Friendship Village Luncheon Talk Remarks

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(There has been a suggested topic by Mr. Sandelin who is organizing the gathering. He'd like to hear a comparison between Dr. Dunn's WMU today and the presidency and challenges of Dr. Sangren/Miller era when many of them were students or faculty.) mature population, many educators, plus former students, and faculty members. One Friendship Village resident and possible attendee is 2008 honorary degree recipient: William S. Hough (Huff), a 1948 WMU alumnus. Hough was part of a 1957 expedition and the first group to spend the winter at the South Pole. His team laid the groundwork for succeeding decades of research at the then-primitive U.S. Navy Amundsen-Scott South Pole base station. IF he's still there, he is in his mid-90s)

• Good afternoon. I'm happy to be here today and delighted that so many of you are members of our University family--alumni and former faculty and staff members as well as community friends.

• Campus developments
Since so many of you are part of the WMU family, I want to give you a few quick updates on what has been happening on campus. It has been a wonderful fall, overall, but here are a few very recent developments.

  - We've just hosted a team from the Higher Learning Commission. They came to assess us for continued accreditation, and left with a solid view of our strengths. We will continue the accreditation we've held since 1915 for another 10 years. The HLC team singled out some areas at WMU for special commendation like student satisfaction, sustainability, attention to special student populations like veterans and foster care youth and community engagement.

  - Last week, we learned that for the second year in a row, a WMU author has been named a finalist for the National Book Awards. This year it is our
longtime faculty writing star Jaimy Gordon who is one of five nominees for the award in fiction for her new novel, "The Lord of Misrule."

-We've just opened a new hybrid electric vehicle testing lab on campus, in collaboration with our industry partner Eaton Corp. The facility is designed to both accomplish needed research in the area and develop expertise among our engineering students in that growing field.

-This week, after two years of work by a campus/community task force, we invited private developers in to help us find a new use that will preserve the look and feel of our historic East Campus. We have great hopes that those private firms will be able to use tax breaks and incentives not available to the University to redevelop that area and preserve the architectural integrity of our institution's birthplace.

-We have students now applying to live in Western View, the new student apartments being constructed just west of Kohrmann Hall. It's the first new student housing built in nearly half a century.

- The new Sangren Hall is being built in the center of campus. If you visit, the constant heavy equipment traffic may remind you of your own days on campus.

• There's enough physical change happening on campus that, for those of you who were students or faculty members back in the 1950s and 1960s, you might be reminded of life on campus during that era. I say that because I was asked today to draw that comparison--between the late Paul Sangren/early Jim Miller era and today.
• That request sent me to one of my favorite books, Larry Massie's "Brown and Golden Memories." As usual, I found myself enthralled to read about the Western Michigan University that led us to where we are today. Here's what I found. It's information that should spark memories for you.

• **WMU in the late 50s and 60s**
  
  - In the 50s and 60s, WMU was a very young, fast-growing university at a time when a college education was viewed as a public good, and the state paid the majority of the cost. Even someone of limited means could work their way through school.

  - The economy was booming throughout the period or at least very healthy until the final years of Jim Miller's tenure in the mid-1970s. WMU's role was to educate Michigan's citizens for demands of a technically changing world.

  - WMU was experiencing dramatically increasing enrollment--10 to 15 percent increase annually. One year (1967), the student body size increased by 2,000 to more than 18,000 student, and President Miller chastised the admissions and housing offices for accepting so many students.

  - Growth brought challenges related to preserving institutional quality and ambience. People feared the "feeling of family" at WMU was being lost.

  - Cooperation was high among Michigan universities. In 1957, WMU became Michigan's fourth university with the support of the three existing universities.

  - In the 1950s and 60s, internationalization efforts were beginning to set WMU apart from many other schools its size. Faculty and students found overseas
opportunities, and the University was reaching out to other nations with offers of technical assistance and with offers of enrollment here in Kalamazoo.

-Campus construction focused on student and community needs--the Gary Center, Goldsworth Valley residence halls, Ellsworth, Bigelow, the Bernhard Center, Seibert Administration, Sprau Tower, Kohrmann Hall, Moore Hall, Miller Auditorium, Waldo Library, Sindecuse Health Center, Sangren Hall and many others went up in two short decades.

-The era was the beginning of turbulent social times--Vietnam era protests, student activism

-Faculty quality and professionalism grew enormously in the 50s and 60s. President Miller counted that achievement as the most significant of his presidency.

• Where WMU is today

-Today, we're a mature university. Our growth comes from careful planning and leveraging our nationally known strengths.

-The economy in Michigan has been in decline for a decade. Our role is still to educate Michigan's citizens, but increasingly our state looks to us as the source of research and leadership that can find new products and diversify our economy.

-We have a desperately strained state budget. Rather than supporting our students, the state has spent the past 10 years dis-investing in higher education. In the 1960s, 70+percent of the cost of college came from the state.
Today only 30 percent comes from the state. The rest of the burden has been shifted to students and their families. It is no longer possible for a student to work his or her way through school. The math simply doesn't work. And I'm afraid too many people see a college education as a private matter of benefit mainly to the student.

-In enrollment, we've worked very, very hard and have been successful in beginning a measured strategic enrollment growth after several years of enrollment loss. This fall, we're at 25,045, and we increased our number of beginning freshmen by 6.8 percent. We are one of only six Michigan universities to have healthy increases at the freshman level. Across our state, level or declining enrollments are the norm as students, for cost reasons, shift to community colleges for their first two years. We honor those choices and reach out to smooth their transition to university life later in their academic career.

-The "Feeling of Family" at WMU was not lost. Today it is perhaps our greatest asset. We're small enough that students and faculty have top-notch interactions. Students still tell us that they choose WMU because it just feels right. It's large enough to have the resources they want but small enough to offer a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Many classes are still small. About two-thirds have fewer than 30 students.

-Now there are 15 universities. Relations are good, but we compete intensely for students and position--and dollars. It is healthy competition that's good for Michigan, but it is a competitive arena, nonetheless.
We still balance strategic growth and quality. Our focus now is on growth that leverages our strengths.

Internationalization is a way of life at WMU. We have Michigan's fourth largest population of international students. We're one of a select handful of American universities that has been selected to partner with a Chinese university through the Confucius Institute. We have a new (Timothy) Light Center for Chinese Studies. Our students have study abroad opportunities on six continents and we are the university of choice for students from 90 nations.

Building still focuses on student and community needs--classrooms, student apartments--but our growth is also related to economic development needs. Our Business Technology and Research Park is a good example.

Students are thoughtfully active. Their primary concerns are sustainability, college costs and jobs.

Our faculty today are second to none. We have a researcher leading an international team at Stanford National laboratory. I just recounted the fact that one of this year's National Book Award finalists is teaching creative writing on our campus. And our allied health and fine arts faculty members are lauded internationally.

- After hearing the comparisons, you may be thinking the picture looks bleak in terms of financial challenges. That may be the case, but we live in different times, and we're moving forward and upward. Those wonderful years in which Paul
Sangren and James Miller led this University were a time when many of our strengths were established. Because of those leaders and events of their era, we have a solid platform on which to adapt and build our 21st century university.

• Our College of Arts and Sciences (established under Paul Sangren) and our College of Health and Human Services (established just after Jim Miller's presidency) are among the significant strengths we bring to the table as we build a private medical school with our community partners Bronson and Borgess. Our Graduate College and research enterprise launched during the Miller era will also play major roles in that effort.

• The internationalization begun under Paul Sangren and Jim Miller allows us to work in a global arena. Today we're seeing in our classrooms the children of international students who came here in the 1960s and 70s.

• But you know, I'm also drawn to the fact that the more things change, the more they remain the same. In looking through Massie's wonderful history of WMU, I see evidence that the 1950s and 60s were a time of formal balls and dancing that was somewhat related to the ballroom dancing of earlier eras. Today, ballroom dancing is back with a vengeance. It's back at WMU. For the past three years, our Department of Dance has hosted Dancing with the Kalamazoo Stars as a fundraiser for student dance scholarships. "Stars" are paired with students who make them look very good on the dance floor--I speak from experience.

• Saturday night is this year's edition of Dancing with the Kalamazoo Stars at Miller Auditorium. We welcome you to attend. But then, you are always welcome on campus. I look forward to seeing you often.
• Thank you for inviting me to be here today and thank you for sparking my reflection on this great University's past and the leaders on whose shoulders I am privileged to stand.

Q&A