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Kalamazoo Service Club/Jr. League

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Kalamazoo Service Club/Jr. League
Dr. John M. Dunn
May 20, 2010

(The audience is made up of women over 50 mostly who have been very active in the community. Organizer says they want to hear about the current state of affairs of WMU, the med school, the Promise, etc)

- Good afternoon. Thank for extending the invitation for me to speak this afternoon, and thank you for the gift of your service to our community. I want you to know that your example and the examples set by so many other volunteers in our city serve as a lesson for our students and a model for community engagement. As an educator, I regard community service--giving back--an essential ingredient to developing students who will be successful citizens.

- In fact, giving back and serving others is part of our model of building a healthy university. It works institutionally and it works for each of us on a personal level. A healthy university is basically one that focuses on maximizing resources--making sure we make decisions and invest effort in a way that leverages our physical and human resources for the benefit of our community, state and nation. It encompasses civility, sustainability, diversity, service and ensuring that our most important resource--human capital--is never wasted.

- It's a very broad set of goals. Today, I'd like to focus mostly on the last part of what I just described--making the most of human capital. The work of Western Michigan University is focused on our current students, of course, but it is also focused on the impact our students will have when they leave us.

- **Breaking news--HHMI grant**

I was asked to let you know about new developments on campus. In that spirit--and because this is an example of student impact long into the future. I'd like to share some breaking news with you. This morning--just a few hours ago--a new \$1 million

grant to WMU was announced by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the nation's largest private funder of science education,

This grant is a tribute to how Western Michigan University is viewed nationally. Only the nation's top research universities were invited to submit proposals for the awards announced today. And only 50 universities were commended by science review panels and selected by HHMI to do the work of improving how science is taught in our public schools.

The grant will be used by science educators on our campus to develop a cadre of high school science teachers whose science knowledge comes from personal experience. We're out to develop experienced scientists who choose the profession of teaching. So instead of simply learning what science high school students are likely to require, we'll be immersing our students in their own research experiences in the laboratory. THEN, we'll help them translate those personal experiences into practical tools for the classroom. Today's announcement means we'll be able to focus on about 60 young teacher-scientists over the next four years.

This news comes on the heels of our selection, in January, by the Woodrow Wilson and W.K. Kellogg foundation to be a site for a new Michigan Teaching Fellows graduate program that also is focused on making sure public school students have access to the best and most committed science teachers. Many of the teaching fellows who benefit from that program are likely to be mid-career professionals who are motivated to take their science knowledge into the classroom to make a real difference in how science is taught.

Both programs recognize a great need for enhanced science instruction and the value of nurturing our nation's human capital--our young people--by nurturing the people who will teach them.

Seita Scholars

- One new development on our campus--and one we're setting the national standard for--is our Seita Scholars program for young people who have aged out of foster care. Again, this is aimed at preserving and nurturing our most precious resource.

In Michigan alone, some 500 young people age out of foster care each year--and are left completely on their own. While an overwhelming majority of such young people want to attend college, they do not have the finances, personal support networks or basic navigation skills to apply and enroll. Only 2 to 3 percent ever earn a college degree. That's a figure we found totally unacceptable.

In 2008, we launched an initiative that provides free tuition for former foster youth who meet our admissions standards. Our program also ensures they have a place--our campus--to call home year-round as well as the kind of support system and safety net families usually provide. We thought we might attract 15 to 20 students for our first class of Seita Scholars, named for a WMU alumnus who is a leading advocate for foster youth. Instead, we began in fall 2008 with 51 students. For fall 2009, we had a total of 74 students in the program. When the fall 2010 semester starts, we'll have about 120.

While we have only offered the Seita program for two years, some of our early enrollees were young people who had already struggled and persisted in their higher education goals in the community college setting. That means we have a few students who are beginning to reach their degree goals.

Just two weeks ago, we saw our first Seita Scholar earn his degree. Michael Fombang (FAHMbang) earned a bachelor's degree in biomedical sciences with minors in chemistry and French. He's studying now to get accepted into medical

school. In the meantime, he's giving back by working as a mentor in Chicago for young people in foster care.

And next month, a very unusual young man will become our second Seita graduate. Peter Ruei, was one of the lost boys of Sudan who came to Michigan as a youngster and was placed in foster care. He was once terrified by the sight and sound of an airplane because airplanes rained death and destruction down on his village. Now, he's earning a degree in aviation from WMU and dreams of flying relief planes into war-torn areas. He's an accomplished and passionate speaker and true advocate for peace--because he's experienced firsthand the horrors that war inflicts on civilians. He's also a wonderful spokesperson for the cause of foster care youth and moves audiences with his compelling personal story.

Those two impressive young men are only our first graduates. Stay tuned. There are more to come.

Veterans work

There's another group of students with enormous potential and to whom we owe special attention--our veterans. With nearly 500 veterans enrolled, we are among the largest public universities to make a commitment to veterans who return to the classroom. In fact, we have more Iraq and Afghanistan vets than any other four-year college in Michigan. We have dedicated an advocacy office to their needs and we have a mini GI bill that helps them move quickly into school before their benefits catch up to them. It's paying off. On May 1, we graduated our largest class of vets ever--53.

• Kalamazoo Promise update

There's another group of students who I'm sure you have an intense interest in as well--Kalamazoo Promise students. We have about 300 Promise students on our campus and I can--and often do--say that the Promise is being fulfilled at WMU.

First announced in Nov. 2005, the Promise, as you know, provides free college tuition to any public institution in Michigan for graduates of the Kalamazoo Public Schools. In December, after just three and a half years in school, one young Kalamazoo woman became the very first to earn a bachelor's degree by using the benefits of the Promise. On May 1, another 17 Promise students earned their degrees at WMU.

I love that Promise students are choosing WMU, but as members of the community to which this gift was given, our responsibility runs much deeper. It's the job of all of us to make sure that students are ready to take advantage of the Promise, wherever they choose to go to college. We've been working to make that happen since the Promise was announced by using summer camps in areas like science and engineering, outreach programs to familiarize students with health care professions and a number of other options.

This year, we launched a program, Bronco Buds, that brings every KPS sixth-grader to campus for a day. They tour the campus, visit classrooms, check out a residence hall and eat in a student dining hall. Our message to them is simple. There's a seat with your name on it at a university in Michigan. To sit in that seat and enjoy the benefits, you have to start getting ready NOW.

This is not about Western Michigan University. It's about those students and, again, about this community's need to make sure we nurture our human capital.

- **Looking to the future--a Medical School**

Finally, I'd like to talk about an initiative that is squarely focused on our vision as a healthy university that promotes the health and well being of our community, state and nation. That is our focus on developing a medical school on the WMU campus and in partnership with our two community hospitals--Bronson and Borgess, which are really world-class teaching hospitals.

As a community, we recognize the incredible local potential as we develop a new medical school that will meet future needs AND serve as an additional building block upon which we build on Southwest Michigan's century-long heritage in life sciences research and medical equipment innovation. The opportunities for our community will be enormous because the need for more physicians in our future is enormous.

The benefits to our future students and our existing programs in the health and life sciences will be pronounced. Just imagine the value added if you are studying nursing in the setting of a medical school, or if you are preparing to be an audiologist or hospital social worker and part of your basic training allows you to be part of a complete medical team.

There's so much more I could talk about today, but I need to honor the time allotted. If you do have questions about these or any other topics having to do with Western Michigan University, send me an e-mail--john.dunn@wmich.edu. I answer my own e-mail, and although there's a lot of it, I will respond as soon as possible.

Thank you.