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Farewell Celebration

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

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Seita Scholars

INTRODUCTION:
I am honored to stand before you today not only as a Bronco but as a Seita Scholar as well! I am thankful to have the opportunity to grace you with my experiences and gratitude toward President Dunn and all that he has offered to Seita Scholars.

I'd like to share with you a quote by Marianne Williamson: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?”

As someone who spent the majority of their childhood and young adult years in the Michigan foster care system, I often times found myself on the outside looking in on the life and experiences I wanted for myself. My senior year in high school was nearing the end and a sense of uncertainty was setting in. During my high school career I was involved in multiple sports and committees. I was an assistant teacher and president of the National Honor Society.

I was the high school student that every parent could be proud of. Despite my accomplishments what people remembered the most about me was not that I was an outstanding student and leader, not that I was a very kind person but that I was a foster kid. My principal would praise me for being such a well-rounded young lady, at the end of one of many conversations she finished off her compliment by saying "You do so well, sometimes I forget that you're a foster kid." This was not a compliment but a reminder that society didn’t believe foster children were capable of excellence. It was from that moment on out that I knew I had to change the negative stigma attached to being a foster child.

Although I was accepted into a plethora of academic institutions I was drawn to Western. As I learned more about the Seita Scholars program I was in awe of the support and resources that it offered its students. I learned about the vision behind the creation of the program and the individuals who advocated and invested in the program, as well as the students that would be a part of the program. It takes a special individual to see the need and the reward behind a program such as the Seita Scholars program. Not only did it take an imaginative vision and a group of people willing to work diligently to make sure the program happened, it took a university president to believe in his staff and push the program into existence. Due to the establishment of the Seita Scholars program, Western Michigan University is now the home for the Center for Fostering Success. Not only have Broncos reaped the benefits of the program, but it has allowed our staff to take the initiative of the program and implement and share resources with universities around the country to offer support to their students. Not only has the program been the catalyst for furthering the futures of Michigan's foster youth it has propelled students into an array of different walks of life.

I am proud to say that since 2008 the program has seen over 400 students and recently celebrated its 100th graduate. Thanks to president Dunn, to be a Seita Scholar has been one of my greatest collegiate joys. With his arms wide open President Dunn has made it his business to welcome Seita Scholars and create an atmosphere where we can thrive and have a sense of
community. From gatherings at his own home, to pool parties and a mass of selfies and "rowing the boat", he has continued to be present and involved in the lives and college careers of Seita scholars. I am no longer looking in on the things that I desire out of life. Western Michigan University has allotted me the opportunity to be hands-on in molding my college career and future. Day by day and degree by degree the Seita Scholars continue to beat the odds and change the statistics surrounding Michigan's foster youth. Thanks to Dr. Dunn we have become the model for excellence and the key to making tomorrow a brighter day!

Remember that we are meant and destined for greatness despite the perceptions of society, the greatness that President Dunn has so diligently nurtured throughout his presidency within this great university! I am honored to have been in attendance during his presidency and am forever grateful to be a Seita Scholar!

I have heard President Dunn say countless times that "Everyday is a great day to be a Bronco", I'd ask that you all join me in saying it one more time. EVERYDAY IS A GREAT DAY TO BE A BRONCO!!!!

Military Affairs:
Good afternoon, I am sure many of you are not aware that the official birth date of the Office of Military and Veteran Affairs was in the spring of 2009. Since then the number of military students at Western has grown from about 300 to over 700. Not only do we have the largest population of on campus military students in the state, we are also the only Michigan university designated as a Purple Heart University. WMU has earned the accolades of Military Friendly, Best for Vets, Military Advanced Education Top University consecutively since most of these awards’ conception. The office itself has grown in the services we provide to include sponsoring Western’s first military specific scholarship, social events every semester, an annual military specific career fair, and other outreach programs showing WMU’s support for those currently serving, those who have served, and their dependents. This university is seen as a place a military student can succeed and people come here because of that reputation.

Support for the military is not just for the student, several faculty and staff of WMU are military members. We have everything from two Brigadier Generals to privates and representation from each branch of the military. WMU has been recognized by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve for being a military friendly employer and during the awards ceremony, President Dunn said “I know my name is on the award, but this is an honor intended for our entire campus.”

Things like this do not happen overnight. It takes visionaries in positions of influence, it takes students unafraid of asking questions and proposing solutions for problems, it takes strong leadership and we are very lucky at this university to have all three. We have had superb military advocates, faculty and staff who understand and support the military student. Students who come with the ability to recognize issues and recommend attainable solutions, and a University President supported by Vice-Presidents, Provost, Deans and directors who understand the benefit to having a military student body and how that adds to a university’s
diversity. As a retired military member, I know how change happens and a true lasting change, a cultural change, comes for the top.

On behalf of the military student population, the veterans and currently serving faculty and staff, thank you, Dr Dunn, for your support, leadership and trust in your officials to make Western Michigan University Best for Vets.

Congressman Upton:
Thank you Tim – and thank you to everyone here for having me. I’m honored to be with such distinguished members of our community, students, faculty, alumni, and of course – my friend John and his lovely wife Linda.

We’re here today to honor the legacy of Dr. John Dunn...

John, I remember when you signed on as Western Michigan’s eighth president, it was for a five year stint. Then the board asked you to stay longer. And then they did it again. And finally, it was left to you to set your own deadline.

And yet, after 10 years, we don’t want to see you go.

We understand, however, it’s time to let you move on to spend more time with Linda and your family. And it’s not as if you’re moving. We here in the Kalamazoo community are grateful that you have agreed to stay here and help guide the new president for a year.

When we look back on your time here, it’s truly amazing how much you were able to squeeze into one short decade. It’s going to sound like a highlight reel but it deserves mentioning – even repeating – the groundbreaking work you have done since that first crisp July morning in 2007 when you started your job.

The impact isn’t just here at home. But truly around the world.

In your time, ground was broken and the first three classes have been welcomed at the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine.

WMed, as it is known, is a community partnership. I have a personal connection as we have partnered with WMed several times as we advanced our groundbreaking 21st Century Cures Act, now law.

Western formed a formal affiliation with the Thomas M. Cooley Law School to create the WMU Cooley Law School and brought first-year law classes to Kalamazoo in 2016.

The new Sangren Hall, 230,000 square feet and four stories tall, sits in the heart of main campus. The $60 million dollar structure is home to the College of Education and Human Development and the department of sociology.
An Office of Sustainability was founded in 2010. And under your leadership, Western has been a leader in solar arrays, electronic vehicle charging and many other “green” initiatives.

In addition to new buildings to enhance new areas of learning, you have overseen the construction of the first new on-campus housing in 50 years, and a new dining center.

After much discussion with students, alumni, and community members, Western moved forward and completed a massive renovation of East Hall, the birthplace of the university, into Heritage Hall. It’s a beautiful facility that has won many awards and it’s open to all. I was honored to be able to present you with the first U.S. flag to fly on the hall’s flagpole since the renovation.

But it’s not just about the bricks and mortar with you, John.

You have a servant’s heart and you truly care about the students. You’ve always been students first. Whether it was tragic acts of violence, or troublesome travel bans – you reach out right away to make sure they are heard and supported.

And they respect you. It’s apparent in all your interactions with them whether it’s at a football game on a glorious fall day – go Broncos!, trudging through the wind and snow to commemorate the birthday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or the many heartfelt hugs shared during graduation ceremonies.

I’m sure you will say you still learn from the students here – whether it is new social justice concerns, or how to “dab.”

I want to close by really thanking you for the hard work and tireless hours you have put in to help Western and the greater Southwest Michigan community.

You have taught us many things. One of the most important teachings you have imparted upon the community is that Every Day is A Great Day….to be a Bronco!

Damon Chambers:

Good afternoon,

Today we are celebrating excellence as a university community. We are celebrating excellency in leadership, innovation and engagement.

President Dun, thank you for your leadership in establishing the 3 pillars of our university. Through the concepts of those pillars, our university has grown significantly. Thanks for your support, collaboration and commitment to the improvement of Graduate education.

On behalf of the Graduate student community we thank you for the wave of change and stability you brought to this university. We wish you all the best as you move to the next
dimension of your life. Our graduate student community will miss your open door policy and access as you listen to each student who sought your ear. You will always be a Bronco.

Best wishes.