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We Have Many Exciting Opportunities this Semester

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Dear Colleagues:

Welcome back to what will be a packed and high-energy semester. We’re off and running this week. As I look ahead, I am excited about the number of opportunities we’ll have to come together as a campus to focus on important issues and strategic campus initiatives.

**Snow closure policies**

I would be remiss if I did not make note of one important aspect of what we call our “spring semester”-snow. Very rarely does the University close because of snowfall, so it makes sense to always assume we are open. If there is ever any doubt about weather conditions, go to the WMU home page or call our emergency hotline at (269) 387-1001. Those are the first places closing information is announced on those rare occasions when the weather gets the best of us. There have been some subtle changes to the closing policy. I invite you to read the current policy at [www.wmich.edu/policies](http://www.wmich.edu/policies).

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**Dr. Michael Eric Dyson**

**Annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration**

This weekend, we will begin our annual celebration of the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As always, our campus is working in partnership with the community, and a host of events have been planned to provide thoughtful and focused reflection on Dr. King and issues of human potential and respect for one another that continue to challenge our nation.

I urge you to take part in as many of these events as possible, but there is one, in particular, I want to note. Award-winning author and media personality Dr. Michael Eric Dyson will speak at 4:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 15, in Miller Auditorium. I have had the opportunity to hear him present on another campus and can tell you that his is a presentation you should not miss. We have three student groups to thank for arranging this wonderful opportunity—the Young Black Males Support Network, You Beautiful Black Woman and the Black Student Union.

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**Alumna Tererai Trent**

**Tererai Trent will speak on campus**

I have a bit of breaking news to share with you about another high-profile speaker. Our own Dr. Tererai Trent will be on campus to speak Wednesday, Jan. 25. Her moving story of
success became nationally known when she was featured in the New York Times and named Oprah Winfrey’s favorite guest of all time. She is returning to Kalamazoo for the first time since earning her doctoral degree in December 2009 to speak to a Southwest Michigan First gathering. She has graciously agreed to speak on campus during that trip as well. Watch for details to be announced in the next few days.

**Dominican Republic, Haiti trip**

This week, I will travel to the Dominican Republic and Haiti to take part in the opening of a new Haitian university campus designed to serve 10,000 students and help that nation rebuild its education infrastructure. I was invited to attend the high-profile event in the coastal city of Cap-Haitien by Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez who is our partner in a wonderful arrangement that since 2008, has brought more than 270 D.R. students to our campus and produced 45 new Bronco alumni now living in that nation.

The Haenicke Institute’s Juan Tavares and I will be part of a delegation that will travel from the Dominican Republic to the new Haiti campus Wednesday, Jan. 12, for the formal opening of the $30 million facility. The new campus, part of the State University of Haiti system, was built entirely by the government and private sector of the Dominican Republic as a gift to its island neighbor. I am so proud we were invited to be part of this event. Our invitation speaks volumes about the strength of our ties in that region.

**Your input is needed**

The semester is young, but already there are plans afoot to secure your input, make you aware of a range of important topics and hear your valuable feedback on those topics. Please be on the lookout for more information on all of these events, but here’s a first look at some of them.

- **East Hall**

  East Campus. In February, an open forum will be held to look at progress on East Campus development. We announced a development partner last fall, and recent state tax laws are now being analyzed to determine what is possible in the short and long run.

- **Sustainability.** As you know, sustainability in its broadest definition is part of our new campus strategic plan. On the operations level, we have had outstanding success. This semester will see a focus on securing faculty input on how to build and expand our learning community that focuses on integrating sustainability across the curriculum. Please resolve to provide your input. That opportunity will begin this week.

- **Medical School.** Later this semester, an open forum will serve to provide information and solicit your feedback on the progress of our School of Medicine. This is a transformatonal initiative for our University and we want you to be fully apprised and prepared to offer your best thinking on this opportunity.

**HLC focused visit**

Finally, a significant group of our colleagues have been and will continue to work hard to prepare for a focused visit from the Higher Learning Commission March 19-20. That visit will examine the great
progress we’ve made in strategic planning. More information about that visit can be found at wmich.edu/hlc. The committee roster can be found on that site as well. Be sure to reach out to anyone on that committee to learn more.

**Student retention**

As you are aware, one of the University’s priorities is the retention of students. We are making progress, but we can do better. I am requesting that each member of the faculty and staff make a concerted effort to reach out to students, engage with them and provide assistance as needed to help our students continue their education. This can range from simply reaching out to ask how things are going to taking time to talk over coffee or agreeing to serve as a mentor. The goal is to make certain that each student has a personal connection that makes them feel supported and encouraged, even when times seem challenging or overwhelming. We can demonstrate in a powerful way that WMU is the institution committed to student success. With your commitment, we can succeed.

I hope one of your New Year’s resolutions was to take advantage of every campus opportunity possible. These are just a few already planned for this semester. Stay tuned to learn about even more.

Best wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year,

John M. Dunn, President