

President Jay Noren
Wayne State University
Universitywide Address
September 8, 2008

Thank you, Nancy. It is a distinct honor to deliver my first Welcome Back Week address as a new member of the Wayne State University community. As most of you know I am just beginning my second month at Wayne. Please accept my heartfelt thank you for the warm welcome my family and I have enjoyed from so many people throughout the campus, Detroit, and the state of Michigan. I also would like to welcome all of you who are joining us here at the Law School and across the campus by Webcast, and a special welcome to the thousands of students and the about 100 new faculty members who are becoming part of our community for the first time this semester.

I am excited and energized to be a part of one of the nation's foremost public, urban research universities. It is the intersection of "urban" and "research" that makes Wayne State such a unique and essential institution for Detroit, Michigan, and the country.

Now it's time to look into the year ahead and beyond. I will begin by placing us in a national and global context. 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 are critically important to address the most significant challenges society faces—providing solutions to problems we did not anticipate just a few decades ago. I know of no other American university more strategically placed than Wayne State to bring about positive change and make a real difference in the future of our cities.

The well-being of Detroit and Michigan ultimately depends on the ability of the state's public research universities to educate a skilled workforce, generate knowledge that creates and attracts new industries and jobs, prepare citizens to be seriously involved in the democratic process; and provide creative solutions to the challenges Detroit and virtually every other great American city faces today.

Wayne State has a unique role to play, not only among Michigan's research universities, but in the entire nation. Our history, our character, and our future is about intense engagement in our community; in a real sense, our success in community service is the key to our success as a teaching and research institution. Serious engagement in our community makes Wayne State a distinctive institution because it ties the university's academic and research resources to issues of immediate significance to everyone in Detroit, Southeast Michigan, and our fellow citizens throughout America's cities.

The city is our campus. We are connected inextricably to Detroit's people, businesses and institutions. What happens to this city happens to us. But what happens to this city depends on us, as well. Although Wayne State is a national research university, we do not follow the traditional model—rather we are a university with doors wide open to the

community and swinging in both directions. The Wayne character and commitment means we like to roll up our sleeves and go to work finding solutions to real world problems. We have always done that and will continue in the future, even more intensively because the challenges are more complex and—even more importantly-- the benefits to society from our successes more far reaching.

I believe we have **four areas** of especially critical responsibility to the people of our city, state, and beyond. All four demand channeling our combined research, educational, and community engagement expertise to produce results that enhance the quality of life of those we serve. The four areas are:

- Access to higher education
- Urban stresses
- Citizenship
- Economic Revitalization

First, Access to higher education

Research tells us that men and women with college degrees earn substantially more than workers without them, and the gap between the two has widened substantially and dangerously since World War II. As this nation continues to compete in a global economy based on information, communications and advanced technology, higher education will become more and more important to individual success and the well-being of society.

We are entering an era in which those with no college degree are simply going to be left behind economically. Public universities in particular therefore are obligated to make certain everyone has the opportunity to pursue higher education to the fullest extent of his or her abilities and energy.

But access to higher education is meaningless if incoming students are not provided with the tools to succeed. Unfortunately, national and state public policy has not invested enough in making a university education affordable, which leads to serious problems of retention and graduation partly because so many students must work excessively to afford the cost of college. And that is exceptionally true at Wayne State.

But Wayne State challenges that national and state trend—we are more than a nationally recognized research university; we are a very special “university of opportunity.” We admit more at-risk students than our peer institutions, and provide an increasing number of programs and incentives to help them succeed. In May 2008 we completed a detailed report on undergraduate retention that recommended a comprehensive approach to improved retention including mandatory orientation for incoming students, peer mentoring and tutoring services, and improved academic advising.

These programs will strengthen the many ways we already promote student achievement on campus, including the array of services in our Comerica Student Success Center, the Living/Learning Communities in our residence halls, and our high-tech interactive Math Lab. Just this week we announced the formation of an Office for Academic Pathways for Excellence, or APEX, which will focus on a number of success strategies, to improve retention and graduation of students who may need to develop basic skills and competencies to enhance their success.

As a university of opportunity, graduation rates will predictably be lower than exclusive institutions; but at the same time our graduation rates for students we admit at risk will be higher than the same students' successes when admitted to institutions that consider themselves more selective and less "universities of opportunity." We can be very proud of our university of opportunity role; we are willing to justify comparisons of our graduation rates to those of more selective institutions because we encourage students facing economic and/or educational disadvantage and then support them to succeed. By providing a chance for higher education to disadvantaged students with obvious potential, and by assisting them with programs promoting academic and personal growth, Wayne State adds dramatically to Michigan's complement of skilled, informed, productive citizens. Because Wayne State goes the extra mile for these students we produce people who do succeed and they are a profoundly precious resource for our state and nation. We also constantly pursue innovative methods that invest in at-risk students and convert potential failure to resounding student success and then share those methods with other institutions around the country. Our impressive Math Corps program is a perfect example. Our faculty will soon publish a research paper on the effectiveness of Math Corps which other institutions will steal—we welcome the theft.

And we serve these groups of students needing special support while at the same time providing excellent learning experiences for another special group of exceptionally talented students in our Honors College.

Math literacy is just one of the literacy objectives we seek to improve—in that vein I encourage all of you to participate in "Literacy Week" this week led by the Detroit Public Libraries and co-sponsored by Wayne State and others—today is International Literacy Day created 40 years ago by the United Nations and this launches the week of "Literacy Week" in Detroit culminating with a Literacy Walk next Saturday on the River Walk at 9:00 am.

Second Responsibility, Resolution of urban stresses

Many of the problems our society faces are felt most keenly in urban areas like ours. For the foreseeable future, successful urban research universities like Wayne State will be essential research, education, and community engagement resources to address the stresses of urban life through efforts such as creative city planning, alternative energy, workforce retooling, economic development, K-20 education, and the delivery of health care and human services to underserved populations.

We have a many productive alliances both long- and short-term; just last week we added another critical partnership, joining the Board of New Detroit. And we will pursue others whenever possible.

But among the most important current relationships we wish to enhance is collaboration with city government. As we all know, these are stressful times for city government as recent events have dramatically demonstrated. Wayne State University stands ready to offer our resources to city leadership as we all experience this transitional period in Detroit. We have communicated to our city leaders that we are ready to offer advice and consultation in the areas of expertise on campus that might be of value to revitalizing city government.

The central tenet is this—Wayne State is committed to continually nurturing successful models of effective cooperation with community organizations and also making our models widely known, so that others can borrow our ideas and apply them throughout the nation. That’s what makes the combination of “urban” and “research” such a powerful force in our University character.

I would like to give you a handful of representative examples of just what I mean by effective partnerships in the service of our city. And there are many others as well, so consider these just a sampling.

The Detroit Healthy Youth Initiative completed last fall was a partnership among the Detroit Public Schools, Wayne State, and others. The program served predominately inner-city, low-income African American and Hispanic American children in grades 6 through 8, and was designed to improve the quality of middle-school physical education. Mixing clear instructional techniques with personal assistance to teachers, the program demonstrated significant progress toward attaining State of Michigan standards for teacher competence and student behaviors.

Every year the School of Medicine’s more than 700 physicians -- working primarily through our long-standing partnership with the Detroit Medical Center -- treat 70 percent of the city's estimated 200,000 uninsured residents. The total cost of uncompensated care provided by Wayne State physicians comes to about \$50 million annually – or about \$70,000 per faculty member per year—a major gift to our fellow citizens of Detroit. It is because of these essential contributions, and the full extent of our service, education and research mission in health disciplines, that we are working diligently to assure productive collaboration with the DMC for the long term future.

I would like to make special mention of the School of Social Work’s new Center for Social Work Practice and Policy Research, which already has developed partner initiatives with key human service organizations in metro Detroit. This Strategic Partners Project seeks to nurture long-term relationships with Detroit area social service organizations to develop and evaluate best practices in social work interventions. The fruits of the School’s collaborative research will inform and shape social work theory and

practice throughout the United States. Again it's the intersection of research and service—research and urban—that makes Wayne State pre-eminent.

The list of our partnerships goes on and on. What matters is that our faculty, staff and students already know the benefits of working with community groups for the common good, and this is something we plan both to continue and accelerate.

Third Responsibility, Citizenship

The future of America will depend upon broad based commitment of citizens to the democratic process. However, today fewer than 45 percent of registered voters and 35 percent of eligible voters typically vote. Too few Americans engage in “community service.”

Our nation faces major economic, social, environmental, security, educational, legal and health care challenges. But these challenges will remain just that, or turn eventually into crises, unless more of us get involved in finding solutions to them.

Good citizenship is fundamental to the founding principles of this nation and essential to the preservation of both our form of government and our quality of life. Wayne State and Detroit provide a rich environment for converting our students to lifelong leaders in community engagement and citizenship. We are committed to instilling in our students this lifelong commitment –and it is a profound responsibility to do so.

Consistent with these goals we will explore potential membership in the American Democracy Project, a program of the 229-member American Association of State Colleges and Universities. The project's goal is to promote higher education's role in preparing the next generation of informed, engaged citizens and to assist colleges and universities in producing graduates committed to being active, involved citizens in their communities.

Fourth Responsibility, Economic revitalization

The three responsibilities already noted—access to education, solutions to urban stresses, and citizenship--all three point ultimately to an element of our mission that has the most lasting consequences for our city and state--economic revitalization. This is key to this city's vitality, to Michigan's future prosperity, and to the future of Wayne State University. All our successes are mutually inter-dependent.

The key to our role in this economic renewal is our capacity for innovative and transformational research.

In its report, *A New Agenda for a New Michigan*, the nonpartisan study group Michigan Future concluded that, quote, “Our higher education institutions ... are the most important assets we have in developing the concentration of talent we need to be

successful in a knowledge-based economy. This is particularly true of our major research universities.” (end quote)

When Michigan returns to economic health, it will be because Wayne State University, and Michigan’s other research universities, act now to commit ourselves to nurture and attract knowledge-based economic ventures in numerous cutting edge fields including information technology, biomedical sciences, engineering innovation, nanotechnology, robotics, health care, financial services, creative management of innovative companies, and others.

Of course, Wayne State already is the state’s “anti-brain drain” research university. More than 75 percent of our graduates remain in Michigan, contributing to the state’s economic, social and cultural well-being. It rightly has been said that on any given day, Michigan could not open for business without Wayne State.

As our state moves into a new economic era, I am especially excited about the potential in our collaboration with the University of Michigan and Michigan State University through the University Research Corridor. For example, recently the URC developed a joint seed fund grants program, totaling nearly a million dollars, to provide start-up support for alternative energy projects. These investments will help launch collaborations for efficient development of cheaper forms of electricity and fuel.

Late last year Congress amended the national Renewable Fuel Standard, setting a goal for this country to produce 36 billion gallons of renewable fuel by 2022. We plan to pursue the potential of alternative energy vigorously and to become and remain a leader in the myriad technologies associated with this field. We have a solid foundation for global innovation in biofuels as a result of our partnership with NextEnergy, and the University Research Corridor with Michigan State and the University of Michigan. We have jointly explored alternative energy opportunities in Michigan including the conversion of ordinary city wood waste materials to cellulose based ethanol fuel from substances like yard waste (leaves, grass clippings), wood chips, construction waste, and utility tree trimmings. We produce over 1.1 million tons annually and are 8th in the nation in production of these materials—an untapped source for bio-fuels. And this alternative energy innovation coincides perfectly with our need for a national commitment to green initiatives including recycling efforts, which we should encourage on campus and beyond. All these approaches and other sources of energy like wind power have much potential for Michigan—the Wayne State and URC research capacity can make these innovative ideas functioning realities.

We also are steadfastly committed to the expansion and refinement of TechTown, our research and technology park. TechTown now has more than 40 tenant companies and is a proven organizational and informational resource for start-ups and established businesses throughout the metropolitan area.

Wayne State’s duty applies as well to our local neighborhood-- promoting the economic and social renewal of Midtown Detroit. This received a significant boost in 2007 with

groundbreaking for South University Village which was completed two months ago as a \$50 million development comprising mixed-use residential apartment housing and retail outlets, supported by a Wayne State public parking structure. But our neighborhood of course is the entire city. So it's essential that our contribution to rebuilding Midtown joins with rebuilding efforts for all of Detroit. We are going to be thorough about seeking partnerships with others who are helping this city return to prosperity. I already have had conversations with people dedicated to bringing back our downtown area, and as they work their way north, and we work our way south, we will meet in the middle with a new Detroit recapturing the greatness and beauty of Detroit.

So envision a new Detroit in which downtown and Midtown are as prosperous and full of life as when Detroit was called the Paris of the Midwest not that many years ago! – and Downtown, Midtown, and beyond are connected by fast, efficient light rail transportation—something already in planning stages. These are realistic goals achievable by partnerships among Wayne State and our colleague institutions that are fully committed to creative collaboration.

One closing thought on how we function in the daily life of the campus. It's important that we vigilantly recognize the tendency of large organizations like ours to become bureaucratic and impersonal. What matters for each of us, is remaining human-centered in everything we do—always working to respond to the needs of students, faculty, staff, and the public we serve. It is only with that attitude—one of priority on customer service—that we can help all of us achieve our full potential. It will be because of the commitment to quality by all of you here today and those not present—faculty, staff, community members--that Wayne State is a powerful positive force in the lives of our students and our community. But we can always do better—as we tell our students in our brochures, radio, and television ads, we will always “Aim Higher.”

I firmly believe that Wayne State is in the right place, at the right time, with the right people to dramatically enhance the quality of life and vitality of the citizens, communities, and institutions we serve. And what could be a better way to spend our days than contributing to that vitality—and really what could be more fun!!!!

Thank you.