

Remarks from President Designate Jay Noren

On May 14, Wayne State's Board of Governors voted unanimously to appoint Jay Noren, M.D., as the university's 10th president effective August 1, 2008. Dr. Noren will succeed Irvin D. Reid, who is stepping down on July 31 after a decade at Wayne State.

For information about Dr. Noren's life and career, visit <http://bog.wayne.edu/presidentialsearch/jay-noren.php>.

The following is a transcript of Dr. Noren's remarks to an open forum held May 13 in Community Arts Auditorium on the Wayne State campus.

Thank you all for coming. I'm very pleased to be here. I would like to talk a bit about my perspectives on higher education and share a few observations about Wayne State University.

I believe that higher education has a more central role in confronting the complex problems of today's society than at any time in history. As our world has become increasingly urbanized, metropolitan universities have profound potential to address the most significant challenges society faces—providing solutions to challenges we did not anticipate just a few decades ago. I know of no other American university more strategically placed than Wayne State to craft positive change. So I'm excited to be here and envision the possibility of working in this vibrant academic community and city.

The challenges to Wayne State are, more than ever before, also the nation's challenges in higher education, economic development and societal stability. If Wayne State can continue to address those challenges successfully, it will become and remain a model for the role of universities in resolving a number of pressing national concerns. This is especially true when you consider the potential for positive change that exists in the University Research Corridor partnership among Wayne State, the University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

Let me make some early observations on four critical challenges common to Detroit, to Michigan and to the nation, for which higher education resources are essential and for which Wayne State has impressive capacity to confront:

1. Transformation of a challenged economy and its workforce.
2. Educational revitalization and energized access to opportunity. We must be conscientious in removing all existing barriers to the availability of higher education, particularly to underserved populations.
3. Urban stress, and related increasingly complex public policy issues that make the university's "urban mission" a matter of urgency. The issues span an increasingly

complex array including transportation, economic development and public schools – all familiar to residents of Detroit.

4. Citizenship: How to prepare students for informed and engaged participation in lifelong community activism—and the essential lifelong learning skills required.

I would like to expand briefly on these four challenges and Wayne State’s capacity to respond.

1. Transformation of a challenged economy and its workforce

We’ve all heard again and again about the serious state of the Detroit and Michigan economies—manifested in part by the highest unemployment rate in the country. What this really means is that Detroit and Michigan have an urgent need to transform the economy and workforce in response to the global marketplace and the information age. So Wayne State, with its University Research Corridor partners, U of M and MSU, must become a laboratory and brain trust for innovative responses to these challenges. There exists an immense capacity for creative work in alternative energy, informatics, transportation engineering, biosciences, nanotechnology, health sciences, and other critical areas essential for transforming the Michigan economy.

2. Educational revitalization—energized access to opportunity:

Wayne State has long prided itself on being a “university of opportunity” –and this institution’s most sacred trust and responsibility is providing an excellent education for students. Wayne State’s claim as a “university of opportunity” rests firmly on the principle of assured access to higher education. It’s essential that we return full force to the principles of Harry Truman’s Commission on Higher Education, which was right 60 years ago and remains correct today; the Commission’s central principle was that every citizen should have the opportunity to pursue higher education to the fullest extent of his or her abilities and energy. We have seriously lost sight of our commitment to this goal in recent years and must renew it—in Detroit, in Michigan and nationally.

The principle of assured access begins long before the freshman year. We must embrace the Pre-K to high school experience in creative PK-16 initiatives that join forces with our public-schools colleagues. The K-12 educational disparities in Detroit pose a challenge and opportunity for Wayne State’s undergraduate and graduate programs in education. Wayne State is a major resource for creating innovative approaches to Detroit Public Schools with its 120,000 students, 8th largest nationally, 68 percent economically disadvantaged, and 33 percent non-graduation rate. Likely nowhere else in the country is there a more fertile intersection of serious K-12 problems and joint intellectual capacity of K-12 colleagues and higher ed to respond.

3. Urban stress, and related increasingly complex public policy issues

Analogous to the agricultural extension successes of land-grant universities during the 19th and 20th centuries, university outreach during the 21st century will be dominated by urban issues and increasingly by urban universities. This emphasis on the metropolitan

mission is an essential trend for the future. This is the time for innovation in urban research universities and the time for major state and private investment in these institutions. Wayne State is in the right place at the right time to lead in confronting problems of serious concern to the entire nation.

In the 21st century the urban university will be an essential resource in urban planning, energy conservation, workforce retooling, economic development, K-12 education and many other areas of need. Among the most complex problems facing America's cities are delivery of human services and health care, especially to underserved populations. This is what makes the traditional partnership between the Detroit Medical Center and the Wayne State University School of Medicine so critical.

Everyone at Wayne State can be proud of what the university has accomplished on behalf of its home city – from developments in TechTown and South University Village to the nationally celebrated Math Corps program. Much has been accomplished, and much remains to be done. Essential elements are business-university partnerships, non-traditional educational methods for non-traditional students, applied research on urban issues, and responsive workforce development.

4. Preparation for Citizenship: How to prepare students for informed and engaged participation in lifelong community activism—and the essential lifelong learning skills required

An essential educational mission for the 21st century is teaching undergraduates to engage enthusiastically in their citizenship responsibilities as a lifelong commitment and everyday part of their lives. A central element of that mission is to encourage them in lifelong learning skills—critical thinking, quantitative abilities, written and oral communication, arts appreciation, environmental insights. Many of Wayne State's special programs target these goals. Among the numerous examples are the Center for the Study of Citizenship, Peace and Conflict Studies, Labor Studies, Chicano-Boricua Studies, Women's Studies, international programs, the new Applebaum Chair of Community Engagement, and many others. Also key are the service learning emphases for Wayne State students. The College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts adds another essential array of programs to prepare students to be citizens engaged in lifelong contributions to a quality community.

I'd like to close with an observation and a prediction.

First, the observation: Wayne State is the premier urban research university in this country and beyond.

Finally, a prediction: Wayne State will be a principal architect for designing and constructing solutions to the major challenges confronting our cities – and indeed, the entire country -- in the 21st century. The driving forces in this endeavor are both the research and development capability of Wayne State's faculty and staff—and the long-term impact of the skilled and talented graduates this university produces for Detroit, the

state of Michigan and beyond. This is the home of great ideas, and of great people – the two fundamental building blocks of positive change.

For these and many other reasons, I think the presidency of Wayne State University is the most exciting leadership opportunity in higher education today. There is nothing I would rather do than join this talented and dedicated community. Wayne State has a long and distinguished history of scholarship, achievement and service to Detroit, Michigan and the world; I am energized by the prospect of building on Wayne State's impressive history and working with colleagues on this campus, as well as partners in the city, state and beyond, to pursue more and even greater successes on the horizon.