



Office of the President

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Dear colleagues and friends:

As president of Wayne State University, I enjoy speaking with our students about their campus experiences. During these talks, I often ask what they appreciate most about our institution. One answer I hear repeatedly is the diversity of our campus.

I'm glad that our students understand the benefit of being part of Michigan's most diverse public university. As the son of an African American father and a Japanese mother, I have had to overcome some of the same challenges our students face as they navigate a multicultural society. Through my experiences, I have come to understand how much we gain from living, learning and working alongside people from all backgrounds.

In today's contentious climate, it is essential to hear and understand different, often marginalized views, and to ensure that every member of our campus community feels that their voice matters. This is not limited to race. Our universities must welcome and include people of all cultures, beliefs, ideologies, sexual orientations and economic classes. This is crucial to providing quality educational opportunities and igniting the sparks that drive change.

Recently, at the annual meeting of the Association of American Medical Colleges and at a National Academy of Sciences workshop, I had the opportunity to speak about the alarmingly low number of African American males in medicine and science today. Despite many advancements in the field over the last few decades, the number of black men applying for medical school has not surpassed the level it was at 40 years ago. No other major demographic group has experienced this lack of progress in the field. This is particularly concerning since we know that diversity and inclusion are drivers of excellence in medical school and in the greater medical community. And without the participation of black men, it's hard to imagine accelerating advancements in health disparities research.

Despite our urban Detroit location, Wayne State is not immune to this challenge. In 2014, our School of Medicine had only seven minority students enroll — the lowest number in its history. We realized that this crisis needed to be addressed and began an aggressive campaign to counter the decline. The School of Medicine made significant changes to its admissions procedures, leading to major improvements. By 2016, the number of minority students enrolling in the School of Medicine had increased to 61, and we enrolled 62 minority students this year. This is an amazing turnaround but there is much to do.

One initiative that Wayne State developed is the Wayne Med-Direct program. It guarantees not just undergraduate admission but also eventual admission to the School of Medicine for 10 exceptional high school seniors each year. Preference is given to students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds who are interested in studying health disparities. Much like recruiting an athlete, we encourage the best students whose ambitions are aimed toward medicine to apply. Instead of seeking the next star running back, we're seeking the next star surgeon, biomedical researcher or pathologist. Wayne Med-Direct

emphasizes mentoring and research by giving participants the opportunity to become part of our School of Medicine during their undergraduate studies, leading to M.D. or combined M.D./Ph.D. programs. We know that when we're recruiting talented prospects for our medical school, we're competing with some of the best institutions in the country. Wayne Med-Direct has shown great success when it comes to attracting the very brightest students to our university. Our first cohort of 10 students completed their freshman year with an average overall GPA of 3.95 out of 4.0.

Throughout its nearly 150 years, Wayne State has been committed to diversity — it is both a core value of our institution and a major focus area in our strategic plan. But diversity is only half the battle. Inclusion is paramount. If students don't feel welcome and supported, we are not doing our job, and our Office of Diversity and Inclusion makes this a top priority. WSU events such as Civic Festival and Student Organization Day celebrate our student body's many cultures, orientations, political positions and religious backgrounds. Programs such as the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies promote research and dialogue that foster greater understanding between students of all cultures. Our NIH-funded Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity program prepares underrepresented students for research careers in biomedical sciences.

We are committed to continuously improving diversity and ensuring that students know they are vital members of Wayne State's community. That's why I set out on my bike this past summer on my first-ever Road Warrior cycling tour. Over the course of four days, I rode 427 miles on a listening tour through some of Michigan's rural communities. My goal was to meet new people with different perspectives and seek out candid conversations with them. We talked about higher education and the role Wayne State plays in the lives of students from all backgrounds, and much more. Between stops, the time on my bike offered me a chance to think about what I'd heard, what I'd learned and how Wayne State can better serve all Michigan communities. I'm already looking forward to next summer's tour.

We benefit as well from interaction with students and colleagues at other universities whose varied experiences challenge us, engage us and make us stronger. Together, we can help more students succeed and pursue breakthroughs that will change the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Roy Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

M. Roy Wilson
President
Wayne State University