4-25-2014

President's Perspective (April 2014)

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President's Perspective – 04/25/2014

Dear Colleagues:

We're literally in the final day of the spring semester, and for more than 2,700 of our students, commencement is no longer a dream but a reality that is just hours away. I hope many of you will be able to join us at Miller Auditorium tomorrow to help celebrate our core mission—student success.

A semester full of change

So much has happened in the past few months, and the next few months promise the same kind of frenzied pace as we race toward completion of some major initiatives and the start of two major building projects. While the major portion of the 2013-14 academic year may be over, we have two summer sessions soon to begin and a host of summer and fall activities for which to prepare.

The WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine

After nearly six years of discussion and planning, our community’s new private medical school is about to become a reality. And that medical school has a name—the best one in medical education.

The WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine owes its more than $100 million in foundation funding to Ronda Stryker, granddaughter of Homer Stryker, and her husband, William Johnston, a WMU trustee.

They have our gratitude for embracing a vision and expressing confidence in the University and its hospital partners. More than 3,500 applications were received for 50 seats in the inaugural class that will enroll this fall. Please mark your calendars now for the gala grand opening events on Sept. 18. The entire campus community is invited.

Years in the making

As I noted, the medical school initiative was years in the making, but it will pay dividends for decades to come. We had a nice reminder this week of how important it is to take the long view and stay the course. ProNAi Therapeutics is one of the original life science companies at our Business Technology and Research Park and a company in which our Biosciences Research and Commercialization Center has invested. The company has been working since its 2004 founding on a new generation of anti-cancer drugs. This week, ProNAi was able to announce the largest round of venture capital funding in Michigan history, with investors raising nearly $60 million in new capital to fund the company’s next round of clinical studies. That’s a decade of work that is showing promising signs for the future. Visionaries in this community and on this campus paved the way for that success years ago.

Sustainability achievements

This has been a landmark year in our sustainability efforts, thanks to so many faculty and staff members and students who are committed and engaged. I’m happy to note that we are a finalist in the doctoral university category for the national Second Nature Climate Leadership Award.
We'll learn our final placement in late spring, but this week, we learned that a video we produced as part of the competition has won the viewer voting competition hosted by environmental website Planet Forward. Nearly 9,000 votes were garnered for our video that describes how far we've come and how deeply sustainability is woven into everything we do.

**Construction priorities**

Two major construction projects will be our physical infrastructure focus over the coming year, and both will be well underway in the coming weeks. Our new Center Neighborhood residence hall for incoming students is going up where Hoejke and Bigelow once stood. The goal is to have this new living and learning environment ready for the fall 2015 incoming class.

On East Campus, the renovation of East Hall into the WMU Alumni Center is ready to roll, with extensive design work done and planning well underway to ensure the facility reflects and celebrates the University's history and its strong community relationship. That addition to our campus will open in mid-2015.

**Accolades and accomplishments**

As our students are packing up for their summer commitments and adventures, news is coming in that reaffirms just how accomplished our student body is.

Junior music performance major **Allyson Perez**, a cellist from the Dominican Republic who just completed her third year at WMU, was packing this week to head to her home city of Santo Domingo. But she won't be there long.

She's been accepted to play with the Youth Orchestra of the Americas on its world tour during June and July. Allyson won her orchestra spot competing against young musicians from 25 nations. The orchestra is under the artistic direction of Placido Domingo.

Meanwhile, one of our graduating seniors has learned he'll receive a national engineering honor late next month. **Kyle E. Croes** of New Baltimore, Mich., is the first-place 2014 winner of the Institute of Industrial Engineers James W. Barany Award for Excellence.

The award is made to just one undergraduate in the nation who has provided distinguished service to industrial engineering through excellence in scholarship and campus leadership. Lyle will travel to Montreal at the end of May to accept the accolade.

Our faculty researchers continue to excel and pull in external funding for efforts that will literally change lives. **Drs. Dae Shik Kim and Robert Wall Emerson** in blindness and low vision studies along with **Dr. Koorosh Naghshineh** in mechanical and aerospace engineering have just been awarded a $421,125 grant from the National Institutes of Health to improve the design and use of
canes in the walking environment. They'll be employing their knowledge of biomechanics and ergonomic design to adapt long-cane use to the detection of obstacles and drop-offs.

Honoring faculty careers

On May 29, we'll pause to honor 25 faculty members from 19 departments who have built their careers at WMU and who have elected to retire this year. These are bittersweet events, as they focus on our faculty members' achievements, but also on our loss of their regular service in the classroom and on campuswide committees. Please be sure to add your own words of thanks for their years of service as their tenure comes to a close and their individual retirement receptions and events are held.

Looking ahead

Over the coming weeks we'll see a host of visitors from around the world. They will include those attending Gilmore Keyboard Festival events that are now underway. They also will include 600 Michigan high school forensic competitors here next weekend and thousands of medieval scholars and colleagues from around the globe here for the May 8-11 49th International Congress on Medieval Studies. High school musicians will be here in July for the Seminar 2014 63rd annual high school music camp, and young artists of every type will be here for the 52nd Michigan Youth Arts Festival May 8-10. The latter group will be joined by the director of "Monsters University"

who will serve as artist-in-residence.

We also will host dozens of summer camps for young people interested in science, writing, sports and the arts. Those are the same young people who may one day be part of our campus community as students.

By far the largest and most critical group of visitors this summer will be the thousands of incoming freshmen who will visit campus with their families for Orientation. They will begin to arrive on May 30 for the first of a dozen two-day sessions. They are here to make their final decision about whether to enroll and commit their futures to WMU.

Every group of visitors gives us the opportunity to showcase our University and make a statement about who we are as a community. We are a favorite summer destination for many groups, as illustrated by the longtime history we have with many of the groups of visitors I just outlined. There's a reason why many of those organizations have been coming here for five and six decades. As a University community, we need to work together to continue to show we're a heads-up campus where students and occasional visitors feel welcomed and comfortable. Please go out of your way to make that tradition continue.

Thank you for all you do every day to make our University one that adds value to our communities and our students' lives.

Continuing best,