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Student Ambassador Remarks

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Student Ambassador Remarks

Dr. John M. Dunn

1/12/09

- Good evening, and thank you for being student ambassadors. You're about to start a season of, among other things, doing the one thing guaranteed to bring a smile to my face as I look out my office window. That's giving tours and introducing new student families to Western Michigan University.
- Your role is of critical importance for this University. You've heard that already and you will hear that again and again. You will have a chance to offer prospective students and their families that first positive impression of Western Michigan University. Your knowledge of the campus and your ability to convey just what a special place this is will make all the difference when it comes time for incoming students to decide if this is the place for them.
- This will be a life-altering decision those students and families make, and you can help them in a very personal way. Prospective students want to know what it's like to be a student here, and their parents want to know they'll be safe, happy and academically challenged. You're the experts on those topics.
- If any of you are marketing majors, you may know a little about viral marketing. On some campuses, students like you are hired to casually strike up a conversation with families taking a tour. They've been known to ride by on a bike, stop and strike up a conversation. It works pretty well, too--until families from the same community or family begin comparing notes about their campus visits. We're a little more up front than that, but that's because we're so sure of your people skills, your ability to communicate and your enthusiasm about Western Michigan

University. We know you'll make that positive first impression without having to resort to subterfuge.

- For years, WMU has had a reputation as a campus that "just feels right." Alumni routinely mention that as the reason they chose to come here. That was true for James Holden, who came here in the 1970s and went on to become the president and CEO of Chrysler. And I'll bet it was true for you. Think about your own introduction to WMU and how you felt when you toured the campus, met a student ambassador and perhaps communicated online with student ambassadors in your major.

- Once a student comes to visit, I'm convinced we have a great chance of recruiting that student. Once we get them here, they feel the warmth and personal connections that they're looking for. They get a sense from you and the other people they meet here that this is a place where every individual is treated with respect, kindness and civility. I think that is a huge part of our appeal. Students realize this can be a place where they learn life lessons--in and out of the classroom. It's a place where they can establish relationships with other students and with faculty and staff members and where those relationships will guide their personal work and leadership styles. It's a place where they'll live and work with a variety of people from whom they'll learn some of life's most important lessons. I had an experience like that as a young college student, and it had a lifelong impact on me.

- (Request to tell the story about the two cooks you worked with at NIU)
As a student at Northern Illinois University, I worked in a dining hall, and I was taken under the wing of two cooks...

- Those two women imparted some of the most important messages I've kept with me from my days at NIU.

- 1) The role of every single person on a great university campus is responsible for the student experience and the knowledge and worldview our students and alumni take with them. It doesn't matter if you're a cook, a groundskeeper, a custodian, a programmer, a clerk or an architect. Everyone plays a vital role.

- 2) Every person from every background deserves to be treated with the utmost respect, civility and kindness.

- That last message is one I hope you have already learned and made a part of your mantra. As a student ambassador now, you are going to encounter every kind of person. Some you'll like immediately. Some, you won't like much. But you have to always treat each one of them with respect. And some of the more difficult personalities may be the ones for whom you'll have to go that extra mile.

- I mentioned earlier that you'll be working with students and families about to make a life-altering decision. Life-altering decisions come equipped with emotions. They're stressful. Not everyone will respond the same way. Some will be excited and eager for the challenge of college and the potential for the future. Others will react with trepidation. They'll fear the loss of family connections and they'll need reassurance from you. You'll be able to share personal stories about how your family has handled it or about how your roommate's Mom learned to deal with the change. All of it will help them, but all of that information and interaction has to be conveyed with the utmost respect.

- In the future, as the leaders I know you will be, your ability to treat people with respect, to gauge their level of stress, to say the right thing and make that important

human connection will serve you well. It's the most important skill set I acquired as a student, and its one I've tried to build upon throughout my career.

- Enjoy your role as ambassador. Polish your presentations and spend every day learning about your campus. I've been here for 18 months, and not a day goes by without me learning something news about Western Michigan University. The campus is full of people ready to answer your questions and make the same discoveries I have. You're representing a great university, and we're counting on you to help new students make the right decision--the one you made, to be a student at Western Michigan University.