4-4-2013

National Advisors Conference

John M. Dunn
Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn
Part of the Higher Education Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn/382

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WMU President John Dunn by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
Good morning, and welcome to Kalamazoo and Western Michigan University. I am delighted that that you have a chance today to meet with each other and become familiar with our community. I hope during your stay here, you take the opportunity to explore our city and visit our campus, which is just blocks away.

I hope as well that you have a chance to meet the many WMU advisors in attendance today. They are quite simply our University's treasure. We pride ourselves on having students who hit the ground running. The fact that they are running in the right direction is a tribute to the work done by our academic advisors.

I always like to set the stage for groups visiting our community by sharing just a little bit about (Kalamazoo and) Western Michigan University. Many of you know us already, but for a significant group of you, this may be your first close encounter.

(In case there's no one like Greg Ayers there as well)
I would be remiss if I did not put my community booster hat on and let you know that this city is fairly know as "The Education City." It is the community that literally invented the concept of free public high schools as part of public education in 1874 through a judicial decision known as the Kalamazoo School Case. The city has been home since 1833 to Kalamazoo College and it was a
leader in Michigan the community college movement with its establishment nearly 50 years ago of Kalamazoo Valley Community College. In current times, you may be most aware of its role as the home of the Kalamazoo Promise--an anonymous gift that has offered since 2006, free college tuition to graduates of the Kalamazoo Public Schools.

Here's snapshot of Kalamazoo's hometown university:

• Western Michigan University is a learner-centered, discovery-driven and globally engaged public research university with nearly 25,000 students from across the U.S. and from 95 other nations. More than 20 percent of our student body is made up of graduate students who are working toward one of the 100-plus graduate degrees we offer, including 30 at the doctoral level.

• We are divided into seven degree-granting academic colleges, a graduate college and an honors college. Our new school of medicine will welcome its first class in fall 2014, and this week, we announced we may be close to a formal affiliation with a private law school that will make WMU one of fewer than 90 universities in the nation to offer professional education in both law and medicine.

• We've been designated by the Carnegie Foundation as a research university with high research activity. On a more commercial level, we've spent 22 years on the U.S News & World Report's list of "best national universities."
I share this information with pride and because I am fully aware and continually reminded that our success as a university rests on the quality of the people we hire. Our academic advisors are at the very heart of our staff. They are among the first higher education professionals incoming students meet. Our students have their first advising sessions during orientation as they are building their class schedules. What those students learn during that first advising session helps set the tone for their next four years.

Our academic advisors work within the academic colleges to set the academic stage for our students, ensuring that they develop a workable series of semester class schedules and meet the requirements of both the University and the discipline in which they are majoring. As our students progress through their department's rigorous course work as upperclassmen, faculty advisors ensure the discipline's requirements are met by signing off on major and minors.

While our institutions of higher education may vary in the way they handle academic advising, there are some common themes and traits I have found in my 40-plus years in academia:

1) You care intensely about students and because no school ever has enough academic advisors, the stress in your professional lives comes from not having enough hours in the day to serve students in the ways you want.

2) Your sound advice to students is the bedrock upon which a smooth and successful academic career is built. Students and their families count on
your knowledge of the university to ensure the most efficient, cost-effective and successful path to graduation is found. In a very real sense, your input, knowledge and creativity are the keys to how well a family's dreams are met. You are often on the front line in determining whether a student needs help academically or socially. And your knowledge of the institutional resources available to provide help can be a lifeline for students.

3) Your institution's well being is riding in large part on how well you are able to serve its students. From first-year retention to students' walk across the commencement stage, the tone you set and the professional demeanor and caring you show are key elements to student success. You may be the person who advises a student to pull back and focus on fewer courses or to stretch--go out on a limb because that's where the fruit is.

4) And finally, advisors are an often-overlooked source of real information about the views and aspirations of students. Simply put, you "get" it. I was reminded of that this week. As I mentioned, we announced--two days ago--the possibility of an alliance that would make an established law school a part of WMU. I sent out a message to our campus community informing them of the possibility and asking for feedback. Among the most powerful messages in the first wave of responses were emails from academic advisors. They knew how important this move was to the students they serve and how attractive this new resource would be to them. They were effusive in conveying the mindset of the students they work with every day.
I am convinced all of you have that wealth of knowledge and are a similar resource for your home institutions. I hope today is an opportunity for you to celebrate the power of your role and share some strategies for leveraging your knowledge and commitment.

Again, please plan on a bit of exploration while you're here. Or come back and visit us again at anytime in the future.

Thank you.