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New Faculty Luncheon

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• Good afternoon. Let me add my personal greetings and welcome to each off you. If you leave today's event with a single message, it is simply this--we're all glad you're here and eager to have you not just as part of our academic community but as part of our extended Kalamazoo and Southwest Michigan communities as well.

• We look forward to seeing you in our neighborhoods and throughout this very special civic infrastructure. This is a town that is dedicated to education, the life sciences and human service. It's the city that gave birth to free public secondary education in 1874 (a fact we celebrated again this summer.) This is also a place that competed against 30 other cities 113 years ago to build what has become a national research university. And just ten years ago last fall, this was the city able to announce the Kalamazoo Promise, which offers free college tuition to its young people. If you love education and what it can do to transform lives, you're going to fit right in.

• This is a place where people stay and build their academic and personal lives. It's a place that invites your engagement and his total immersion in the life of this University and this community. In recent years, we've almost gotten used to celebrating 50th service anniversaries. One of our most celebrated and prolific faculty members (Paul Maier) retired a while back after 54 years at WMU--years spent building both a spectacular international academic career and a rich community life. He's still as actively engaged as ever--even during retirement.

• That is the kind of career and community life I wish for each of you. I make that wish for you knowing full well that you are likely the last new class of faculty I will welcome to WMU. I will retire next June after an academic career that has taken me around the
nation. These past almost 10 years in Kalamazoo and at this University have been remarkable--both personally and professionally. I urge you to take full advantage of the opportunity and the potential before you.

• You are joining our University community at what can only be described as a period of great change--the start of a new WMU era. We have just welcomed 72 students into the third class of the new Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine.

• Two years ago, we announced a formal affiliation that has led to the Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School. This fall, first-year law classes are being offered, for the first time, right here in Kalamazoo.

• Not too long ago, this was a public research university with seven degree-granting colleges. Now we are one of fewer than 90 American universities whose name graces both a medical school and a law school--two private professional schools affiliated with a public institution.

• And this fall, we're launching a new program that will ask students to create their own "Signatures" by choosing custom pathways and recording experiential learning that will be reflected on both their diplomas and their transcripts. These very personal signatures will reflect the unique set of experiences and qualifications they will take away from WMU. We're just beginning down this road, and I predict many others will follow. You can be part of this effort to help students tailor the learning experience.

• We're evolving and open to new ideas wherever we find them, because those new ideas lead to new opportunities for our faculty and our students. Welcome, and thank you for deciding to become a member of our community. Enjoy yourself this afternoon, and
please know that regardless of which college is your academic "home," I'm looking forward to seeing you at events on campus in the months to come. Welcome.