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Aquinas/WMU Engineering Partnership Signing

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Good afternoon. It is an absolute pleasure to be here on the campus of Aquinas College today and to have a chance to catch up with my old friend President Olivarez and to meet with Dr. Barrows and Sister Damien. The fact that we're here to cement an important new partnership between our two schools is icing on the cake.

What we're finalizing and celebrating today is a partnership that builds on the academic strengths of our institutions and one particular combination of strengths that will mean the students we serve will be able to meet their maximum potential and achieve the goals they and their families have set.

As a comprehensive research university, we have long taken the position that every student needs the breadth of knowledge that comes from a broad-based liberal arts background. We're educating young people for both careers and a future as well-rounded citizens. For that reason, WMU has a longstanding tradition of "firsts" in the higher education arena. We were the first university in the nation to require computer literacy and the first to mandate students take coursework that explores the nonwestern world.

We know we need engineers and scientists who can embrace the challenges of the world from a broader perspective than technology alone. We also need social scientists and graduates of our professional schools who apply their skills to the challenges confronting a technologically advanced
marketplace. Our colleagues at Aquinas know that as well and are ready to bring their long experience to the table to make that happen.

- The partnership we've developed will allow Aquinas students to spend their first two years at Aquinas and immerse themselves in the Catholic and Dominican tradition that has been the hallmark of this college for so many years. Then, those students will have an opportunity to bring the insights and world view from the Aquinas experience and apply them to the engineering disciplines for which Western Michigan University is internationally known.

- We've spent some time getting to know each other as the details of this partnership were worked out. We concluded that the strength of Aquinas's math and science curriculum is an enormous asset for this initiative. That strength and the fact that both institutions share a commitment to ensuring all students graduate with a broad-based liberal arts background made this partnership a natural fit. We'll be preparing young people to bring the best of both worlds to their professional lives, and they will be ready to immediately contribute to the needs of our region, state and nation.

- Job-ready graduates in a high-demand discipline for our State’s work force and young professionals ready to bring their own unique values to their roles in the West Michigan community--that is what we are sure will come from this partnership. This is the start. We expect in the next two to three years, we'll all be able to say "mission accomplished."