6-12-2012

Malaysian Alumni Gathering

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Good afternoon. My name is JOHN M. DUNN and I am the President of Western Michigan University—YOUR WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY! I am very pleased to be with you here in Kuala Lumpur and to greet so many wonderful Western Alumni.

Of course, many of you graduated before I became President. You may have graduated when….. JOHN BERNHARD or DIETHER HANEICKE or ELSON FLOYD was president. I’m not exactly certain how each of them led the graduation ceremony, but I know that I have begun every single graduation by saying: “IT’S A GREAT DAY TO BE A BRONCO.”

Join me. Let’s try that now together – “IT’S A GREAT DAY TO BE A BRONCO.” ONCE MORE????

I’d like to say—and know you will agree—every day is a GREAT DAY TO BE A BRONCO. I hope you’ve worn your degree from Western proudly because Western Michigan University is a world-class university, and it is alumni like you who have made this university great.

I know that some of you came to Western as long ago as the 1960’s and were part of the pioneering young Malaysian scholars who ventured abroad, earned degrees and returned home to Malaysia to work, raise families and build this great country. Western benefited greatly from your presence, and in many ways you were responsible for setting Western on its course to become one of the most internationalized universities in the United States.
We are proud of the way Western has grown internationally. Over the years, nearly 3,000 Malaysians have studied and earned degrees at Western. Today, Western hosts almost 1,500 students from 94 countries. The International Festival—an annual event where international students grouped by country prepare displays about home and foods from home, share their culture and food with the university and local communities. Each year, many hundreds of students and people from the local community visit the Bernhard Center to experience the flavors of the International Festival.

Our international programs office—now called the Haenicke Institute for Global Education—has a staff of nearly 65 including a full-time immigration attorney. Western offers an undergraduate major in Global and International Studies that has more than 200 majors. Both American and international students are studying in the program.

Although Western has programs all over the world—from nearby Indonesia to Kenya to Saudi Arabia to Brazil and the Dominican Republic—Malaysia and Malaysian students have been a priority for Western for more than 50 years. Over those decades, you have contributed so much toward making Western the great university it is today. One of my goals for coming to Kuala Lumpur is to take the opportunity to say THANK YOU for placing your trust in us, for coming to study with us and for contributing to our classrooms, campus and culture in so many, many ways.

Some of you may already know, but let me take this opportunity to remind or inform you all that we have a program designed to say THANK YOU to all of our Malaysian alumni.
Since 2008, Western has offered a scholarship for children of Malaysian alumni. We were so proud to have you study with us that we hope very much that you will consider sending your children to Western, and with the scholarship program the financial burden of sending them will be a little lighter. This is just one way we can demonstrate concretely our appreciation.

Of course, we would be delighted to have you come back to Western to see the campus and how it has grown. Let me extend a personal invitation for you, should you be visiting the United States for any reason, please make plans to visit Kalamazoo and Western.

Many of you know that these recent years have been especially challenging for universities in the United States and elsewhere. Budgets have not only been very tight, but the funding we receive from the State of Michigan has declined dramatically over the past 10 years. Nevertheless, Western has continued to grow and strengthen many of its already impressive programs. Indulge me for a few moments as I brag a little about Western and recall for you some of the points of pride that reflect so well to the university where you studied.

➢ Western is widely recognized as a **TOP-100 RESEARCH UNIVERSITY** among universities in the United States as ranked by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

➢ Western is one of 98 universities in the United States to host a chapter of **Phi Beta Kappa**, the most prestigious academic honor society in the country.
We are consistently ranked so highly because of the quality of our academic programs. Many Western programs are among the top in the United States and some in the world! Here are just some of them:

- Engineering Management
- Evaluation Studies
- Paper Engineering
- Theatre arts
- Medieval Studies
- Aviation
- Jazz Studies
- Speech Pathology
- Occupational Therapy
- Physician Assistants Program
- Low Vision and Blindness Program

The list could go on to include more than 200 more academic pathways being offered today, which should make you proud to be a graduate of Western Michigan University.

If it has been some time since you have visited the campus, you may not recognize its tremendous growth in recent years. Here are some examples:

- **The College of Engineering** has moved to a completely new 256 acre state-of-the-art campus on Parkview Avenue to the west of main campus.
- In 2005, **the College of Health and Human Services** moved into a high-tech 200,000 square foot building on the University’s Oakland Drive campus.
▪ In 2006, the new $28.5 million dollar Chemistry building was opened.

▪ In 2007, the Frostic School of Art opened in the new 44,000 square foot Richmond Center for the Visual Arts.

▪ And currently we are completely rebuilding Sangren Hall and expanding the Lee Honor’s College.

Let me close by turning back to international education because this is an area where Western stands out among U.S. universities, and it is an area where all of you have had an impact on our University.

Over the last 25 to 30 years, a truly global higher education marketplace has emerged. Actually it began in Britain in the mid-80’s as Margaret Thatcher reduced government funding from British universities. British universities immediately began aggressive recruiting international students as a potential source of revenue, and it wasn’t long before Australian universities followed, developing very aggressive programs aimed at recruiting international students for Australian universities. By contrast, most American universities were slow to recognize this global trend, and many still have not.

But Western, thanks to the early presence of students from abroad—and many of you were already with us, has been able to move positively to build relationships with universities around the world and to welcome our many students from Malaysia and other countries as well. You have truly been instrumental in internationalizing Western Michigan University. You came half-way-around-the world to a city with a highly unusual name—Kalamazoo—and made Western your
home for studies in the United States. We appreciated you when you were there, we are very proud of you and your successes now, we love our current Malaysian students, and we thank you for all that you have done for our university.

Let’s remember—“IT’S A GREAT DAY TO BE A BRONCO.”

THANK YOU FOR COMING THIS EVENING. I HOPE YOU WILL ENJOY THIS EVENT AND PERHAPS MEET SOME FELLOW BRONCOS THAT YOU HAVEN’T SEEN FOR SOME TIME.

(Written for President Dunn by Dr. Donald McCloud, HIGE)