10-29-2010

Medallion Scholars Reception

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WMU ScholarWorks Citation
Dunn, John M., "Medallion Scholars Reception" (2010). WMU President John Dunn. 140.
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• Thank you for being here.

• To our donors, thank you for making the Medallion Scholarships possible. You have chosen to provide opportunity for a truly remarkable group of young people. For 24 years, these wonderful scholarships have, with your help, attracted the very brightest students in Michigan and beyond. Since its inception in 1984, 458 students, including the 20 new 2008 Medallion Scholars, have won this award. Previous recipients have gone on to accomplish great things, and we expect nothing less from our newest award winners.

• To our new Medallion Scholars, let me congratulate you on making a wonderful decision. When you chose Western Michigan University you made the decision to come to a university that offers all the resources of the national research institution it is. You also became a member of a University community committed to ensuring your success. That is what WMU is all about. It is a place where you will be empowered to Grab the Reins and take charge of your future.

• For the parents here today, let me just say thank you for entrusting your student's next few years to us. You've obviously done a spectacular job over the past 18 years. We hold you in great esteem and pledge to make the next four years everything your students have dreamed of and everything you have worked so hard to achieve.

• I have the privilege of leading Western Michigan University--a university I have known of and admired all of my professional life. Since becoming a member of the WMU community three years ago, my appreciation for the caliber of the institution and the quality of the people who work here has grown exponentially. Everywhere I
go, I share a few critical pieces of information about this university that I think everyone should know. You're part of our Bronco family now, so allow me to arm you with a few facts to share when you're home for the holidays.

- The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines us as one of fewer than 200 research universities in the nation and one of only 139 that are public institutions.

- For 20 years, U.S. News & World Report has listed us among the Best National Universities.

- Phi Beta Kappa has authorized fewer than 100 American public universities to shelter chapters of that distinguished honors fraternity. WMU is one on them.

• We have nationally ranked programs in areas that range from engineering management to creative writing. From geosciences to jazz studies, we offer an enormous number of top-flight programs. I like to tell people that if there were a "final four" for academic disciplines, we'd be there every year in many of the areas I just mentioned.

And here are some updates--recent developments that speak to the quality of our faculty and programming.

• On Oct. 13, Jaimy Gordon, professor of English, was named one of five finalists for the National Book Award in fiction. Winning will put her in an elite group that includes William Faulkner, W.H. Auden and Rachel Carson. This is the second consecutive year a creative writer with WMU connections has been a finalist for the award.
• Three weeks ago, we opened a brand new Hybrid Electric Vehicle Lab on our campus that Eaton Corp. funded to make sure its research needs are met--and to make sure the pipeline is full of students who thoroughly understand that new technology. That lab is partially staffed by four undergraduate engineering majors--not much older than you--who were selected and trained to undertake critical research.

• Earlier this fall, our University Chorale in collaboration with the professional singing ensemble Seraphic Fire climbed to the top--No. 1--of the iTunes classical recordings charts with their recording of a classic 1610 Monteverdi piece. On the way up, they displaced new releases by the likes of Yo-Yo Ma and the London Symphony Orchestra.

What I've just shared is all part of what we call The Western Edge. You may know the Western Edge as a program with some very specific elements we shared with you while you were exploring WMU. But the edge is more. It's the kind of advantage you'll have throughout your life that comes from being a member of the WMU community.

Welcome to WMU. We're proud to be your university. Enjoy your years here as a member of our University family.

Thank you.