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6-16-2010

AMBUCS Luncheon Address

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Dunn, John M., "AMBUCS Luncheon Address" (2010). *WMU President John Dunn*. 167.

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AMBUCS Luncheon Address
Dr. John M. Dunn
June 16, 2010

- Good afternoon. It's great to be here again here with the AMBUCS membership. I never miss an opportunity to visit with you and celebrate the support you have provided for Western Michigan University and its students over the years.

Thanks to AMBUCS for scholarship role

- I continue to be grateful and amazed at the level of funding you have provided--particularly for young health care professionals. And I continue to be grateful for, and in deep admiration of, your work to improve opportunities for people with disabilities. Personally and professionally your organizational goals are goals I have long shared.
- Nationally, I'm told, the AMBUCS Scholarships for Therapists program represents the largest single private source of educational grants for therapists in the United States. Since 1955, AMBUCS has provided more than \$6 million to educate physical and occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists and audiologists.
- This chapter of AMBUCS has had a particular mission over the years--to work with the national organization to sponsor therapy students at Western Michigan University. We consider you our partners in educating a generation of health care professionals that will face a demand greater than any in recent memory. Health care reform, a generation of aging baby boomers and medical advances that allow us to spot disabilities in children earlier in life will mean that the students you have been helping will be of immediate service in our community and beyond.
- At the end of 2009, the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicted that occupational therapists, for instance, will see job opportunities increase by 26 percent in the next

eight years--a rate of increase far greater than projections for other occupations. In a recent book on "150 recession-proof jobs" occupational therapy nabbed 18th place.

Similarly, speech therapists will see a 19 percent increase in opportunities during the same period. Music therapists, who also have received AMBUCS support, will see great increases in demand.

- Your support allows students to study in therapy programs that are among the finest anywhere.

- WMU's occupational therapy program, which is almost 90 years old, was among the first such programs in the nation and is the highest ranked (U.S. News) program in Michigan.

- Our speech therapy program is also among the top such programs in the nation and was founded by Charles Van Riper, who literally wrote the book on the treatment of such problems as stuttering.

- And our music therapy program, which this year celebrates its 50th anniversary, was one of the first full accredited programs in the country and provides national leadership to the profession.

- AMBUCS support of these programs does two important things:

- It provides the opportunity for young people to access higher education and excel in the health care fields we'll need tomorrow to ensure quality care.

- It helps build better lives for the people with disabilities they serve--both in our community and in the nation as a whole.

On behalf of all of the students who you have helped with scholarship support, I say "Thank you." Thank you as well on behalf of all of those who are being served now and all of those who will be helped by AMBUCS in the future.

Healthy community in the broadest sense

You are partners not only in providing access to education, but also in building a healthy community. I'd like to take a few minutes to explore how we define "health" at Western Michigan University.

- There are three basic components to what we call good health. We focus on them as an institution, and I believe they hold great value for our community state and nation as well:
- **Preserving health and strength**--at both the organizational level and the personal level
- **Sustainability**--Protecting our individual, institutional and natural resources;
- **Diversity**--Preserving and enhancing our commitment to human capital--allowing the full development of the potential of every member of our community.

I don't think there are many issues that we find at the university or that you'll find in civic and professional life that don't fall within those three principles.

- It's the third one--preserving and enhancing our commitment to human capital that is the most complex. I see great parallels between what we do on campus and what you do as an organization through your outreach to individuals with disabilities as well as your assistance to our students who want to make service to others their life's work.
- You look for programs and initiatives that help those with disabilities lead richer and fuller lives—you help them realize their strengths. We do the same, but we also look at special populations who are not well served and find ways to reach them as well. We help them reach their potential because we believe human capital is our most precious resource.

- Those with disabilities have a longstanding place at WMU--in our classrooms and as the recipients of the professional health and educational services we provide. We extend those services to our community through campus clinics and other outreach initiatives.

- Lately, we've expanded our campus-wide focus to include special populations who have needs that are not being fully met and who have much to offer. I'd like to tell you about a couple of those initiatives because I see in you, an audience that understands the gratification of helping people realize their potential.

Veterans

- First, there are our veterans. We've been very successful in reaching out to veterans and being their school of choice. At more than 450, we now have more veterans of the Iran and Afghanistan conflicts than any Michigan university.

They are as diverse a group as one can imagine, but they have some common needs as they transition from the military to the classroom.

- They need and deserve the ability to make that transition quickly--our Mini GI Bill helps them do that.

- They need advocates who understand some of the family and psychological issues inherent in moving from a foreign battlefield to the classroom--our Advocacy Office helps them and it helps our campus community learn to adjust to their needs.

Foster care youth

- One recent 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 navigational 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.

The students on campus already are pursuing degrees in more than 25 fields--occupational therapy is one. Because a few Seita Scholars came to us with some college credits already earned, we've just seen our first student graduate from the program. Michael Fombang (FAHMbang) earned a bachelor's degree in biomedical sciences with minors in chemistry and French. He's studying for his medical school exams, so he can continue on and become a doctor. In the meantime, he's giving back by working as a mentor in Chicago for young people in foster care.

- **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 and 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, without question, world-class teaching hospitals.

As a community, we recognize the incredible potential as we develop a new medical school that will meet future needs AND serve as a strong foundation upon which we build on Southwest Michigan's century-long heritage in life sciences research and medical equipment innovation. The benefits to our University and community may be enormous. And the need for skillful 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, occupational therapist or hospital social worker and part of your basic training allows you to be part of a complete medical team.

Closing

In closing, let me thank you once again for the gift of your partnership in helping young people meet their goals. Together, we'll continue to build a community that is healthy, strong and diverse, and we'll serve as a model for communities like ours across the nation.

Thank you.