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Christ University MBA Program Lecture
Transformative Ties: How International Education Makes Us Strong
December 2, 2016
Dr. John M. Dunn
President of Western Michigan University

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for that kind introduction (?Name?). It is my distinct pleasure to be here with you at Christ University--an institution with which we've been allies for almost 20 years. We take great pride in our affiliation with this program and with the opportunities our two universities can provide to students because of that affiliation.

It is also my pleasure to have the opportunity to tell you a bit about the philosophy that guides the international commitments and connections of the University I am privileged to lead--Western Michigan University. Those commitments and connections are vital to our pursuit of excellence in all that it does. They are a part of who we are and have worked to become for more than 60 years.

Simply put, I am convinced that international study and the experiences that accompany it have transformative powers for the students who take advantage of the opportunity--and even some who do not.

Usually when I speak somewhere, and always when the audience is this far geographically removed from the city I call home, I feel compelled to provide a brief description of the caliber and characteristics of the learning community in which I live and work. Some of you know about WMU already, but to others, we may just be a name and a location on a map.

An international research university

Western Michigan University is an internationally known research university that enrolls over 23,000 students. More than 20 percent of our students are enrolled in graduate programs, studying in one of 106 degree programs at the master's or doctoral level.

WMU is one of 15 autonomous public universities funded by the state of Michigan. And WMU is one of just four of those Michigan Universities with a medical school and a law school. The University occupies nearly 1,300 acres in the middle of a small city named Kalamazoo, that has a population of 75,000. WMU also has smaller regional locations in cities across Michigan, and thanks to a very recent development, at a location in Florida.

At WMU, we believe that a great university must be international; we recruit faculty and students from around the world and have actively done so for many decades. Right now, the number of international students on our main campus in Kalamazoo is nearly 1,900 individuals from 100 countries--8 percent of our student population. That international enrollment includes a subset representing our strong Fulbright Fellowship program. Last year that program brought us 27 graduate fellows from 16 countries.

You'll be interested to know that WMU's alumni population in India is nearing 1,000--some of them here with us for this event. Over the past three years, we've seen a surge in the number of our current students from India. We've experienced a 20 percent increase in Indian enrollment since 2014, and there are now 325 students from India on our campus--almost all studying at the graduate level.

And because we recognize the benefits that come from giving every student the opportunity to live and study abroad, we have more than 60 programs in 35 nations through which U.S. students can travel and earn academic or internship credit.

Additionally, for more than 40 years we've offered English language instruction for international students through a CELCIS program that is among the world's most highly

regarded. The Center for English Language and Culture for International Students has been offering language and culture instruction to incoming international students for 42 years. Our center serves students headed to WMU, as well as students planning to study at other U.S. universities.

So that is all about numbers--the infrastructure or the bones of the place, if you will. Now I want to fill in on the elements that make up the heart and soul of a great university--the underlying tenets that bring higher education to life for our students each and every day.

Three pillars to define the University

Four years ago, in a Universitywide effort, we set out to clearly define who and what we are as a higher education community. Most of us already knew the qualities that set us apart, but we did not have universally accepted language that we could use to consistently talk about ourselves and around which we could strategically plan for the future.

In fairly short order, we settled on three pillars--simple core phrases that define us. They tell the world what we offer and what sets us apart. As a campus community, we agreed that Western Michigan University is:

- Learner Centered,
- Discovery Driven, and
- Globally engaged.

Let's just explore those three pillars.

We're learner centered

Western Michigan University is a university where every member of our community is responsive to and responsible for the education of our students. We challenge and engage all members of our community with a university experience that creates skilled, life-long learners.

We're discovery driven

The University offers experiences that enable discovery, and promote creativity and research. We are committed to pursuing inquiry, disseminating knowledge, and fostering critical thinking that encourages life-long learning. Our scholarship creates new knowledge, forms a basis for innovative solutions, leads to economic development, and makes substantial contributions to society. Discovery encompasses the entire range of scholarship from bench science to the fine arts.

And last, and perhaps of most interest to you, we're globally engaged.

The University impacts the globe positively. We are a community of learners committed to human dignity, sustainability, social responsibility, and justice. Our campus embraces a diverse population of students, faculty and staff who develop learners and leaders who are locally oriented and globally competent, culturally aware and ready to contribute to world knowledge and discovery.

Remember, if you will those first two qualities--learner centered and discovery driven--while I talk about the third. I've already filled you in on the numbers--1,900 students from 100 nations--and some of the other details of our global commitment. It is important to note that we welcome the peoples of the world to our campus. We acknowledge and celebrate the fact that international students bring their gifts to our university campus--their knowledge, culture, language, customs and intellect. Our campus is more vibrant because of their presence, and our students are eager to experience the traditions and learn about the great accomplishments of other cultures and civilizations around the globe.

It's not unusual for second-generation international students--some born in Kalamazoo while their parents studied at WMU-- to return to our town for their own WMU education. Our international students return to their home nations and go on to become

their countries' leaders and still they retain the great affection for the United States they developed as students. They are corporate leaders, diplomats and university administrators.

Student feedback vital to process

Now this may sound like we have mastered the art of international education. We've been at this for a long time, but we still have so much to learn from our students about how we can serve them better--and how they can share their culture with us. For that reason, we try to provide multiple ways our international students can give us feedback about their experience. It sometimes provides surprises when students share an issue we would never have considered as a problem.

- There are a variety of tools we use to get information from international students that will help us serve them better.

-Our first step was to conduct student surveys of international students to gather feedback. But a paper or online survey has its drawbacks. They don't get to the heart of some of the real issues. Only conversation can really do that.

- So, over the past three years, I've held luncheon gatherings for all of the students from a single nation--a chance to eat together and talk candidly about their student experience--what works and what could be improved. They raise some of the same concerns as every student on a U.S. campus--the universal concerns about parking and about food. But they also raise issues that might never have surfaced otherwise--concerns about the informality of the classroom experience, public transportation availability, health insurance for accompanying family members and their intense desires to really get to know U.S. students and families. Every insight we receive gives us the opportunity to enhance their experience and the experiences of international students who will follow in years to come.

We also offer as many opportunities as possible to honor our international students and allow them to share their culture with our campus community.

-We hold an annual International Festival, in which our international students share their nation's food, language and customs. It has become one of the spring social highlights for the entire Kalamazoo community. Last year, that incredible event was organized by Karthik Balakrishna, a graduate student from India majoring in electrical engineering. He called the festival "a reflection of the University's multicultural strength."

-We also invite our students to showcase their nation's identity with an annual Parade of Flags at our Homecoming football game.

-And at each commencement ceremony, we offer recognition to those who have traveled from around the world to WMU to succeed by earning a degree.

International focus woven into learning and discovery

I'm very proud of what we do in providing degree success for students from around the globe. We are "Globally Engaged." But you'll remember that three-part mantra I shared earlier in this talk. We are Learner Centered, Discovery Driven and Globally Engaged. And those three qualities are not separate and distinct, but rather woven, interlaced, through everything we do. And those first two qualities, successfully inculcated support the third. Our global engagement is only as good as our ability to support learners and our ability to create new knowledge.

Our global engagement is substantive, and some might think it is a goal unto itself. But truly the benefits and relationships between our learning, discovery and international work are what allows us to provide a level of excellence that can't be achieved without those interrelationships.

Among the promises we make and pride ourselves in keeping for enrolled students, are our commitments to ensuring 1) students have a transformational experience at WMU and 2) our students will leave us prepared for not just a job, but prepared for a career, a lifetime of accomplishment and the ability to take their places as active, productive and compassionate citizens of the world.

We want every student to learn the lessons that come from spending his or her days meeting, studying, living, eating and getting to know people from parts of the world outside their comfort zone. We want them to know that traveling, visiting and living in far flung locations, learning to adapt, respect and enjoy other cultures are all natural activities of well-educated people.

We want all of our students from every nation to discover the truth of what author Henry Miller once said. "One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things."

There is perhaps nothing that will transform your world view and prepare you for the global economy the way a study abroad opportunity will. As president of WMU, I get to visit our study abroad and international study partner locations around the world. I talk with students whose world has changed forever and whose outlook on learning, diversity and citizenship has been dramatically altered by the chance to experience higher education that includes an international element.

They've learned that what Mark Twain once said is true.

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness."

And that lesson is learned as well by the students who may never travel and study abroad, but have the opportunity to learn from those who do.

Discovery knows no boundaries

And finally, we must not forget that discovery and the expansion of knowledge happens everywhere. When we look at discovery as an international endeavor, we automatically open ourselves to new ideas and new ways of attacking a problem. In the scientific realm that idea was best expressed by Louis Pasteur.

"Science knows no country," he said, "because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world.

What a perfect view of the role of new knowledge and its place in the modern world. It is exactly the viewpoint that will develop in our students as they move seamlessly around the globe--to travel, study, live, work and create the future.

It is a viewpoint that likely drives Subramanian Ganapathy, who earned his Ph.D. at WMU in Kalamazoo in 2013 and then returned to India to accept a postdoctoral research position at the Centre for Nanoscale Science and Engineering here in Bangalore.

It's why we bring U.S students to the India Gateway Program that allows them to visit Bangalore--India's Silicon Valley--visit industry, take classes on the Indian economy and familiarize themselves with Indian culture. And, of course, it's why we take such pride in this MBA program and the professionals it produces.

Knowledge truly does not have borders or boundaries. Nor does the habit of lifelong learning or the lessons of travel and study abroad. In pursuing excellence and supporting the best learning environment possible, the international connections we have forged and nurtured have become vital.

Those connections allow us to support our campus learners, increase campus discovery and make our mark in the global community by transforming the next generation of leaders.

Thank you for your interest in Western Michigan University and the global community we have come to serve. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.