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KRESA Kalamazoo County Administrators Meeting

John M. Dunn

Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

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KRESA Kalamazoo County Administrators Meeting
President John M. Dunn
May 10, 2017

Opening

Good evening! Thank you all for the opportunity to be here and talk about some of my favorite topics--education, opportunity, schools, community engagement and student success. You and I have a lot in common, so I've been looking forward to the chance to get to know you better and to share some information about the University I've led for the past 10 years.

I understand from Dave Campbell that, in addition to KRESA administrators, we have a number of school board members here. I will confess up front to feeling a special kinship with you. I count my 13 years of service as a school board member in Corvallis, Oregon, as a pivotal experience in both my personal and professional life. I took away lifelong lessons and beliefs about democracy, community and governance from those years. School board members are the grass roots--the bedrock really--of our nation's governance. They--you--have enormous sway over the lives of families as well as the health and quality of life in our communities.

(Dunn's personal stories)

- Impact on career
- Variety of Issues

Some things to know about WMU

I always like to make sure an audience has some solid knowledge about Western Michigan University. Because you are educational professionals and because this is WMU's home community, I'm pretty confident you all know the basics. I suspect there are a few proud Bronco alumni here this evening (Show of hands?)

So instead of doing the usual basics, let's kick it up a notch and talk about a few items you may never have fully explored. I'm going to jump around a little bit and rely on your already high level of knowledge about WMU. Let's start with what's happening right this minute.

Just up the road, at the Battle Creek/Kalamazoo International Airport, there are hundreds of scholars from all over the world getting off planes and heading to campus to join hundreds--thousands--more already at WMU or arriving by car or train for our 52nd International Congress on Medieval Studies. It begins tomorrow morning and lasts through Sunday, and there will be more than 3,000 people attending. They'll fill up every hotel in town and beyond, and many will live in our campus residence halls. They've traveled here from Sweden, Chile, the U.K., Israel, Russia, Spain, Italy and Australia--34 nations in all--and from 47 U.S. states. This is a big deal. To give you an idea of how big, I can tell you there are places around the globe where only two things are known about Michigan--1) Detroit is the home of the automobile, and 2) Kalamazoo is home to the annual medieval congress. For four days in May, Kalamazoo becomes the center of the universe for those who specialize in the Middle Ages. And, of course, Kalamazoo County residents are welcome to attend at no cost.

Having 3,000 extra people in town for a few days has an economic impact. So does being home to 23,000 students and more than 4,000 staff and faculty. And of course, there are days when we fill Waldo Stadium or Miller Auditorium with thousands of visitors. We assess those financial benefits to our home region every few years. The last time we did it was nearly six years ago, and at that time WMU had an \$820 million economic impact on Kalamazoo County.

The opportunity university

So, I've just described two important ways in which our county is positively changed by the presence here of Western Michigan University. We impact the economy and we provide an unusual world-class level of academic and cultural involvement. Those are good things. But even more important are the ways in which we work with you to provide opportunity and the prospect of success for young people from a variety of backgrounds. You and I are partners in some profound ways when it comes to tailoring support systems for students who are veterans or for young people who are in foster care. Nontraditional students, underrepresented minorities and the most gifted of honors students--all have the opportunity to find their path to the future at WMU. They may be in your classrooms right now, but soon they'll be at WMU and then on to the world stage.

You know them. They're the young people you see as high school students or alumni and who have enormous potential. That's all that matters. They just need the opportunity to succeed. Some universities pride themselves on being exclusive and measure their worth by how many applicants they reject. At WMU, we regard ourselves as more of a value-added proposition. Our success is based on the number of students with potential who we admit, and who succeed and keep moving toward graduation.

Seita Scholars

Our Seita Scholar Program is a perfect example and this is a perfect time to talk about it, since May is Foster Care Awareness Month. Our Seita Scholars Program is for young people who have aged out of foster care. We offer a full-tuition scholarship, a campus coach support system and campus housing that remains

available to our Seita Scholars and becomes their home--a home that remains open to them during semester breaks and in the summer.

We began the Seita Scholars in 2008 to address the lack of higher ed opportunity for young people. While 70 percent of foster youth aspire to attend college, only about 5 percent of them achieve their goal of earning a postsecondary degree.. Much of that is because they simply don't have the family support systems or the finances to make a go of it. Today, WMU is home base for a statewide initiative called Fostering Success Michigan, and our Seita Scholars program is the most comprehensive collegiate program for foster youth in the nation. We graduated our 100th Seita Scholar in December, and another 10 graduated in April.

Here are some other unique student populations who have benefitted from access to the opportunity and support systems they need. They all play a special part in making the WMU campus and Kalamazoo County the vibrant community that it is.

Veterans

We take real pride in welcoming and supporting is our nation's military veterans. We have more veterans of our country's Afghanistan and Iraq operations than any other university in Michigan. Since 2008, we have offered military veterans and their families in-state tuition, and we were among the first to set aside space and personnel to support veterans through an on-campus office that has become their central gathering space. With Congressman Fred Upton's support we became the lynch pin for a VetSuccess operation with our partners at KVCC and KCC. That 2012 designation, the first in Michigan, brought additional resources to our veteran-students. Ten days ago at April commencement, 63 veterans were among our graduates.

Academically talented/gifted students

You might not know that WMU has one of the oldest collegiate honors programs in the nation. It boasts a student profile that is similar or even more impressive than that of students attending the most elite private colleges in the United States. Our Lee Honors College is academic home to more than 1,770 top students--up more than 8 percent over the past four years. Last fall the college welcomed its largest ever freshman class--418 students from around the nation.

The Lee Honors College plays a special role in Southwest Michigan school districts--including those in Kalamazoo County, by offering ATYP--the Academically Talented Youth Program that starts in middle school and allows top students the opportunity to use dual enrollment while they're still in high school.

Minority students

Minority student enrollment is a one of WMU's special success stories. Over the past five years, total minority enrollment has increased by nearly 11 percent, with increases in all categories except native Hawaiian/Pacific islanders. Total minority enrollment for fall 2016 stood at 5,147--22 percent of the University's total enrollment.

International students

And finally, let me mention a very special group of students who contribute to our campus and community culturally, economically and academically. Our international students, who come from 100 nations have had a tough year, and our focus in recent months has been on reassuring them and reaffirming how important

to our campus community and how welcome here they are. There are more than 1,800 international students at WMU--double the number on campus a decade ago.

Nearly 100 of our international students come from the nations that have been called out in the president's travel ban executive orders. These students are just now and very slowly regaining a sense of equilibrium after a period of being confused, distraught and convinced that at any moment they would be physically seized, perhaps separated from their wives and children and barred from continuing their research and progress to a degree in which they'd invested years of their lives. The grace and forbearance with which those students responded to the stress in their lives served as something of a life lesson for our entire campus community.

Med school and law school

All of these unique student populations enjoy a campus that has grown and been enhanced both physically and in terms of quality and the diversity of programs offered. I suspect you're familiar with the Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine and the WMU Cooley Law School. We're not at all hesitant to talk about them.

What you may not know is that, as a result of these two developments, WMU is now one of only 90 colleges and universities in the nation to house both a medical school and law school operating as part of its academic family.

Again, the impact on this community is enormous--now and for many years into the future. Our fourth class of medical students--84 students selected from among more than 4,800 applicants from around the nation, will join the Kalamazoo

community this fall. And next spring, our first class will graduate and continue on to medical careers--many of them in this community.

Closing

Opportunity, community building, cultural vibrancy, diversity and economic impact--these are just the low-hanging fruit I've chosen to illustrate what our University--Kalamazoo's university--means to the citizens and educators of Kalamazoo County. There's so much more I could share.

On Aug. 1, I will relinquish the presidency to Dr. Edward B. Montgomery. Our Board of Trustees did a wonderful job in finding my successor and they honored me by involving me in the search process. I have enormous confidence in President-elect Montgomery and am excited to see where he leads WMU in the coming years.

He comes to WMU with incredible credentials. I ask that you extend to him the same warm welcome that I received 10 years ago and that you reach out to him to help him and celebrate our shared mission. Kalamazoo and our schools will only benefit from your outreach and good will.

I will be here in the community for the next year working on special projects and doing whatever I'm asked by the board and new president to do. I look forward to seeing you out and about. Please don't hesitate to stop and chat. I may have some extra time on my hands--and that's a good thing.

I want to be respectful of your time and offer the opportunity for you to pose any question you have, so fire away.

Thank you. *(Approximately 15 minutes)*

Possible Q&A topics to suggest:

- *Student debt load --\$30K*
- *Graduation rates—90 percent over 8 years*