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Fall Convocation State of the University

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State of the University
Dr. John M. Dunn
Fall Convocation
Sept. 30, 2016

Opening

• Good morning. Thank you all for being here and celebrating the accomplishment of the nine outstanding people we have just recognized. They exemplify the values of Western Michigan University. Please join me in one more round of applause for our colleagues who continue to distinguish themselves everyday.

Thank you, as well, for being in the audience today to hear what I'm told is known in some circles around campus as the "Consider it Dunn State of the University" address.

• We've gone to great lengths this fall to make convocation an event that has been totally transformed. We've turned it into a daylong event, moved the location, added a picnic lunch and created video presentations to enhance the award ceremony. As these changes were contemplated over the summer, I thought the least I could do was play my part and commit to making a significant change to my annual address.

And so I opted to do that by announcing my retirement--making the 2016 State of the University address my last.

The State of the University

One thing that does not change today is your expectation that I articulate where we are as an institution, what we've accomplished and what the future holds for our University.
The state of Western Michigan University is strong. That strength is increasing exponentially and this University community has a future that is incredibly bright.

We are an ascending research university and we are continuing to solidify a unique position in the higher education arena. Value, access, service, sustainable development, diversity, civility and soaring academic achievement are the individual qualities that fit within our self-described role as a learner-centered, discovery-driven and globally engaged research university.

I am and will always remain incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together. As Western Michigan University selects its ninth president, our collective role as a university community is to polish and celebrate and yes, even brag a bit, about our accomplishments and our most recent achievements.

The person who becomes our next president needs to know exactly how special this university is and how the existence of Western Michigan University impacts the quality of life in our city, state, region, nation and world. As the search process unfolds, I'd like to see us as a University community consciously and deliberately celebrate and share our pride in what we have accomplished and what we know we can accomplish in the future.

What are those singular accomplishments that we should celebrate? For years now, we have described ourselves as learner centered, discovery driven and globally engaged. While our achievements don't always fit neatly into one of those three categories, those descriptors are a convenient place to begin the conversation.
**Learner centered**
Our commitment to access and our focus on every learner means we continually look for new student populations to serve and new ways to serve and engage all of our students--indeed all who consider themselves learners. Our role is to serve, respect and embrace all members of society.

**We're building a diverse campus**
This fall--as in each fall of the past 10 years--our enrollment of minority students has increased and now accounts for more than 22 percent of our overall enrollment. Over that same 10 years, our international enrollment has nearly doubled to more than 1,800 students, and our number of nonresident students has grown to 14 percent of our total. Our commitment to access and our pioneering role in honors education means our diversity is reflected across the spectrum. Diversity--racial, geographic, economic and cultural--means our university is robust and inclusive. And we have built that diverse strength always with an eye on building and maintaining a standard of strong academic credentials. We are not done. We must continue to work on building a diverse faculty and staff profile that is in keeping with our student profile.

**Diversity of thought and expression**
Diversity of though and expression is the natural outcome of efforts to build a diverse community. Earlier this week, I was privileged to attend a gathering of educators, lawyers, social media authorities and foundation personnel. Our focus and discussion revolved around the need to protect academic freedom and expression while protecting and respecting the underrepresented members of our university communities. It was a reminder to me that while we have made substantive strides in this area at WMU, we have much work still to do.
Create Your Signature
An important learner-centered element of our strategic plan is an effort to expand student options by inviting them to be thoughtful and deliberate about their out-of-classroom experiences, so that those experiences become part of a permanent record of personal and professional development. Through a program I first told you about last year, we're asking students to create their own signature and to have that signature--body of experience--reflected on their transcripts and diplomas, alongside their academic achievements.

The Create Your Signature program that is being piloted this year, could become a signature program for this entire institution. Everyone has both a unique signature as well as an obligation to use that signature to the betterment of humankind.

Seita success
Perhaps one of our most remarkable successes over the past decade began in 2008 with what we thought would be a handful of students who had aged out of foster care. Today, our Seita Scholars program has more than 150 students. Later this year, I'll have the opportunity to award a bachelor's degree to a Seita Scholar for the 100th time. With the lessons we learned from some amazing young people, we have launched a Fostering Success Center that includes a statewide network and training programs to share those lessons and our experience nationally. And the many initiatives and tools we have employed to help our Seita Scholars succeed have implication for other parts of our student population.

New student populations
Our learners will increasingly be a geographically diverse group. A bit later in this talk I'll mention our global impact and attraction. But there are places in this nation
that look with interest at our strengths and our ability to deliver the educational horsepower (BroncoPower) their communities need. When such opportunities present themselves, even the nominal barriers of state lines fall by the wayside.

One of those communities is Punta Gorda, Fla. That community's needs and desires in higher education start with aviation and health care, but extend beyond and into so many of our areas of strength. We've been working carefully with community organizations and local higher education entities to craft a response to their needs. Our work is made easier by the fact that we already have a Bronco foothold in nearby Tampa Bay, where one location of the WMU Cooley Law School can be found.

In October, we'll celebrate this partnership with Florida Southwestern State College that will bring our aviation program to its campus, even as we expand our current presence in Battle Creek. Florida Southwestern State College will get the benefits of a successful world-class degree program in aviation starting in fall 2017, while the WMU program will enjoy an additional operating site in a milder climate that will extend our ability to provide the air time all of our students need.

Meanwhile, our Physician Assistant students already are enjoying a new--and also much needed--set of clinical rotation locations while we explore expansion of that and other health care programs to learners in that region.

"Win-win" may be a dated description, but it is certainly a true representation of our work in Florida. What does the future hold there? We don't completely know. We continue to work through our own and Florida's accrediting bodies, but one thing is certain. Western Michigan University will become a familiar presence in Southwest Florida.
**Discovery driven**

Great universities take years to build. It's been my privilege to lead an institution that has made the commitment and invested the time and energy to build on core academic programs over many decades. The platforms of extraordinary expertise and influence that Western Michigan University enjoys have rarely been on display in quite the way they have been in recent weeks.

Just yesterday, for instance, we held an event marking $500,000 in new funding from the Michigan Legislature for the Michigan Geological Survey, which the state designated our Department of Geosciences to lead five years ago. Adding the survey's resources to the decades-old work of our geoscientists is allowing heretofore unprecedented analysis and protection of Michigan's mineral, natural gas and petroleum resources. One of the outcomes of this new funding will be an important analysis of city of Portage's underground water resources in order to protect the area's municipal water supply for the future.

Another example of our time-honored programs leading to current recognition is certainly our focus on **behavior analysis**. At the end of August, our Department of Psychology celebrated its 50th anniversary of having a department-wide focus on behavior analysis. WMU was one of two universities in the nation whose pioneering work in that field became internationally known as early as the 1970s.

Two weeks ago, that expertise was on display as we celebrated the application of behavior analysis to the treatment of autism. A three-day Michigan Autism Conference attracted 600 attendees. It was followed by the opening of the Kalamazoo Autism Center, part of this University's Autism Centre for Excellence. The newly opened autism center was the fulfillment of a decades-long dream. The event drew
area and national legislators, one of whom--Margaret O'Brien--described WMU's role this way:

"We have the shining jewel in our country and around the world for training people to treat autism."

And Congressman Fred Upton voiced his admiration for our autism work, pointing out that autism spectrum disorders are being targeted by his 21st Century Cures bill that is seeking $1 billion in funding to fight brain disease.

Traditional WMU academic strengths in areas as diverse as education, paper engineering, occupational therapy, creative writing and fine arts continue to enhance our ability to discover, serve, challenge and enlighten every day. They are all at the heart of our university identity, and those heralded programs set the bar high for each new innovative program and initiative.

One such new and innovative unit is the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine. It is an academic entity for which discovery is already a hallmark. Over the summer, for instance, two professors from the School of Medicine were awarded an $825,000 federal grant to study medication doses given to children during emergency medical treatment. The goal of Drs. Bill Fales and John Hoyle is reducing the high rate of medication-dosing errors that occur when children are treated by emergency medical services.

And another path to discovery is combining the assets of political science--a longtime strength of this University--and one of our more recent alliances that has become the WMU Cooley Law School. Working under WMU's Dr. Ashlyn
Kuersten, WMU graduate and undergraduate students are using a $414,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to discover and investigate cases of wrongful conviction. Once they identify possible injustices, they pass those on to WMU Cooley faculty and law students in that school's Innocence Project to take through the court system. The goal is exoneration of those unjustly imprisoned. That discovery goal also results in students who know how to dig, analyze and bring such tools as DNA testing into the cause of justice. That project is only possible because of the ties that link the law school and the University.

**Discovery in the community**

Our role as a University also extends to helping the private sector develop and commercialize new technology--often in collaboration with our academic programs. That is what our Business Technology and Research Park has been doing for 15 years. On that front, I have some breaking news to share. Late yesterday, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce announced that her department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) is awarding a $2.1 million grant to Western Michigan University to support the expansion of our Business Technology and Research Technology Park. The grant will support Phase II construction of necessary infrastructure for the park, which is expected to attract some $50 million in investment and create 200 jobs. We also must thank our partners in this endeavor--Oshtemo Township and the Kalamazoo County Road Commission.

**Globally engaged**

Global engagement is another of our areas of long commitment that will pave the path to our future. I am acutely aware of our role in the world thanks to my travels recently to some of our partner nations like China, the Dominican Republic and, most recently, Thailand. I am, in fact, still processing the potential for new and exciting
initiatives with our Thai partners in areas such as education, engineering, business and signature WMU offerings like our evaluation doctoral program.

Bronco alumni can be found in large numbers in almost every nation of the world. They are our untapped natural resource and ready to help build our profile. I have had the privilege of visiting some large alumni gatherings in the Dominican Republic, Malaysia, Japan and, most recently Thailand. Each time I travel to visit our alumni or touch bases with our domestic students who are studying abroad, I am reminded of the words of St. Augustine, who said:

“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.”

An essential part of our mission has to be making our students the most literate--the best read--when it comes to reading that book we call the world. We must continue to be evangelists for the benefits of study abroad and a destination for top students from around the world.

Again, we rely on our long history of achievement in this field. Our international engagement dates back decades and has put this University in a prime position to leverage decades of experience and strong international partnerships. One of our honorees today, Dr. Howard Dooley, was an early champion of this work. Such long and attentive service to the cause of international education means our alumni are in positions of influence in all sectors of society globally. It also means we are the destination campus today for students who are the children and grandchildren of our alumni.
Moving forward, more partnerships are in the works, as we examine the possibilities and logistics of partnering with host nations and universities on academic degree programs that are carefully constructed to take advantage of the resources of both partners. Years ago, we were pioneers in international "twinning" programs. Don't be surprised in the future to see 3+1 programs, 1+2+1 programs and any variety of combinations that will provide optimum opportunity for the students we may serve.

And while people in this nation and the world at large extol the benefits of STEM fields as the tools that will better their economies, we must be vigilant in reminding everyone that the book we call the world has not only many chapters but also a complex plot and subtle themes. It is the arts, humanities and social sciences that speak to the soul of our humanity. Our economies cannot lose the true "story" by trying to lose the core of who and what we are.

**The path forward**

As I said in my opening, the work we've accomplished together--the work we're still accomplishing together--makes this university a highly desirable location for someone with aspirations to be a university president. In the coming months, I hope you recall some of the items I've just laid out and add your own points of pride as you have an opportunity to meet and work with a new president.

The new president will need to hit the ground running, and will, of course, need to make his or her own assessments. But I intend to share with that fortunate individual four basic messages about this University and its potential--just to provide a head start:
1) This University and community can accomplish anything. As a University community, our recent achievements--a medical school, a law school and a renovated birthplace among other successes--can only be characterized as "monumental."

2) We are a community of depth and breadth and longstanding academic expertise. Our programs and our individual and collective contributions are recognized internationally.

3) This is a University community that is resilient--tough, if you like. We have made enormous progress during one of the most challenging and financially dark periods in the history of Michigan and as we faced a deep decline in our financial support. One can only wonder what more could have been accomplished in a better fiscal climate.

4) Most important, our people are our greatest strength. As a community, we are committed, innovative, diverse, caring, civil and committed to the communities and learners we serve.

I began this address by referring to this as the Consider it Dunn State of the University address. I'd like to assure you we're not "done" yet. We have months of achievement ahead of us and then we'll recommit and connect with a new president. Each and every day of this and the coming year will be a good time to remember that this is a great day to be a Bronco.

If you will do that, I'll be happy next year to Consider it Dunn.

Thank you. Now let's go have lunch.