

Inaugural Address
April 4, 2014

Thank you, Governor Dingell.

Members of the Board, honored guests, members of our campus community, friends: thank you all for being here today. I feel keenly the honor of your presence on this occasion. I would like to acknowledge and give special thanks to Jacqueline and to my daughter, Presley. I am particularly grateful to our Board for their confidence; if not for them, I would not be standing here today.

To be given the opportunity to be the 12th president of this very special university is humbling, and I am honored to have been escorted by four of my predecessors — each of whom has made a mark on this university. It's a bit overwhelming to see so many representatives from many of our Michigan universities and so many from beyond our borders. Higher education is a noble calling, and your participation today is a reminder of how privileged we all are to be a part of it.

Eight months ago, I was sworn in as president of Wayne State University. Today, we conduct the formal ritual to recognize that fact.

You might ask what's the point, after all this time, to go through this formality? From a purely practical standpoint, that would be a legitimate question. But rituals and traditions like the one we celebrate today serve a purpose.

Ostensibly, we are here to formally recognize a new president. But really, we are here to celebrate the university. And even more so, we are here to reflect, to reassess and to plan accordingly. To look back at where we've been, see where we are now, and look forward to our possibilities and potential.

Wayne State has come a long way since 1868. Recently, I read a book about Wayne State called *A Place of Light*, which was written to celebrate the university's centennial. Much of it chronicles the evolution of the university of today. I was particularly struck by the second chapter, which describes the very beginnings of Wayne State, when Woodward was a dusty road on the north side of the city. It reads:

“Those who drove in during late August 1868 noticed that nearer at hand, beyond Canfield Street at the Harper Hospital grounds, something unusual was happening. A lumber-dray stood by the road; as

they passed the last patch of woods and the hospital's northerly board fence, the rattle of hammers and zip of handsaws met their ears...

A few veterans from Harper's Soldiers' Home stood or sat watching. Otherwise, all was quiet, normal, almost rural. At the hitching-rail on Woodward, in front of the long picket fence, waited a couple of doctors' rigs. Neither the farmers nor anyone else could imagine they were witnessing an historic event — that here was the beginning of a medical school destined to endure for a century and become part of a state university."

It's hard for us today to imagine such humble beginnings. It's equally hard to believe that the people of that age could have imagined the Wayne State of today. Likewise, there is a future Wayne State that will be different in so many ways from the Wayne State of today. The people of that future — many not even born yet — will one day look back at our history. We have a responsibility to them: to remain a "place of light."

Now, it is our time to move WSU forward. Our tools are different from those quiet days of hammers and handsaws. Our world is vastly different from post-Civil War Detroit. We are different, and each of us brings our own unique experiences and contributions to this enterprise. It is our time now.

Sometimes in life, things just seem to line up. For me, I feel as though my life experiences have been leading me to Wayne State, and this day. I was approached by the Board about coming to Wayne State more than a year ago, but I knew about Wayne State long before that and even shared with a colleague that if ever I was to lead a university, it would be one like Wayne State.

The combination of traits that describe this university — comprehensive, public, urban, research-intensive and integrally connected to the community — makes Wayne State unique among Michigan's universities, and a treasure nationally.

In order to better understand how my values align with that of Wayne State and how I visualize Wayne State's future, it is important to know a bit of my own personal history — what events shaped my life and brought me to this stage at this point in time.

- My parents did not have an opportunity to pursue a higher education degree. My Japanese mother, particularly, lost her father and brother in WWII and was abandoned by her mother. She grew up with an uncle in a poor, rural community and had to quit school in eighth grade to work in the rice fields to help support her adoptive family.
- I grew up in Japan for most of my childhood, developed a deep appreciation of another culture and gained perspective that was more global than typical.
- I went to a public high school in the Washington D.C. area that was known more for its athletics than for academics.
- I had the opportunity to obtain an outstanding liberal arts education at a small liberal arts college in rural Pennsylvania.
- From there, I was privileged to go to Harvard Medical School, where I came to understand the meaning of “excellence” the importance of high expectations and of never settling for anything less than the very best.
- Knowing that I was going to be performing my ophthalmology residency training at Harvard, I intentionally sought a different environment for my pre-residency internship and went to Harlem Hospital in New York for a year.
- After completing my residency and fellowship, I spent a year in St. Lucia and was exposed for the first time to the realities of medical care — and of life in general — in an undeveloped economy country.
- I began my academic career at both the King/Drew Medical Center in the Watts area of Los Angeles and the Jules Stein Eye Institute and Department of Ophthalmology of UCLA in Westwood. Two institutions that are almost polar opposites: one exclusively minority, the other almost exclusively white; one defined predominantly by its connection to the community, the other by its vast research enterprise; one located among the poorest zip codes in California, the other among the very wealthiest.

I do not take for granted the breadth of experiences I've had throughout my life. Rather, I feel truly fortunate to have experienced the challenges of the urban core culture; to have been immersed in diversity at both the local and global levels; to have had my fire stoked by the quest for knowledge of the past and of the arts; to have experienced the thrill of discovery of new knowledge and educational excellence, where the highest of achievements for the public good was an expectation — indeed, a responsibility.

I mention this about myself not for self-praise but because, in many ways, these experiences mirror what Wayne State is about. When I arrived here last summer, I found a place of relentless intellectual curiosity that is the hallmark of great research universities. I found a place that strives for excellence, from the labs and classrooms to the playing fields and community. I found a diverse campus, a mosaic of many cultures and creeds and ethnicities. I found a university not just located in a community, but connected *with* the community on multiple levels, through service and outreach and economics. I found a university infused with the toughness, grittiness and confidence of the city around it. I found a university whose motto is “Aim Higher,” who day-in and day-out inspires students to do just that.

I found a university proud of its heritage as a university of opportunity and access, which holds that principle dear while, at the same time, continuously refining it to incorporate the uncompromising ideal of excellence. I found a university that offers not just access, but access to excellence, where students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and educational preparation have a chance for a top-notch education at a national research university. Where students from our local neighborhoods study with students from all over the world. Where students live, work and study in the real world and are prepared to succeed in it when they graduate.

This is Wayne State University. This is a place of light.

To let that light shine ever so brightly, we must not fall prey to the fallacy of false choices. My own experiences have taught me that seemingly different choices different paths need not be oppositional need not be “either/or” propositions. Instead, that they can be incorporated and melded into a whole that is richer and deeper than either approach alone. We must reject as false the choice between being a university of opportunity and access or a nationally prominent research university.

- We must reject as false the choice between offering a broad liberal arts education or a more skills-oriented education that is responsive to the specific workforce needs of the state.

- We must reject as false the choice of serving a local mission or a broader national, even global, one.
- And, perhaps most of all, we must reject as false the insidious choice between embracing and advancing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity or academic excellence.

I value greatly the liberal arts education I received. As I reflect on it, I'm reminded of how enriched we are by Plato's dialogues, Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," the genius of Shakespeare, by the magnificent voice of Luciano Pavarotti, the melancholy melody of Billie Holiday. They shape us, enlighten us and help us understand that there's more to life than earning a living. They broaden our perspective beyond the focus of our studies or the boundaries of our careers and, in doing so, improve not just the quality of our lives but — I believe — the quality of our work.

The ability to provide a great liberal arts education is arguably the most distinguishing feature of a great university — and Wayne State must strive to be an ever-greater university.

Yet, as an institution accountable to the public we serve, we must be mindful of not insulating ourselves in an ivory tower mentality and accept — even embrace — the fact that an increasingly important metric of the value of higher education is readiness for the job market.

In states across the country, there is a growing expectation — indeed, a demand — that public universities train students with specific skills that are sought by the workforce. Businesses are clamoring for graduates with the skills and knowledge to start contributing on day one. There is legitimacy in this concern, and we must rise to this challenge and make sure that our students are able to find good jobs upon graduating.

We can do both and we should do both.

In balancing both, we must keep in mind that unlike the not-so-distant past, the average college graduate will hold 11 jobs in their lifetime and even change careers two or three times. Many of the categories of jobs of the next decade don't even exist today. More than just skills, we must educate people who can evolve with the rapid pace of the world — people with nimble minds, and curiosity and the ability to look beyond what is to what could be. Ultimately, our job is to graduate individuals who are critical thinkers,

adaptable, and able to function and evolve in an increasingly global economy and an increasingly diverse world.

That must be Wayne State's focus.

Speaking of global, Wayne State is a university that can and should have both local impact and global influence. Our local impact is immense and our contributions too numerous to list. I will mention just one example that motivated and inspired me and made me so very proud of our students. Several weeks ago, I met some of our students during their alternative spring break program. These students chose to stay and serve in Detroit during this long, cold winter rather than head south for sun and fun. After his experience, one of our students wrote on Facebook:

“Last Sunday, 53 students at Wayne State University chose to forego a spring break vacation to a sunny beach with swimsuits, sandals and Smirnoff. Instead, they chose to serve in Detroit, with philanthropy and altruism in mind instead of partying hard; service to the community that was given without any expectation of anything returned. Despite being deployed three times to three different countries, I can honestly say that this was probably the most transformative week of my life. I've never seen such a group of dedicated young people who are selfless to no end, and it gives me faith and confidence in the next generation of young professionals. I love all you guys like family. The birthday card signed by everybody is probably the best birthday present I've ever gotten, other than the experience of being able to be on Alternative Spring Break Detroit. I can't wait for next year!”

That student, Kenny Uy, is a veteran of three tours of duty overseas. He is with us today. Kenny, stand up and take a bow — and a belated Happy Birthday to you.

We have been deeply connected to Detroit since our founding, when those wounded Civil War veterans watched the carpenters working on a hot summer day in 1868. Today, we find ourselves connected during an unprecedented time in history: a time when a once great American city went into decline; a time when the city had to confront difficult truths and enter into deep self-reflection; a time of renewed commitment and of optimism for re-emergence; a time of immense opportunity to do the right things and make a difference.

Wayne State will remain fully engaged in making a positive difference for Detroit. This is a part of our local mission, and our impact in this regard is tangible. But our impact extends far beyond.

Our groundbreaking research — particularly in the biomedical sciences, but also in other areas — is recognized around the world. Yet, in recent years, budgetary constraints have limited our investment in our research mission and our research contributions have fallen short of what they should or could be. We must aggressively push the frontiers of new knowledge and redouble our research efforts.

The soon-to-be-completed Multidisciplinary Biomedical Research Building offers a terrific opportunity to greatly expand our research capabilities and lead in the conduct of team-based research on problems that disproportionately affect our urban community. Yet, in doing so, the results of such research will influence health and well-being, certainly nationally, but also in regions halfway around the globe — as far from Detroit as geographically possible.

Locally, we must stay true to our historical status as the university of choice for students from Detroit and its surrounding metropolitan area, as well as for the many immigrant populations in the region. While we continue our efforts to attract these students — including new immigrants who plan to make America their home — we must also be welcoming to international students who plan to return to their home countries with new knowledge and perspectives gained here. It's good for them and it's good for us.

Local impact and global influence: that must be Wayne State's focus.

I reject the false choice between diversity and academic excellence.

Historically, some of the most creative periods in civilization have emerged when people of different backgrounds interact and work together. The Renaissance grew, in part, from the clash of cultures from the East and the West. Diversity of thought, born from our nation's immigrants, fueled America's creative energy and led it through a period of unprecedented growth and advancement.

Simply put, maximal innovation and creativity is a byproduct of fully capitalizing on diversity. And like a tapestry, in which each color is distinct and adds to its overall beauty, America's social fabric is enriched by its many races, ethnicities and cultures. As occurred in the Renaissance, as occurred in the growth of

our country, diversity in the context of higher education can be the driver for academic excellence. It is not academic excellence in spite of diversity; rather, it is academic excellence through diversity.

Academic excellence, innovation, creativity: enhanced through a complete embrace of diversity in all its many forms.

That's what Wayne State must focus on.

Due to the efforts of the eleven presidents before me, including the four with us here today; the many provosts, deans, vice presidents, and other administrative leaders; the faculty, and students, and governing board members who were part of this institution, Wayne State University today has a strong, firm foundation. Many challenges lie ahead, but I am energized by the potential. With the assistance of all of you — the governing board, the administrative leadership team, the faculty, students, alumni, the community and our many friends — I pledge to work tirelessly to make Wayne State University the model of what a public, urban, research university can and should be.

Imagine:

- A university of opportunity that offers unparalleled access to excellence and national research ranking among the top public universities
- A university committed to the liberal arts and one that is responsive to the workforce needs of the region and state
- A university with immense local impact and global influence
- A university with uncompromising academic excellence that embraces racial, ethnic and socio-economic diversity to its fullest extent.

A model public, urban research university must have a clear vision of its urban agenda and engagement; of how it confronts issues that disproportionately impact urban populations — whether it be related to health, housing or environmental sustainability — both for the betterment of its community and the education of its students.

We must be guided in this effort by a comprehensive strategic plan. Beginning immediately, we will commence a strategic planning process with an expectation that it will take approximately six months to complete. We have engaged the services of a local Detroit firm with knowledge of and commitment to the city of Detroit and state of Michigan to assist us in this effort. We will seek broad input from all of our constituent groups, including many that are not traditionally a part of university strategic plan processes.

I firmly believe — a belief I know all of you here today also share — that the next phase of the evolution of Wayne State University will be as important as any in its long history.

I gained a greater appreciation of Wayne State by reading *A Place of Light*, the story of Wayne State I mentioned at the beginning. But the story is not over. We will continue that story from the Centennial of 1968 right up until our 150th anniversary in 2018. We are discussing the sequel with one of our distinguished historians, and I am optimistic that he will accept the challenge of writing it.

Wayne State University is a place of light.

So let that light shine. Let it shine for the young boy from East Detroit who lives a tough life today but dreams of a better one tomorrow. Let it shine for a young woman from a Midwestern rural town who pictures herself as an internationally renowned surgeon, or a grandmother who finally pursues her dream of earning a college degree. Let it shine for the people of Detroit as they witness a historic transformation of a city and yearn for a model, new, great American city of the future. Let it shine for the young men and women from countries near and far who come here for a great education and leave enlightened with a vision of a better world. Let it shine for the curious and the outspoken. The doers and the dreamers. Let it shine with pride in what we are and pride in what we do.

Let it shine into a future we can imagine and collectively work toward. It is our time, our responsibility. Let's make sure that the yet unwritten chapters of the history of Wayne State University are the best ones yet!

Thank you.