

President M. Roy Wilson  
Wayne State University  
University Address  
September 12, 2017

Thank you, Nourhan. And welcome, everyone, to the start of the 2017-2018 academic year.

*[Acknowledge BOG members]*

*[Acknowledge Jacqueline]*

I'd like to welcome two new deans to Wayne State: Dean Richard Bierschbach of the Law School and Dean Jon Cawthorne of the School of Library and Information Sciences. I'd also like to welcome Jerrold Brandell to his new position as interim dean for the School of Social Work.

This is my fifth time delivering this fall address. I'd like to use this opportunity to do three things: First, I will review some highlights from the past year; second, I will review some trends from the last several years; and third, I will discuss my hopes for the next year or so.

It's been an interesting and successful year. Among many topics I could cover, three stand out as particularly noteworthy:

- 1) First, led by Sandy Yee and Hilary Ratner, our university came together in an unprecedented way and passed our re-accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission with a very high rating—in fact, there were no areas of concern. In my opinion, we had a lot of ground to make up even to submit a good application; my expectations were surpassed, and we put together a superb application. I want to thank the entire university community for its part. It was truly a team effort.
- 2) Second, after what can only be described as a disastrous accreditation site visit in 2015 by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, or LCME, we regrouped, completely overhauled basically all aspects of the medical school in an incredibly short time-frame, and had a very successful site visit by the LCME this past year. More on the medical school later.
- 3) Third, Wayne State, like all other colleges and universities, has been impacted by social and political factors that have played out on a national stage and have caused extraordinary divisiveness. As a diverse and inclusive campus, we've had to deal with new national policies and blatant expressions of repulsive viewpoints that challenge our belief system to its very core. Yet, fundamental to a free democratic society and enshrined in our Constitution is our right to freedom of speech and assembly, a right that is particularly sacred on the campuses of our colleges and universities. Determining when hateful speech and symbols cross a line and are no longer deserving of expression presents one of the most challenging dilemmas in higher education today. We are a large

and diverse campus, and no single stance can represent the viewpoint of all, but I believe that we have handled the divisive issues of immigrant deportation, sanctuary campus, expressions of hateful symbols, and DACA fairly well.

As a guiding principle, despite the political process that results in the election of our governing members, Wayne State must stand with no party in determining its position on such issues; rather, we must stand for our students. It's not over, and we will need to continue to take positions on difficult issues. In doing so, we will always be guided by what is in the best interest of our students.

As I was preparing my thoughts for today, I reflected on my 2014 university address. During that address, I stated that we were at a watershed moment in the history of the university. Specifically, I discussed the need to turn around declining enrollment and research funding, as well as poor student success metrics, particularly the 6-year graduation rate. Well, which way are we tipping?

**Enrollment:** For the fourth straight year, beginning with Fall 2014, our new students to Wayne State (FTIACs and transfers) have increased over the previous year. Last year, for the first time in recent history, our total enrollment was higher than the previous year. Unfortunately, we were not able to build on that momentum as our graduate and international enrollment took a large unexpected hit. We will begin the academic year with overall enrollment flat to slightly down.

We are still aiming for 30,000 students by 2021, so we need to redouble our efforts. We are doing this with a more organized approach to recruitment, which includes a new system for managing our new student prospects, more outstate and out-of-state recruitment, very aggressive international recruitment, including the hiring of an on-the-ground representative in India, a greater push on graduate recruitment, and a new brand campaign that will leverage the Warrior spirit that makes Wayne State unique among Michigan public universities.

**Research:** Our research enterprise continues to grow. Research awards to date this fiscal year are up by \$56.2 million as compared to the same time in 2013. And the 2016 research *expenditures* as reported to the National Science Foundation grew to \$221.5 million in 2016, an increase of \$7.7 million from 2015. That's a 3.6% increase. Year-to-date numbers show continued growth in 2017 versus 2016. Through August 30, 2017, NIH funding is up 17% compared to the same time last year.

**Student Success:** One of our most important student success goals is improving the 6-year graduation rate. As per our strategic plan, our goal is 50% by 2021. For the past five years, our graduation rate has been improving two or three percentage points each year, a rate of improvement that put us in the top 5 percent of public colleges and universities nationally. This is outstanding progress, but it gets better.

Just yesterday afternoon, the registrar's office confirmed that the last student remaining to be certified for graduation from 2011 has been certified. I am pleased to announce that the 6-year graduation rate for that cohort is 47 percent, up eight percentage points from the 2010 cohort that graduated last year.

Our “at risk” students are participating in this rise in graduation rates as well. Over the past six years, the 6-year graduation rate of African-American students at WSU has jumped 13 percentage points to 20 percent.

Although we would like to see the rate even higher, this is a phenomenal increase. Black students graduate at nearly three times the rate they did six years ago. Additionally, the graduation rate for first-generation students is up 11 percent, and up 15 percent for Pell students in just three years.

I think we can reasonably state that we’ve tipped in the right direction on these metrics since that 2014 university address. But we have a long way to go to becoming the pre-eminent public urban research university that we aspire to be.

Let’s talk a bit about some of the challenges that I see for the coming year.

**Medical School:** Despite a very successful LCME site visit, significant challenges remain at the School of Medicine. Although the gap has narrowed considerably, our expenses still exceed our revenues and our primary hospital affiliate is, to be frank, adversarial. For the past couple of years, you’ve seen press and other communications regarding disputes with Tenet/DMC, and leadership in our practice plans—University Physician Group and University Pediatricians.

It’s very complicated, but the bottom line in all of these disputes is that we are guided by our mission, our integrity, and our core values.

- We no longer will allow our medical enterprises to be compromised by poor business practices or predatory partnerships.
- We no longer will provide privileges or a paycheck for people who will not work.
- We no longer will kick the can down the road in the hope that things will just sort themselves out. We will be accountable and make the hard decisions now.
- We owe it to ourselves, our students, our patients, and our community to stand for what is right.

I don’t have a crystal ball, but what I can tell you is that I am confident in our leadership, our doctors, our researchers, and our educators. What we are undertaking is heavy work, but our aspirations to be great mandate that we take a stand now and take control of our future.

**Budget and Finance:** This year is the first since at least 2011 that we did not experience an across-the-board budget cut. But the budget model for higher education with its reliance on increasing tuition to meet budgetary objectives is not sustainable. We must therefore make sure that we are utilizing budget models and processes that will drive efficiencies and promote growth. This year, we will be undergoing a thorough budget and finance assessment of each unit as we continue to transition to a more accountability-based budgetary process.

**Free Speech and Racial/Ethnic Confrontations:** Wayne State is among the most racially and ethnically diverse universities in the nation, and we take great pride in our culture of inclusivity. Yet, as has occurred at many campuses nationally and in our state, we are likely to be confronted with expressions of intolerance and even hate toward different minority groups. We must not take our diversity as affirmation that our campus is somehow different and that such views do not exist here.

More insidious is not the blatant expression of racism, which thankfully is minimal here, but rather the harboring of feelings and viewpoints that may not represent the mainstream.

Universities must be havens for respectful dialogue and debate between different points of view. We must seek opportunities to learn and grow from different perspectives on sensitive subjects such as race, ethnicity, and immigrants. This extends as well to including the full range of people, thoughts and ideas—even political ideas with which some of us may disagree.

We hear from many people on a range of subjects, but we know we still have a lot to learn. For the first time, we will be undertaking a comprehensive study of our campus climate for equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Through interviews, review of institutional data, an extensive survey, and focus groups with students, staff, faculty, and administrators, we will paint a detailed picture of the progress we've made toward building the inclusive community we desire, and gain a much clearer sense of those areas where we still have work to do.

When the time comes, anticipated to be around October 16, I urge each of you to take the opportunity to respond to the survey and help us learn more about ourselves.

I do worry about these things, but essentially I'm really excited about what will be accomplished during this coming academic year. I will briefly discuss some of these efforts.

**Improving our general education program:** We are very close to having a new general education curriculum. It's taken a lot of work, consideration of a lot of viewpoints, and adoption of many compromises through an iterative process that involved many faculty. Our current general education curriculum is outdated and overly burdensome for students, and it is absolutely imperative that we make changes now that will be implemented for Fall 2018.

**STEM Building:** Our legislative priority for capital has been the renovation of the largely vacated graduate library building into a state-of-the-art STEM teaching and education building. We were successful this year in obtaining \$15 million from the state for this project, which is anticipated to cost between \$30 and \$40 million. Detailed design work is under way now for construction to begin next year.

**Initiation of the Hilberry Gateway Project:** In my 2014 address, I spoke of the importance of supporting the arts and humanities. I stated at the time, "I believe that leading institutions of higher education, and Wayne State specifically, must reaffirm their commitment to the humanities and arts."

Our fundraising efforts have gone well, and I believe that we will be in a position finally to begin planning and construction of a new Hilberry theater and performance center next year. This project will be a terrific complement to the STEM Building, and will serve as a strong signal that Wayne State is committed to excelling in both the sciences and the arts.

I'd like to conclude on a topic that I'm quite ambivalent about—and that is university rankings. Actually, most university presidents are ambivalent about these rankings. On the one hand, we criticize the various methodologies used and believe sincerely that the quality of an educational experience for students cannot be distilled into a numerical ranking.

Yet, on the other hand, we are curious to know where our institutions rank because these rankings influence potential students and their parents, and may even impact faculty recruitment.

Despite my mixed feelings on the subject, I've decided to form a task force to focus on the various university rankings to ensure that we are recognized appropriately and getting full credit for our scholarship and other metrics used. Three of these rankings use fairly serious academic criteria and one does not, but is included because it is highly influential.

We do quite well in the rankings that are more objective and academic. For example, the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities places WSU in the top 301-400 institutions globally and top 100-119 institutions nationally.

The Center for World University Rankings puts Wayne State 190<sup>th</sup> in the world and 81<sup>st</sup> nationally. And the National Taiwan University Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities places WSU 207<sup>th</sup> in the world and 73<sup>rd</sup> nationally. These are three serious academic rankings, and Wayne State does relatively well.

Regarding a particular visible rating that is not academic but very influential, I am pleased to let you know that as of today, we can announce that Wayne State University is now ranked in the US News and World Report's top tier of higher ed institutions.

When people in the community and throughout the country ask me, "What's going on at Wayne?" my answer is invariably, "A lot." Frankly, it's difficult to know where to begin and what to include. The same with this address. I was able to cover only a fraction of everything that is happening. I hope, though, that I was able to convey a sense of optimism and excitement about the upcoming year and beyond.

By this time next year, we will be in full celebration of our 150<sup>th</sup> birthday and nearing the successful completion of our \$750 million Pivotal Moments campaign. It will be a great year.

I wish to conclude by thanking all of you—faculty, staff, students, and community members for your important roles in making our university a great one.

I also want to thank my colleagues in administrative leadership for their tireless efforts, their dedication, their commitment to serving this university, and for their unwavering support of

Jacqueline and me as we try to serve this university as best we can. We could not do the work we do without you. Thank you.