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## Legislative Testimony

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Legislative Testimony  
John M. Dunn  
Feb. 25, 2016

*Legislative questions to public university presidents*

- *How degree programs are created to respond to market needs, and how existing programs are terminated to save money and reallocate resources*
- *Innovative approaches to boosting student retention and degree completion*
- *University efforts fostering collaboration to strengthen regional assets (public/private partnerships, outcomes).*

• Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be here with you today. I'm also mindful of the time constraints and the topics about which you've asked for information. With that in mind, I will be respectful of your time and share with you some initiatives on a variety of subjects. Along the way, I hope you will hear meaningful answers to your questions.

• First, I need to acknowledge--proudly--the presence at the Capitol today of some 40 WMU students from our Environmental and Sustainability Studies program as well as our Political Science department. They are here to meet with 26 different Representatives and 19 different Senators throughout the day and voice their opposition to the diversion of Great Lakes water. You will easily spot them wearing their gold shirts and showing a great deal of Bronco pride and confidence.

• There are three lasting messages about Western Michigan University I'd like you to take away from our discussion today. Very simply said, you need to know that I lead an institution that is:

- **innovative,**
- **committed to adding value** to the people and organizations of Michigan,  
and

- **an early adopter** of solutions to the challenges and opportunities we face as a state.

Some of those challenges are embedded in the three questions you've posed to public university presidents:

- How do we ensure our programs are tailored to the needs of employers and our students?
- How do we ensure our students succeed and move quickly to degree completion?
- How do we put the resources of the University to work to both boost our economy and spread best practices that can be used across our state and around our nation?

- Let me start by saying the academic programs we offer are under continual examination and change. Our program additions are pegged on market forces and employer needs. They're also a way for us to leverage areas in which we already have enormous strength. Here are a few of the new programs introduced or expanded over the past year:

- Sustainable brewing--a scientifically rigorous program to prepare personnel for what is a \$6 billion Michigan industry
- A Master's in Public Health that we expect to draw mid-career professionals from a five-state area (hybrid online and in-person)
- New programs in business law and business analytics
- A law minor designed to help our undergraduates complete a law degree at an accelerated pace.
- Transformation of existing programs into accelerated graduate degrees that allow students to take as many as 12 credits while they're still undergraduates-
- and still paying undergraduate tuition rates. That allows them to earn a

graduate degree in a relatively short time and at less expense. We offer 17 such degree programs.

- If you're looking for proof of our effectiveness in meeting both employer and student needs, you need look no further than WMU's annual post-graduate success data. Our most recent survey covered 75 percent of our more than 5,000 graduates last year. We believe it is the most comprehensive documentation of life after graduation for students at any Michigan university.

The core finding is that within three months of graduation, 88 percent of our grads are "actively engaged" in the next steps of their professional development. They're employed, in graduate school in the military or launching a business. For those employed full time, 87 percent were employed in jobs related to their academic discipline. Their median salary is in the \$40,000 to \$45,000 range. And 75 percent of those who are employed have jobs right here in Michigan. The findings are prominently posted on our university Web site.

As a University and community, WMU and Kalamazoo have a rare opportunity to develop best practices for improving student success and degree completion. We've turned a student success environment for WMU students into a best-practice regimen that we're sharing with other colleges and universities around the state and nation.

- You are familiar with our celebrated Seita Scholars program for former foster care youth. It has turned into the most comprehensive such collegiate program in the nation and is allowing us to export best practices for nurturing our most vulnerable young people. After eight years, we've seen more than 70 Seita Scholars earn their degrees (will be in the 90s by summer's end.) The 24/7 campus coaching techniques that have worked so well for them are now

being used as a model for students at other universities and for students in other high-risk populations.

- Our status as the home of the Kalamazoo Promise and the University that has enrolled more than a third of Promise-eligible students led the U.S.

Department of Education to award us a First in the World \$3.2 million grant last year. The research is aimed at uncovering the impediments to degree completion that still exist among a population of students that no longer has to worry about the financial stress of going to college. What we're learning will help us and other universities develop an even stronger culture of degree completion. We're the first to have an opportunity like this and we are committed to making the most of it.

- I said we were early adopters of solutions to statewide challenges. I'd amend that to say "early, enthusiastic and successful" adopters of solutions--especially in the area of economic development. We work hard to leverage the strengths of public/private partnerships and collaboration. Let me share just two significant examples.

- First, I would say that in the life science industry, WMU and the private sector first became serious partners in the late 1990s, when the Kalamazoo community was faced with the loss of major parts of its pharmaceutical heritage. The University and community came together to build a life science incubator called the Southwest Michigan Innovation Center in 2003 with major assistance from this Legislature. That "incubator on steroids" along with additional state support allowed the University to work in partnership with dozens of startups launched by people with great ideas and a commitment to Michigan. More than 30 successful Michigan life science startups grew out of those partnerships.

Fast forward to 2016. The Southwest Michigan Innovation Center just last month became an integral part of the very young (2 years old) Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine. That school was established to serve this state and nation at no cost to Michigan taxpayers. From its inception, thanks to the generosity of the Stryker family, it has been designed to both educate new physicians and generate new life science discoveries.

The medical school's W.E. Upjohn Campus, (a building donated by MPI Research and Upjohn family member Bill Parfet,) has just had the final two floors renovated. Those newly transformed spaces will be home to a new Center for Clinical Research and other research entities being created in tandem with our medical school partners Borgess Health and Bronson Healthcare. That new research space, paired with the Innovation Center will put Kalamazoo and SW. Michigan on track for exponential growth in the discovery and commercialization of life science technology.

- One final example of early adoption of technology is an initiative that will help provide Michigan an entree into a new industry. WMU's internationally known work in the field of flexible printed electronics and the design and fabrication of sensors is putting us in on the ground floor of designing products that will be used to produce materials that can be molded into anything from clothing to the plating of ships and aircraft. Flexible hybrid electronics will be used on products in such fields as the automotive industry, communications, consumer electronics, medical devices, health care, transportation, performance monitoring and agriculture. The global market in flexible hybrid electronics, now at nearly \$13 billion, is expected to top \$77 billion by 2025.

Last fall, two of our researchers joined Defense Secretary Ashton Carter at NASA's Ames Research Center to announce the Flexible Hybrid Electronics Manufacturing

Innovation Institute. launched with \$75 million in federal funds and \$96 million in private support. Those WMU engineering professors lead one of the effort's national development nodes. Their role, specifically, is to work with materials suppliers to build a materials registry and to assist companies in the scale-up of technologies. They'll also be training educators and the industrial work force.

As I said at the outset, I want to be respectful of your time, so let me invite your questions.