Medallion Scholarship Competition Welcome

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Good morning. Welcome to Western Michigan University and to Kalamazoo. We are all delighted to have you here on campus for our annual Medallion competition.

Let me start by offering an apology for any parking problems you may have experienced this morning. This is a large, vibrant university and there's always a lot happening. Today, you will to be sharing the campus with people visiting the latest exhibit in the Richmond Center for Visual Arts; about 4,000 sports enthusiasts who will be attending the Bronco men's basketball game versus Northern Illinois; and thousands coming to campus for the performance of Last Comic Standing this evening at Miller Auditorium. You'll recognize right away the variety of opportunities for our students, and today is an unusually "light day" for events on our campus.

I want to congratulate the parents and family members with us today. You have played a vital role in bringing your student to this point in their lives and you rightly share in their achievement.

And, of course, I congratulate the students. You have done well--incredibly well. By anyone’s standards, you are very bright and accomplished students. In terms of standardized tests and high school grade point averages, you are among the highest scoring students in the nation.

**The Medallion Competition**

Today, let me borrow a phrase from the Marines. We're not looking for a few good men, but we are looking for a few good students with the character, curiosity,
initiative and ability to take full advantage of the opportunities that Western Michigan University presents. Our Medallion scholars are a select group. We expect and have witnessed great accomplishment from previous winners. Regardless of today's outcome though, we know already the students here today are on the path to success. We want you and your family to become part of our University community.

Today's competition will be challenging. The essay and group problem-solving activities are designed to go beyond standardized test scores and grades. We want to review your personal and communication skills as much as your academic capabilities.

Many of our campus student leaders come to us through this annual competition. And our Medallion scholars, along with other top WMU students, go on to win prestigious national scholarships like the Truman, Goldwater and Udall awards. As a matter of fact, twice in the past five years, WMU students have won Gates Cambridge Scholarships for graduate education--that's the Cambridge University equivalent of the Rhodes scholarship.

Last year, one of our Medallion Scholars--now a junior--was part of a WMU team that won the iOme Challenge--a national collegiate contest asking some of the brightest minds in Generation Y to propose solutions to the nation's Social Security problems. Our team topped teams from Harvard, Boston University, St. Louis University, the Air Force Academy and many others to win $20,000 and an opportunity to go to Washington and present their plan to Congress.

You'll have an opportunity to hear from some of our other current Medallion Scholars and members of our Lee Honors College a little bit later. I promise you'll be
impressed. And I know you'll come away with a better idea of just what a diverse and gifted group our honors students are.

**What WMU offers**

I hope you have a chance to make some discoveries today as you learn more about WMU--and I predict those discoveries will revolve around the people you meet or learn about as you become more familiar with our campus. We have a beautiful campus (underneath that layer of snow) and some of the best instructional facilities you'll find anywhere. Our new Chemistry Building, our engineering campus, our Health and Human Services Building and our new Richmond Center for Visual Arts are among our spectacular facilities--the finest you'll find anywhere.

Now under construction is our new Sangren Hall, which will include the latest classroom technologies, and you will have an opportunity--as a WMU student--to take full advantage of that spectacular new building. Sangren is the most broadly used classroom building on our campus, serving students from every academic discipline.

And, if you entered campus through our west entrance, you undoubtedly noticed the building site of an apartment complex known as the Western View. Opening this coming fall, this housing for **upperclassmen** and **graduate students** will be just steps away from classes, sports events, and Miller Auditorium -- the perfect option for students who want the independence of apartment living.

While facilities and technology are important, it is the quality of the people who make up this university that will make all the difference in our students' lives. A university is, after all, its people. You'll meet some of them today. If they seem like they're incredibly interested in you and your success, I'll have to congratulate you on your powers of perception.
Student success is what this University is about. It is a place that has all of the resources of a much larger research University but still has kept the focus squarely fixed on teaching and making our students successful. We have more than 175,000 alumni around the world, and they will attest to that. In fact, we've discovered our alumni are our greatest marketing tool. They are willing to regale just about anyone who will listen with stories of the personal connections they made with faculty members here--connections that have lasted a lifetime.

Recently, a young woman who graduated from WMU and went on to graduate school at Syracuse University was discussing a move and a new job opportunity with two of her friends--both graduates of one of Michigan's very large research universities. At one point in the conversation, all three wondered what their favorite undergrad professors would recommend. The WMU alumna picked up her cell phone and called the chair of WMU's School of Communication, who had been a favorite professor of hers. Our alum and her former professor chatted for a bit while her friends listened incredulously. "Get out. My favorite professors wouldn't have a clue who I am," one finally said. "And you can just pick up you phone and call yours--and he answers?"

That ladies and gentlemen is the WMU difference--what we like to call the Western Edge. This is a place where faculty and staff alike are focused on what it will take to help your student succeed. Our faculty members are world-class researchers who found a University where they can generate new knowledge, teach what they've learned and have close working relationships with students. Relationships like the one I just described are a two-way street, of course. They take initiative on both sides, but they happen here with great regularity.
Who are the professors our students get to know?

• There's physicist Nora Berrah, who for years led an international team at Berkeley National Laboratory's Advanced Light Source. More recently, she's worked as co-team leader for Atomic and Molecular Science, helping to open Stanford University's new Free Electron Laser at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center. Nora schedules her teaching load so she can focus on her research one semester and spend the next teaching entry-level physics searching for the next research star.

• There's English Professor Jaimy Gordon, whose new novel "Lord of Misrule" is the winner of the 2010 National Book Award for fiction. Among past winners of the prize are literary giants William Faulkner, Saul Bellow and John Updike. Professors Gordon, Nancy Eimers (EYE-merz) and William Olsen are among several nationally recognized, award-winning authors in our distinguished English department, all of whom are teaching members of the faculty.

• There's geoscientist Carla Koretsky, who launched our geochemistry major; chemist Sherine Obare (oh-BAIR), who specializes in nanotechnology; and biochemist David Huffman, who's made groundbreaking discoveries in the fight against Wilson disease. They are three of our youngest faculty members and they've all been singled out by the National Science Foundation as being among academia's rising stars because of their ability to both generate new knowledge and convey that knowledge in the classroom.

This is a place where talented faculty members build their careers, stay and retire--and even then keep making a contribution. That's the case with author Stuart Dybek. He retired recently after a 33-year career at WMU in which he won a PEN/ Malamud Prize, a Whiting Writer's Award, several O. Henry Prizes, two Pushcart Prizes and the Lannan Literary Award for fiction. Just after his retirement, the MacArthur
Foundation awarded him a "genius grant." That $500,000 award comes with no strings attached--just a request to keep being productive. Stu is writing of course, but he's also continuing to mentor creative writing graduate students here, and he continues his role as a faculty member at WMU's renowned Prague Summer Program.

Western Michigan University is filled with people like the ones I've just described. We have faculty at the top of their game and staff members ready to help your student take advantage of every opportunity. We have programs internationally recognized for excellence, and we'll help you graduate with the credentials that will help you move successfully to your next level of achievement.

The Lee Honors College
There's an additional WMU benefit for a select group of students. I'd like to take a moment to mention one place on campus where our students report that their experience here is especially meaningful: the Lee Honors College, WMU’s honors program. It may surprise you to know that WMU has one of the oldest honors programs in the nation and that the academic credentials of students in our Lee Honors College equal or surpass those of students in some of the nation's most elite private colleges.

Do I think all of today's competitors should become honors college members? Absolutely. If there is only one piece of advice I can give you to aid in your success at WMU, it is to become part of the Lee Honors College. It offers its students a smaller and more focused personal learning community. They are given priority registration so they will get the classes they want and need. The success rate of honors college graduates as they apply for graduate schools and professional employment is exceptional.
**Closing**

Finally, let me urge you to take a careful look at our home community while you're here today. This is a wonderful college town with people who go out of their way to make students an important part of the social fabric.

I keep a copy of a thank-you letter that appeared in the local paper--the Kalamazoo Gazette--about one year ago. It was from the mother of two a recent graduates. The mom just wanted to say thank you to the people of Kalamazoo for what she called an unexpected bonus to their WMU education.

"The bonus," she said, "was having this great school located in a terrific community filled with kind and generous people who welcomed our children, made them feel at home, kept them safe and provided us with a terrific feeling of reassurance."

I later learned, this was a lady who knew her college towns. She was a resident of one and employed at that other research university due east of here--in Ann Arbor. She recognized the special qualities of this town and the unique ties that bind WMU and Kalamazoo.

Please don't hesitate to let any of us know if there is additional information we can supply in the coming weeks and months. We want you to be well-informed and enthusiastic members of the WMU community

Enjoy your day today. Regardless of the outcome of today's competition, I hope you feel the kind of welcome and focus on success we want all of our students and their families to feel. So again, please let me congratulate all of you. I look forward to seeing you on our campus in the fall.
Thank you.