6-23-2008

KRESA Dinner Presentation

John M. Dunn
Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn
Part of the Higher Education Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn/349

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WMU President John Dunn by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
• Good Evening and thank you so much for inviting me here to speak with you this evening. I've spent my lifetime in education, and I feel right at home here with all of you. We work with students who are at different stages of their academic development, but we have more in common than people outside of our profession might realize.

• As a matter if fact, I spent a good segment of my early career in higher education working as a bridge between K-12 districts and university resources. I think it's fair to say that experience left me with some interesting insights about the relationship between higher ed and public school districts.

• (Story from Oregon about helping the kid with Down Syndrome) - Her comment has stayed with me all these years. I want you to know that you can count on a lot of "help" from this university president.

• Today, I am president of Western Michigan University, a university that began as a teachers college, but is now so much more. While WMU has retained its commitment to K-12 education, it now has resources that can be put to work in the service of public education in ways that its founders never could have imagined.

• When I speak, I always like to set the stage by telling the audience about WMU and its resources. I never like to take for granted that the audience has a clear understanding of the caliber of Western Michigan University.
First of all, I need to remind you that Western Michigan University is one of fewer than 200 comprehensive national research universities. That assessment of WMU comes from the Carnegie Foundation and its classification system for U.S. Higher Education--literally the nation's "gold standard" for categorizing our education resources. Michigan is fortunate to have five of them--Michigan State, Michigan Tech, UofM--Ann Arbor, Wayne State and Western Michigan University.

Our university is also home to one of the nation's oldest collegiate honors programs--the Lee Honors College--and students in that college have credentials that equal or surpass those of students from the nation's most elite private colleges. Within that context, I've tailored a few brief comments about factors and initiatives that might be of particular interest to you.

You should also know that WMU has on campus a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the oldest and most prestigious academic honor society in the nation. Only 97 public universities in American have been authorized to shelter a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, and WMU is one of them.

WMU has international stature in fields that range from aviation, atomic physics and medieval studies to geophysics, jazz studies, engineering management and blindness and low vision studies.
-WMU's prowess in a number of disciplines has led to developments that have a profound impact on what you do. Our science education researchers are among the three most productive faculty teams in that discipline in the nation. Just last week, they brought some of the top minds in science education together for a conference at Brook Lodge in Augusta to discuss how we implement best practices to boost the way we teach undergraduates.

-Our mathematics education experts have developed a high school math curriculum (known as Core-Plus) that has been recognized by the National Science Foundation as one of five exemplary new programs available to students today.

- And 105 years after our founding, we're still a major force in preparing teachers, counselors and administrators for your districts. Western Michigan University remains one of the top-10 producers of educational personnel in the nation.

• Throughout my adult life and career, I've been committed to American public education, and I now have the help of those resources behind me. I think my personal background has left me with the ability to be a "player" in addressing the challenges you face--and the challenges we face together.

• Personal background.

    -My early stint as a HS teacher at Lake Forest High School
-observations about my 13 years as a School Board Member and issues we dealt with including: school closures, prayer in school, sex education and, of course discipline.

I have a pretty good idea about the challenges you face and the skills you have developed to navigate those challenges. I consider my service on the School Board was a great training ground for my current position.

- So how do you and I bring our shared experiences to bear on the real educational issues that face our state? I think the answer is a simple one. It is all about the success of our students at a time when our state has challenged us all to double the number of Michigan students who earn college degrees. It's a time when we have to remain mindful of the needs of all our students--those headed to a university and those headed to a community college or planning other post-secondary education.

Many of you have heard the phrase, "no acceptable casualties." That's what I propose should be our mantra from our students' very first day they enter kindergarten until they've successfully finished a path that will provide them the skills they need to be productive. That's how I feel about students we admit. If a student has met the standard for admission and is committed to do his or her part to succeed, we at Western Michigan University 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.

Whatever we talk about as we move forward together has to be grounded in that simple goal. We want and need to offer our students the opportunity to succeed. We don't have the luxury to let ourselves point fingers or play the
blame game. If there's one thing all those experiences I just described taught me, it's that we need to stop thinking in the "us against you" way. Each of us needs to play the hand we've been dealt and maximize our resources to do just one thing--turn out successful and productive graduates.

• We need to ensure that students move seamlessly between our K-12 districts and our colleges and universities, And most important, we need to make sure no one is left without a way to participate and no future workforce need is left unmet. Let me tell you about three WMU initiatives focuses on an underserved group of traditional age students. The second looks at a special and growing group of nontraditional students. The final initiative is aimed toward a looming shortage of professionals in one critical area for our state.

**Foster Care Initiative**

• **First, the underserved traditional-aged students.** In January, we announced our Foster Care Initiative in Higher Education, which includes scholarship support and special housing arrangements for qualified young people who have aged out of foster care and who are on their own. Students who are admitted to WMU through this program will be known as Seita Scholars and will receive a scholarship named for Dr. John Seita--I'll tell you more about him in a moment.

Here's why we're doing this. More than 500 young people age out of foster care in Michigan every year. Unceremoniously left on their own to make
their way in the world, often with no adult role models, no money, no job and most important, no home.

-70 percent aspire to go to college, but only about 20 percent actually are able to enroll and only a quarter of those students go on to earn a degree. That compares to a national college attendance figure for college-age youth of about 67 percent.

-Let's put those numbers in human terms. For every 100 foster care youth, 70 want to go to college, 14 actually get there and only three or four ultimately earn a degree. In a society like ours, this is unacceptable. We cannot afford to lose the potential of those young people.

Let me describe that potential by telling you the personal story of John Seita, the man for whom we've named our scholarship.

-John Seita is a three-time WMU alumnus who grew up in foster care and has become one of the nation's foremost experts on and advocates for foster youth.

-More than a dozen foster home placements between the time he was 8 years old and when he aged out of the system.

-Received a scholarship to attend a small liberal arts college. When Christmas break came around and the school shut down,
he had nowhere to go--spent those weeks sneaking into a closed residence hall and scrambling for food.

- Eventually, he came to WMU and excelled. Today he is a faculty member at MSU. He has published extensively on the topics of foster care and youth development and has worked with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. He was honored in by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as the Foster Care Alumni of the Year for the United States.

John Seita has helped us design our foster care program, which will include:

- A home--a spot in our residence halls that will not close over the holidays or between semesters.

- Adult assistance to young people who need help and encouragement with admissions and financial aid forms--someone to provide these students the basic information most other students have, simply by being part of an intact and caring family.

- A partnership with Kalamazoo Valley Community College to facilitate the transfer of foster youth to WMU;

- A work-study component to provide additional life skills and campus connections for students in the program; and
Our first Seita Scholars will be on campus this fall. I could not be more proud of what my University is doing. I think we are literally raising the bar when it comes to taking responsibility for our community.

Veterans' initiative

• The second initiative I want to tell you about is focused on a group that will be growing in number over the coming months and years—veterans. We are seeing veterans of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq now return and head for college, bringing with them a unique set of needs and perspectives. I think it's important to note that of all of Michigan's four-year colleges and universities, WMU has the largest population of veterans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan—about 230 of them. We take their needs seriously.

In 2007, we launched a "mini GI Bill" to ease their transition from military to college life. Because veterans benefits sometimes aren't immediately available, we decided to offer returning veterans their first semester of tuition free and to offer them residency status for their subsequent semesters.

Shortly after putting that program in place, we established an advocacy office for veterans that is designed to focus on their unique issues and needs. It's been a resounding success, and I see the need for such services continuing to grow in the coming years. That office works directly with veterans to address any transition issues they have, but they also sponsor programs for the campus to talk about the ways we, as a community, can help veterans make that transition successful and to look at issues like
housing, disability services, faculty and staff training, the use of technology and mental health services.

For both the foster care and veterans' initiatives, I believe we are on the cutting edge at WMU, and we are seeing signs that other universities are choosing to emulate what we're doing.

**School of Medicine Discussion**

- And finally, let's talk about the work force issue. Michigan is about to face a critical shortage of physicians. More than 6,000 Michigan physicians will take down their shingles in the next 10-12 years. Michigan retirees will include 38 percent of our primary care, family and internal medicine practitioners. More than 60 percent of those remaining already have practices that are full. Our existing medical schools have slightly increased their incoming class size, but do not see further expansion as feasible.

- We will not be able to turn to medical schools in other states to fill our shortage. They'll be busy filling the basic healthcare needs in the rest of the nation.

  - But, the number of new medical school grads choosing residencies in family practice, or internal medicine is declining

  - Just 20 percent of residents in internal medicine chose to go into primary care. In 1998, that figure was 50 percent.

  - The number going into pediatrics fell 7 percent from 1995 to 2006
• We face a future in which there will be too few entry points into medical care for too many patients. And we face that future at the exact point when the nation's baby boomers hit retirement and their need for healthcare escalates.

• Knowing about the looming shortage and Kalamazoo's existing infrastructure, I posed a question about beginning a medical school in Kalamazoo that has grown into a communitywide conversation involving the leadership at both hospitals and the Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies, an entity that already is providing clinical training through internships and residencies.

• The opportune timing and the community conversation has led to some initial due diligence investigation. Earlier this spring, consultants from DJW Associates of Lexington were invited to the campus and community for a two-day visit to give us a preliminary assessment of what it would take to launch such an initiative.

Their report could not have been more positive. They found, as I did, a community with a tremendous set of resources. Not only did they find a University that has many of the academic resources in place, they found a community partnership already engaged in third- and fourth-year medical education, a wealth of clinical opportunities available through the Bronson and Borgess hospital systems and strong support for the concept among most stakeholders.
• That preliminary evaluation is strong enough to prompt us to take it to the next level. We're in the process of transitioning to another consulting firm for a more detailed evaluation of the benefits and challenges that come with the idea of medical school. I cannot honestly tell you, at this point, where this will all end up, but I can outline some of the basic parameters that will come into play.

• First and foremost, we are looking at this as a privately funded medical school that is affiliated with a state university. We cannot divert any existing University resources to do this. There is simply no way that this can or will involve taxpayer funds.

• Second, we are not looking at doing just another medical school. Whatever we consider will be uniquely tailored to this community and the health care and economic development needs of our state. I have some experience with the benefits of a small and very focused medical school. Whatever the outcome of our work, we know there could be some very real benefits to Western Michigan University and its home community.

Challenges.

Now I know the topic of my talk demands that I talk about the challenges that face WMU. I suspect you'll recognize our challenges as being much the same as yours. There's the budget. And there's also the budget. And finally, let's not forget about--the budget. It would be hard for me in good faith to talk much about my university's budget woes. I know you are all facing similar straits. It's a product of where our state economy is today. I will say,
though, that I think that way Michigan higher education has handled the reversal of fortune we've been handed is remarkable. Over the past 20 or so years, we've gone from having 2/3 of our operations covered by state funding, to having less than a third or our costs come from the state. We are always mindful of the burden that cost shift has put on our students, and I am extremely proud of the fact that, last year, my university had the lowest tuition increase of any public university in Michigan. And despite the fact that we are one of Michigan's five research universities and are fourth in size and complexity, our tuition comes in at 11th out of 15 public universities. We're fiercely protective of our students' ability to access higher education.

We're also fiercely protective of our university's reputation and we’re insistent that WMU's contributions be recognized. Last year, the state legislature was considering a funding bill that would reward three large universities and disadvantage 12, we objected vehemently to the prospect of having our status as a research university overlooked and having our ability to help the state's economy impaired.

We've adopted a motto, however: Some complaining is alright, but no whining!

I'm going to stop here, because I think you may have some questions, and I want to make sure they are answered. So, again, thank you for inviting me this evening and for listening so graciously. I'd like to now open the floor up to any questions you have.

*************
Question and Answers

Latest stats from College of Education--2006-07 numbers compiled in February 2008

College of Education
Total enrolled: 2,544
Number of teaching interns during year: 968
Number of supervising faculty for teacher prep programs: 73
Student/Faculty ratio: 13 to one

Teaching interns work an average of 45 hours per week for 15 weeks

WMU’s program completer annual pass rate on the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification was 100 percent for the most recent year reported.

Teaching interns are placed through our School/University Partnership Team, which is now in its 15th year. The SUPT model is founded on collaboration with several public school systems and includes a system of cluster sites involving supervising teachers who work together with university faculty members assigned to the cluster sites. Designed to foster communication and site-based decision making, the program was named in 2004 as the Distinguished Program in Teacher Education by the Association of teacher Educators.