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Graduate Student Orientation

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Thank you, Dr. Pyenson, for that wonderful introduction.

Good morning. I'm delighted to be at the top of the schedule today. It means I am among the first to officially welcome you to your graduate studies at Western Michigan University.

If you are just finding your way around the campus and community, be patient, I can tell you from my own recent experience--just a year ago now--that there are untold treasures for you to discover and enjoy here. And after just more than a year, most days I still learn something about this University and its home community that reinforces and expands my perception of both WMU and Kalamazoo.

You made a wonderful decision when you decided to apply to this University to pursue your graduate degree. Your choice, I'm sure, was based on the same things that attracted me to WMU:

- The superb quality of academic programs
- The University's reputation in national and international arenas
- WMU's status as a Carnegie-designated research university
- The incredible sense of balance that exists between this University's teaching and research missions
In addition to with those qualities, I've found that the size of this University is very attractive. WMU is large enough to offer all of the academic resources of a much bigger university. We rival "the big three" there. But WMU is still small enough to retain a wonderful sense of community and collegiality. Most larger universities can't come close to us on that front. I think you'll find that sense of community and collegiality will make all the difference in your graduate experience here and forever color your perceptions of what constitutes true educational excellence. The quality of our programs attracted many of our world-class researchers, but the size and sense of community often convinced them that this is the place to stay and build a wonderful career.

You will be meeting some of those amazing scholars in the classroom because this is one of those very special places where we embrace research and scholarship as an institution and where our researchers and scholars embrace teaching. It's a dual mission that really speaks to the heart of what WMU is. You will find our star researchers on the front lines in undergraduate education. You'll also find them absolutely devoted to building student research teams that include both graduate and undergraduate students and in whom they entrust some of the most critical parts of their research.

WMU is full of such scholars. When I'm out around the state talking about the caliber of our people, I like to provide a snapshot in time of some of the tangible ways our faculty members are on the cutting edge of international events and issues.

Here are some August 2008 examples.
1) Through last weekend, the world's eyes were on China and the Olympics. The opening ceremonies at one Olympic venue--the equestrian site in Shanghai--featured the World Youth Choir under the direction of WMU's internationally renowned vocal coach Dr. Steve Zegree. The choir also included the voices of four current WMU students and recent grads as well as four WMU student musicians who were part of the choir's backup group. (I asked Steve to make sure he got a photo of the WMU group in Bronco garb in some Olympic settings. He complied. I got photos of WMU students in front of the Olympic rings, at the entry to the equestrian venue, and even a shot of a Bronco shirt with Steve Zegree inside of it on the giant screen monitor during the opening ceremony rehearsals.)

2) As China prepared for the Olympics, that nation enlisted the aid of the International Federation of Translators to help it standardize its public translation and signage practices. That organization has been led for the past three years by Dr. Peter Krawutschke (krah-WOOCH-kah), WMU professor of German. The organization concluded its work with China by holding an international conference in Beijing just days before the Olympics opened. If you happened to be watching China's version of CNN, you would have seen an in-depth interview with Dr. Krawutschke as he described the role he though China was ready to play on the world stage.
3) Closer to home, WMU is at the forefront of energy research that has caught the attention of Congress. When the Legislature is back in Washington next month, it will consider bills to fund carbon sequestration research in which WMU is leading the way. The legislative effort was unveiled by Congressman Fred Upton on our campus earlier this month and will focus on work being done to capture carbon dioxide and store it underground in Michigan and other geologically compatible states. Doing so, would allow us to use our coal resources for electricity in a way that would not continue to degrade the environment.

Those are just a few examples that cover the past few weeks. There are literally hundreds more I could have selected. This is a campus community rich in accomplishment and rich in collegiality. As graduate students, you are represented on campus by members of the Graduate Student Advisory Committee. If you haven't already personally met the chair of that committee, Brandi Pritchett, I'm sure you will soon, and you're in for a rare treat. I got to know Brandi last year before she took the reins of the committee, and I know she has great plans to continually enhance the role of graduate students in the life of the University.

As you go through today's event, you'll meet many more. We all stand ready to help you have a successful graduate career. I have great confidence in your potential and I have great confidence in the people who will work with you--our faculty and staff. You will find great success, great joy, wonderful relationships and, perhaps some fun along the way.
A bit earlier I mentioned the wonderful balance we've achieved as a University. Let me take a moment to urge you to find your own sense of balance as a student here. Early in your days as a student, be sure to make an effort to explore outside your academic area and department.

- Attend a student or faculty concert or arts event. There are more than 1,200 of them every year, and they range from lunchtime recitals and dance presentations to rousing Sunday afternoon tuba concerts.

- Take in a Bronco athletics contest. If you're a football fan or even if you just want to take a road trip to Detroit, I urge you to join us at Ford Field Nov. 8, as the WMU Broncos take on the University of Illinois Illini.

- Take a drive or ride the bus to the Parkview Campus and walk through our engineering complex.

- Tour the building that houses our College of Health and Human Services and explore the Oakland Drive campus.

- And don't forget to bring family and friends into the mix. The possibilities for their enjoyment are endless. Let them enjoy the annual International Festival in which our students from around the globe offer samples of their nations' cuisine and culture. Take a family bike ride or rollerblade together on the Parkview Campus. Check out the main campus's outdoor sculpture tour and visit the wonderful new Richmond Center for Visual Arts.
I wish you joy and success as you connect with new friends and colleagues and as you establish your own niche in the academic world. I wish you great accomplishment and moments of tremendous breakthrough in your research and scholarly activity. And I wish you personal happiness and satisfaction as a member of this community.

Thank you and please enjoy the rest of today's presentations.