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## Friendship Village Remarks

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Friendship Village Remarks  
Dr. John M. Dunn  
12/20/12

- Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me here today and for sharing your early holiday celebration. I always love visiting Friendship Village and spending time with so many people whose lives were touched by Western Michigan University—and who, in turn, touched and made a difference on our campus.
- Carl suggested some topics that might interest you, and I will certainly touch on all of them, but I want to be respectful of your time and keep my talk short enough to allow you to pose the questions I know you have about what's happening on campus. I'll even suggest a couple of topics for those questions—our new medical school, East Campus, our new football coach, Sangren Hall and our growing global engagement.

Budget/money issues--the perennial challenge

- Because this is at the top of Carl's list, let's start with money issues. We have chosen to move forward on a growth trajectory, despite the financial challenges of the past decade. Over a 10-year period, WMU's annual state appropriation plummeted from \$126 million in 2001-02 to \$93 million in 2011-12. For the year that ended in June, we faced a full 15 percent decrease in state funding. We've managed all those decreases in state funding with deep internal cuts and cost-saving initiatives as well as relatively modest increases in tuition.

I am enormously proud of what we have accomplished, even in the face of such daunting reductions to our resources. Many of you were active at WMU at a time when state appropriations made up two-thirds of our budget and tuition provided the final third. There's been a complete reversal in that model. Today, the state

provides just over a quarter of our costs. The rest is made up by our students and their families. We have managed that change to our business model in a way that could only be called successful. More important, that success did not come at the expense of our critical mission and vision.

What that does mean is that we have to be creative and strategic as we set our agenda for the future. A good example is our school of medicine. We knew from the start that no state funding would be available for an initiative like this, so we reached out to the private sector for support and will continue to do so moving forward. The model of a private program within a public university is an interesting one that presents its own kind of challenges and opportunities. It's a creative option that I predict could become a popular model adopted by others in the future.

Putting money issues at least partly aside, let me share some important developments on campus. Last year at about this time, we formally adopted a strategic plan that includes language that describes who and what we are and sets metrics for how we continue to build on that identity. There are three basic pillars of that strategic plan. We are:

- learner centered,
- discovery driven, and
- globally engaged.

Those three terms form the lens through which everything we do can be put into perspective. And those three terms set the direction as we head into the future.

### Learner centered--an entire community of learners

When we say we're learner centered, we of course mean that our students and their success are at the heart of all that we do. But we mean so much more than that.

Every one of us is part of that learner-centered community as well. We are a value-added institution, and a critical part of that value we add is our ability to inculcate our students with the notion that learning is a lifelong activity. We model that for them every day.

Our student recruitment efforts and results are some that will interest you. We had an incoming freshman class this fall that was slightly smaller than last year's, but the overall quality of the students we recruit has continued to go up in each of the past five years. (For Freshmen, it is now at 3.32 GPA and 22.4 ACT)

One area in which we have seen remarkable growth in both numbers and student academic credentials is our Lee Honors College. Our honors program, which was founded by Sam Clark 50 years ago this year, is one of the oldest and most prestigious collegiate honors programs in the nation. It's grown by 60 percent over the past four years and now has more than 1,600 students with credentials that rival the most elite private schools in the country. Our students come to us with high school grade point averages in excess of 4.0 and with ACT scores in the 30-plus range.

We are enormously proud of and will continue to recruit top honors students, but we also have made and maintain a commitment to be accessible to first-generation college students from a variety of backgrounds who may not have that same set of credentials but who do have the desire, commitment and potential to succeed. We have been very careful to maintain that special part of our University's identity as we build each incoming class.

Career placement

So where, in this economy, do our students go after earning a degree? You may have heard discouraging news during the election cycle that said fewer than 50 percent of grads were landing jobs. Let me reassure you. There seems to be some kind of backlash nationally against the notion that higher education pays off economically. The evidence, though, continues to pile up.

Just this week, the latest national study by the association of State Higher Education Executive Officers and funded by the Lumina Foundation was released. It showed that the salary premium for those who hold a bachelor's degree across all disciplines ranges from 40 percent in South Dakota to 87.8 percent in Texas. In Michigan, the average annual salary for someone with just a high school diploma is \$29,907 vs. \$51,322 for someone with a bachelor's degree.

At WMU, we have invested a lot of time and effort to learn about our students' post-graduation plans. We've surveyed graduating seniors beginning six weeks before commencement and ending three months afterward. With a remarkable 61 percent response rate. Here's what we've found.

- 87 percent of our graduates are actively engaged--employed full or part time, heading for graduate school, in a post-grad internship or fellowship, serving in the military, etc. Take out the part-time group and that figures still stands at 76 percent.

- 72 percent of our new working grads are in jobs significantly related to their degree field.

Those are figures for all degrees across the disciplines. For some fields-- engineering, health care, for instance--the numbers are spectacular. The economy has taken its toll, certainly, but our graduates are launching careers and finding success.

One very real consequence of the economic downturn has been a much more focused approach by students and families to selecting majors and careers that have a real job payoff. That's all right, because we still have the opportunity during our students' time with us to also promote with them the value of a broad-based liberal arts background. Our students will leave us knowing how to learn, and they will know that they must keep learning throughout their lifetimes.

As futurist Alvin Toffler once said,

"The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."

### Discovery driven

A result of being literate and always ready to learn is, of course, the possibility of discovery. Research universities have always been about discovery, but only in recent years have we made discovery and entrepreneurship an expectation of every member of our learner-centered community. Our message to faculty and students alike is that discovery does not respect the boundaries of disciplines or the age and relative inexperience of a mind willing to fully engage.

Our students join faculty members in the lab, invent new products, begin new businesses and launch new research strands. Across the campus exciting things are happening.

- We have new supercomputer capabilities in our engineering college that will allow such initiatives as modeling the progress and likely trajectory of a flu epidemic to help public health officials respond appropriately. That same super computer can run algorithms capable of analyzing the benefit of social media in extreme emergency response situations.

- We have students who have launched a business from a trailer-hitch design invented in an entrepreneurial engineering class. That team of three students went on to win a \$10,000 state investment in the Accelerate Michigan competition.

- We have archaeologists and anthropology experts using satellite imagery and other new technology to locate dinosaur fossils in Wyoming, explore the lives of early humans in Nepal or model water resources on the Sinai Peninsula.

- And we have physics researchers on the lookout every year for that one or two curious young people in freshman physics with the potential to unlock the next great secret of atomic structure.

This is the discovery environment we seek to nurture every day.

### Community and global awareness

Our students also will leave us knowing that our world today is more a neighborhood than a series of isolated home countries. The community and global awareness we build into our programs has as its base the premise that every person matters and every culture has something from which we can learn and to which we can contribute.

Even as we are sending domestic students to study abroad and take part in international internships, our campus is attracting students from other nations. This year, we have some 1,600 students from 95 nations--from Austria to Zimbabwe. Our largest feeder nations are Saudi Arabia, China, the Dominican Republic, India and Japan. I'm not sure you can get much more internationally diverse than that.

Our engagement with our home community is stronger than ever. Engagement is a two-way street, and I have been heartened at the way so many of you here at Friendship Village have reached out and been willing to engaged our students through the Resilience project.

Through the project, individuals in this community have partnered with Kalamazoo Promise and Seita Scholarship students to establish a very special learning community. I chose the word "partner" very carefully, because I know that the benefits being derived are of equal value to both members of each relationship. You've demonstrated what being a lifelong learner really means.

I'm delighted to know that a new group will begin the journey next semester. It is just one more example of how you continue to have an impact on our University. And you have my deep gratitude for your commitment to be among our students' strongest supporters.

Thank you.

And now, as promised, I want to hear from you. You have questions and concerns that I want to ensure are answered, so let's begin that process.