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STEM Seminar Welcome

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• Good Evening and welcome to an important three days of work on what is one of the most critical areas we face in higher education. You're working to recommend ways that, collectively, we in higher education can help our students be successful in our nation's greatest areas of need--science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

• I also welcome you to Western Michigan University--or at least the environs of WMU. While you are not on our campus, you are just a few miles away, and I invite you to visit at any point on this trip or any future trip you make to the area. We're proud of our University and always eager to share it with our colleagues. I think, however, that for the nature of this working seminar, your meeting organizers made a wise choice in holding the conference here on the beautiful and more secluded grounds of Brook Lodge.

• This STEM seminar could not be better timed. When the National Science Foundation awarded funding for this effort, it was a precursor of what was to come. I'm sure that it came as no surprise to any of you that late last week, when the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies signed off on the $56.8 billion bill which would fund the agencies under the panel’s jurisdiction for the 2009 fiscal year.
That bill adjusts NSF priorities in a significant way, shifting about $50 million from research to an emphasis on education activities. The $50 million shift was made in recognition of America’s need for robust investments in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education. That development reflects the fact that as a society, we've recognized that we need not only more discoveries, but also more people to make those discoveries. We need more engineers, more mathematicians and more scientists.

• You're in good hands this week, with this event being coordinated by talented science educators from three strong organizations and a distinguished panel of presenters. Among your conference organizers and those attending are members of WMU's Institute for Science Education which has a history dating back to the early 1960s. Its faculty is among the top three most productive groups of graduate faculty in the nation and we are very proud of science education success from both ends--getting prospective science students in the front door and finding ways to make undergraduate science students successful.

• Like our colleagues nationwide we've been addressing the pipeline issue--how do we get young people excited about the potential for a career in science, As a matter if fact, just today more than 125 8th-graders from the Kalamazoo Public Schools began attending a two-week, hands-on summer science camp at WMU. The effort, also funded by the NSF, is designed to assess learning outcomes based on best practices in science education and will combine the teaching resources of Mallinson Institute researchers as
well as Kalamazoo area public school teachers. We have similar initiatives in engineering as well.

But your focus this week is on undergraduates. You're here to talk about best practices for ensuring undergraduate STEM success and how to expand their use. You'll find that is a topic dear to the hearts of those on this campus. We have committed ourselves to the success of every student on our campus, and there are few areas in which that is more essential for our state and nation than the STEM areas. Many of you have heard the phrase, "no acceptable casualties. That's how I feel about students we admit. If a student has met the standard for admission and is willing to do his or her part to succeed, we have a moral and fiscal responsibility to make sure that happens. We must make sure that student does not become an academic casualty and does not waste the investment made by family, university, state and nation. If that student has expressed an interest in the STEM areas, we must work doubly hard to make sure we do not lose that potential.

• You have a lot of work ahead of you this week, but I predict a successful outcome for your conversations. The makeup of your conference dovetails with what we know already about successful science education initiatives.
  -They're based on partnerships.
  -They represent diverse viewpoints and world experience.
  -They're interdisciplinary rather than focused on a single discipline.

• I wish you a week full of "Aha" moments and real success. Enjoy the beautiful surroundings and the opportunity to share uninterrupted reflection and discussion on the topic that brought this talented group together. I look
forward to seeing your report and learning more about we can expand best science education practices in a way that allow all of our undergraduates to succeed.