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President's Perspective (June 2015)

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President's Perspective

Dear Colleagues:

We are rapidly approaching the close of the 2014-15 academic and fiscal years. Just two weeks from now, we'll celebrate the success of our students with the year's final set of commencement ceremonies.

This is the time when the next academic year begins to come sharply into focus. Events of the past few weeks give us a better idea of what the 2015-16 year will look like. Our budget is set and, most important, we're beginning to get a good handle on what our student population will look like and how life on campus will change. With thousands on campus this month for new student orientation, I want to update you on some unfolding developments that will impact the success that they—and you—will be able to build together.

BUDGET

The state recently finalized its budget for the coming year, and it included a $1.4 million appropriation increase for WMU. When our Board of Trustees met earlier this month, they were able to use that increase for planning purposes, and they approved two important actions: they held WMU tuition and required fees increases to 3.2 percent, and they set our working budget for the coming year.

The budget is lean, but balanced, and it allows us to meet our contractual commitments for employee pay increases. It also includes pay increases for non-bargaining unit employees and a $1.8 million line item for the pay adjustments that resulted from the staff compensation project.

The tuition and fees increase includes an increase in the student assessment fee that was initiated by our students and passed through a campus referendum. The revenue from that portion of the increase will go directly to support student organizations. Our tuition and required fee increase still keeps WMU as the most affordable of Michigan's research universities and in the bottom half for costs among all 15 public universities—probably in ninth place.

MAJOR PHYSICAL CHANGES TO CAMPUS

Last Friday, the campus community gathered for a brief groundbreaking ceremony to officially mark the start of construction of the new Valley Dining Center. This important new facility will be a game changer for our students and a major new resource for the entire campus community. There is a large cadre of people in student affairs and facilities management who have been involved in the planning and development of this effort. Please let them know how much we all appreciate their work.

While construction is just getting underway in the valley, two other major efforts are racing toward completion for this fall.
The Western Heights residence hall complex near the Bernhard Center will be online for the start of the fall 2015 semester, and it is proving to be an enormous draw for the beginning students it was designed to attract and house. Again, this new housing resource—our first new residence for beginning students in more than 50 years—is already proving to be a game changer.

Our new WMU Alumni Center at the top of Prospect Hill is also close to completion, although it is scheduled for an October opening. Earlier this month, we got a preview of the sense of excitement that is building for this renovation of the birthplace of WMU. A June 1 deadline for personalizing private support saw nearly 1,500 people contribute a name or message to be included as part of the patio or interior donor wall for the building opening. Be sure to take a drive along Davis Street and look up to get a real sense of the view that will once again be part of the celebration of the WMU/Kalamazoo heritage.

ENROLLMENT

As I noted earlier in this message, we're welcoming thousands of students and their families to campus this month for new-student orientation and transfer transition programs. At this time of year, we all want to be able to assign an enrollment number for fall, but it's just not possible to do that yet, with any accuracy.

What I can say is that our new beginning student applications and admissions numbers have been running significantly higher than last year through the recruitment period, so that's a promising sign. The other pieces to the puzzle include graduate and transfer student enrollment, international enrollment and retention. We're working hard on all of those fronts to build a strong fall enrollment.

MEDICAL SCHOOL

Also on the enrollment front, you'll be pleased to know that the WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine is very close to welcoming its second class of students, following another successful recruitment season. You'll be hearing more about that before our fall semester begins.

WMU COOLEY

Our faculty and staff have been working over the past months on a number of joint initiatives with our new affiliate, the WMU Thomas Cooley Law School. While that has been unfolding, I've been tremendously proud to see the WMU identity attached to a Cooley initiative that has been drawing national headlines. The Cooley Innocence Project, which is part of the national Innocence Network, has exonerated three individuals in its history—the most recent in late 2014.

Last month, the team won an appeal before the Michigan Supreme Court for a man who has served more than 25 years in prison. Based on the Supreme Court's ruling, the Court of Appeals
must now decide whether DNA testing is required under Michigan law. In addition, attorneys from the Cooley project have worked with Michigan legislators to support a new bill to compensate individuals who have been wrongly imprisoned. Three WMU students currently intern with the Cooley project.

**SUMMER INITIATIVES TO ENJOY OR FOLLOW**

A number of opportunities for us to celebrate being Broncos will unfold in the coming weeks. These range from upcoming events to student competitions. More information will be posted on the news pages of WMU News. Here are just a few examples.

**WMU night at the Growlers game**

On Friday, many of us will gather at Homer Stryker Field to celebrate Staff and Faculty Appreciation night as well as hold an alumni gathering. I hope you'll join us and bring the family.

**WMU team tackles Air Race Classic, races through Kalamazoo**

Next week, June 22-25, two WMU women aviators—Sara Karsten and Katie Vena—will take part in the Air Race Classic, a 2,100-mile women’s air race that has its roots in the era of Amelia Earhart. The best part of this year's event is that the race route comes through Kalamazoo, so our team and the other competitors will do a flyby at the Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport—with most coming through on Tuesday, June 23.

**Be part of history at Fort St. Joe archaeology site June 27 and 28**

The WMU Archaeological Field School, under the direction of Dr. Michael Nassaney, is back in the field this year. During the final weekend of June, participants will hold a two-day open house at the Fort St. Joseph dig site in Niles, Mich. The Fort St. Joseph mission, garrison and trading post complex was occupied from 1691 to 1781 along the St. Joseph River. WMU researchers have been uncovering the remains since 1998. At the free open house, the students will literally open up the site and you'll have an opportunity to hear lectures, visit an outdoor museum, take site tours, watch historical re-enactments and demonstrations, and enjoy period music and food.

**Trombone student aims for top spot at event in Spain**

Senior Evan Clifton, one of our trombone stars, will head to Valencia, Spain, July 8-11, to compete for top student honors at the International Trombone Festival. Evan will compete against two other finalists—one from the Juilliard School and the other from the Rotterdam Conservatory in the Netherlands. My money is on the Bronco.
That's just a sample of ways to stay engaged with our University over the summer. There are many others. 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,

John M. Dunn
President