

President M. Roy Wilson  
Wayne State University  
University Address  
September 12, 2018

Thank you, Abdul, and good morning everybody.

Welcome to a new academic year, and thank you all for being here.

As many of you know, this is a big year for us. We're celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding as the Detroit Medical College. We're also marking the successful conclusion of our \$750 million Pivotal Moments campaign, a goal we met several months ahead of schedule.

And while we've had much to celebrate and reflect on this year, I don't want us to lose track of our 2016-2021 Distinctively Wayne State University Strategic Plan. We are almost at the mid-point of the plan, and I thought this would be a good opportunity to take a look at where we stand with our goals.

I'd like to start with an observation that I hope has been apparent to everyone here today: it's getting crowded on campus. The lines for coffee and food are longer. There are more bikes (and scooters) parked on the mall. And, well, there are just more people around. Some of that is the usual start to the semester. But some of that is because we have more students on campus. That's not an accident. It's part of our strategic plan, so let's start there.

## ENROLLMENT

The Strategic Plan states that our goal is to grow enrollment to 30,000 students.

This fall we are welcoming the largest group of full-time freshmen in our history – our 150-year history. When classes began Aug. 29, there were 2,955 full-time freshmen. That's an increase of 15 percent over last year's incoming freshman class. We also welcomed 3,074 FTIACs, our

largest group in more than 10 years. Community college transfers are up 7.1%. Last year, we saw a big drop in international students, like many other colleges and universities, but this year we reversed the trend, and new international students are up 3.5% over last year.

And they are college-ready students. Over the last 10 years our selectivity has increased steadily, and the credentials of our Fall 2017 and 2018 class are among the highest credentialed classes on record, with an average GPA of 3.4.

Some of those “new” students are former students we are welcoming back to school through our Warrior Way Back program. This program allows students who left the university with debt – but not a degree – to re-enroll, work off their debt, and hopefully join the growing ranks of Wayne State alumni. We have 43 of these students so far, and each of them has their own Warrior Strong story. We hope this program becomes a national model in opening the door for another shot at a college degree.

Some of our enrollment seems to be related to new campus development.

Just last month we had the ribbon cutting for the brand-new Mike Ilitch School of Business in downtown Detroit. This beautiful new learning facility has brought a surge in enrollment for the school. Since we announced the \$40 million Ilitch gift in October 2015, graduate enrollment in the Mike Ilitch School of Business has increased by two-thirds to more than 1,400 students this fall. In that same time, total enrollment in the school has increased by one-third to more than 4,000 students today.

While enrollment is growing in certain categories – like new students – overall enrollment continues to be somewhat flat. There are two reasons for this.

First, we are graduating more students sooner, and that means we have fewer students in the extreme out years. This is a factor we hadn’t fully considered when setting our enrollment goal of 30,000 by 2021—nevertheless, it is a good problem to have.

Second, as I mentioned, last year we saw a steep decline in international student enrollment. And even though we've had a slight uptick this year, international student enrollment will likely remain a challenge for us for the near future.

And so to hit the 30,000 goal by 2021, we have to admit that will be difficult. But at the risk of seeming overly optimistic, I'm not ready to adjust that goal – not yet. Let's keep our sights set high.

## GRADUATION RATE

One of our key priorities in the Strategic Plan was to increase the six-year graduation rate to 50 percent, and we've made headline-worthy strides toward this goal.

Our six-year graduation rate is now about 47 percent, an increase of about nineteen percentage points over a period of six years, and slightly up from last year. We're still in the process of verifying this with the latest IPEDS data, but we believe this is the fastest improvement in six-year graduation rate of any major college or university in the country.

This stunning rate of increase in our overall six-year graduation rate has made another of our goals more challenging. Our strategic plan calls for us to close the graduation rate gap for underrepresented students. We have made progress here, and closed the gap by about four percentage points. That's good, but it's not yet fast enough to close the gap completely by 2021. That's because the *overall* graduation rate increase is so steep – another good problem to have.

But simple math means it will be difficult, if not impossible, to close the gap by 2021. At some point, if we continue this progress, these rates will converge, as the African American graduation rate has more than doubled over the past six years, considerably faster than the overall rate. But we all should be happy if both rates continue to climb quickly and steadily.

And while this wasn't an explicit goal stated in the Strategic Plan, I want Wayne State to implement a clear four-year graduation plan, because six years should not be the standard

completion rate for our students. In fact, I'd even like to explore a four-year guarantee of some kind. In other words, if a student does everything they can to complete their bachelor's degree in four years but Wayne State falls short, for instance, by not offering a required course, then the student will finish their degree at no cost. We owe it to our students to help them complete their degrees and move on with their lives as quickly as possible. Let's continue to raise the bar.

## OTHER STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES

Importantly, we are laying the foundation for continued improvement in our graduation rate. Here are just a few of our initiatives, mentioned in the Strategic Plan.

An important objective in our Strategic Plan was to restructure the general education program to ensure student learning outcomes and success. We successfully modified our general education program for the first time in 30 years, laying the basis for a true 21st century learner. A byproduct of the new gen ed curriculum is greater flexibility for the students, which should help them in achieving a successful educational outcome.

Additionally, we launched the Warrior VIP program for students who are admitted regularly yet could benefit from extra support.

Increasing student housing options was a stated objective in our Strategic Plan. We know students who live on campus tend to have higher success rates, and last month we opened Phase I of the Anthony Wayne Drive Apartments to accommodate a burgeoning demand for campus living. We have 400 new students living on campus this year, and 400 more next year. Yes, it's getting more crowded, but those are the kinds of crowds I like.

## RESEARCH

Our stated goals for our research enterprise are ambitious. Among them are increasing research expenditures, expanding the research enterprise, and establishing an Office of Research Development.

We have some exciting upticks to report.

I've noted in the past that research awards have been increasing. In fact, federal funding has increased by 14 percent since 2014. But expenditures always lag awards. I'm happy to report that research expenditures went up in 2016 to \$221.5 million and in 2017 to \$226.5 million, and we anticipate the number will continue to rise next year.

As part of our goal to expand the research enterprise, we have established the Translational Neurosciences Initiative, the Healthy Urban Waters Initiative, and the Translational Sciences and Clinical Research Initiative.

In an effort to enhance our pipeline of student researchers, we are working to build undergraduate majors in several key subjects. Back in 2016, we launched an undergraduate degree in public health, which has been wildly popular. Now we are working to develop curriculum for an undergraduate major in Neurosciences, which we anticipate will be completed in about a year or so.

Another key priority outlined in the Strategic Plan was the establishment of an Office of Research Development to identify and support programmatic grant initiatives, develop structured processes around instrumentation and equipment grants, and diversify our funding portfolio. This year we recruited an AVP, Denise Figlewicz, to spearhead these efforts.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Innovation and entrepreneurship are a cultural value and strategic focus area, respectively, in our plan, and we've advanced our efforts in these areas in notable ways.

The Wayne Innovation Studio, powered by TechTown, is open right inside the front door of the undergraduate library. If students have an idea about starting a business or want help to grow something they're already working on, then it's the first place they should go.

Also in line with the strategic plan we created a Council on Entrepreneurship composed of deans, the VP for Research, and the VP for Economic Development. This group provides leadership and coordination of academic and research activities within colleges and around the university that involve entrepreneurship. It relies on the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Steering Committee made up of faculty and staff from around the university to identify opportunities and directions for better supporting the entrepreneurship ecosystem here at Wayne State.

To improve the speed and effectiveness of our engagement with businesses, we are developing a Wayne State Office for Business Innovation (OBI) that we expect will be operational by Winter 2019. Universities sometimes have the reputation of being complex organizations that move slowly and are so risk averse that they cannot capitalize on opportunities to collaborate with businesses.

Establishing the OBI will allow us to create new public/private partnerships to create more and innovative R&D, accelerate the process and effectiveness of tech transfer opportunities, and take advantage of exciting business opportunities.

Wayne State is well positioned to do this successfully: we've got lots of talented faculty, we're located in Detroit where new industries and technologies are being developed; we're aligned with the TechTown entrepreneurial ecosystem; and we have a history of innovation and entrepreneurship. The OBI will ensure we have the structure and processes in place to facilitate these interactions and capitalize on the growing technology and business opportunities.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Wayne State strives to be a welcoming and inclusive environment where diversity is broadly valued.

Diversity and inclusion run deep in our history, and their importance is evidenced by the fact that diversity and inclusion is both a strategic focus and a cultural value. To this end, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion has been active on many fronts.

Among the specific Strategic Plan objectives was the launch of an office devoted to multicultural student engagement. This office launched officially as the Office of Multicultural Student Success, or OMSE (“Omsee”), as it’s more commonly called. OMSE seeks to cultivate a safe campus environment where we value, promote, and celebrate the identities of all students on our campus. It also plays a key role in offering initiatives that positively address and impact student success for underrepresented and at-risk students.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion spearheaded a climate survey to learn more about issues of diversity, equity and inclusion on our campus. Forty percent of staff, 25 percent of faculty, and 12 percent of students responded to the survey, and we expect to release an analysis of the results later this fall.

The Climate Study will continue with focus groups and other forms of data gathering and analysis that will occur in the months ahead.

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Without financial stability, we would struggle to achieve our vision or even meet our short-term goals and objectives. That’s why Financial Stability and Operational Excellence is a focus area in the strategic plan. I’ve already noted a couple of areas that contribute to our financial health – enrollment and our Pivotal Moments Campaign, which are among the key metrics of the plan. These help our financial situation, but they don’t tell us where we stand from the standpoint of overall financial health and stability.

We measure our financial health by analyzing a number of financial ratios and measures, all of which we roll into what we call a “composite financial index,” or CFI. To provide some context, a CFI of 1.0 indicates very little financial health. A CFI of 10 is the top of a range. A CFI of 3.0 represents a relatively stronger financial position, and is what I’d call an acceptable yet low

benchmark. Last year, our CFI was 2.49, and our goal this year was 3.0. We beat this goal and improved significantly to 3.53. We are not yet where we want to be, but we are moving quickly in the right direction.

Also among the key metrics in this area of the Strategic Plan is the need to improve the reputation and level of awareness of Wayne State.

We've got a number of initiatives in this area, including our Warrior Strong brand campaign, which launched last October and is moving forward. We've also shared a lot of great history with the world this year as we celebrated 150 years in the heart of Detroit. Two public relations programs – The Conversation and The Op Ed project – are helping our faculty get national and international attention.

The Conversation is a not-for-profit media outlet for articles written collaboratively by university faculty members and editors, with the goal of conveying expert information in layman's terms. Since Wayne State began participating in summer 2017, our faculty members have published 48 articles by 31 Wayne State faculty authors, for a total readership of 1.65 million across the globe. Our top two publishers – outlets that republished our articles – are CNN and the Washington Post.

The Op-Ed Project works to diversify the academic voices sharing ideas in the media. In November, we conducted an internal seminar called "Write to Change the World" for 20 faculty members, several of whom have gone on to publish their first op-eds in media outlets such as the Detroit News and The Chronicle of Higher Education.

These sorts of activities will pay off over time to raise our public stature and reputation, but our reputation also depends on how well we serve our core mission. I continue to have mixed feelings about the U.S. News and World Report ranking, because the rankings can be manipulated, and I have no intention of trying to game the system, although all too many do. But people pay attention to the report, and we need to as well. If we do the right things, like improving graduation and retention rates, it can pay off in the rankings.



I was pleased last year to report that Wayne State broke into the U.S. News and World Report rankings at 223. This year we moved up nearly 20 spots – a very significant improvement – to 205. This is a big jump over one year, and places us fourth in Michigan. If we keep to our mission, we'll keep rising in our rankings.

To give you a bit more information on our Pivotal Moments campaign, I'm sure you all know we met our \$750 million campaign goal a few months early – an excellent outcome. Here's more good news: money is still coming in. We currently stand at \$761.7 million, and by the time the campaign formally concludes at the end of this month, we expect that our final amount will be close to \$770 million.

This is a tremendous contribution to our financial sustainability goals, and one that was made possible through the tireless support and generosity of many. We have a special celebration for this achievement planned next month, and I hope you will join us. You'll be hearing more about this soon.

One final financial sustainability metric in the Strategic Plan that I want to mention is increasing the endowment to \$500 million. Currently, our endowment has grown to \$383 million, and we anticipate an additional \$120 million or more in new planned gifts that have been pledged but not yet secured. This represents a great improvement over the past three years, as our endowment was actually going down. This turnaround is due in part to better investment performance, probably through the introduction of a Chief Investment Officer, as well as our fundraising efforts.

## PROGRESS YET TO MAKE

On some of our metrics, we still have progress to make.

1. One of our key metrics was the establishment of a **centralized community engagement database**. This would allow us to track our community engagement activities in all the schools, colleges and units using up-to-date, searchable data. This has proved a

challenge. We have a strong history of community engagement across the campus. But we have been decentralized in our approach, and it's been difficult to gather information or keep our records current.

- a. We're not giving up on this, though. Having this information at hand can help people understand just how much we do, help us collaborate for greater impact, open up new opportunities for people to get involved, or start new projects to fill in gaps. I've asked that we restart this initiative and complete it during our planning cycle.
2. Another key objective in the area of financial sustainability was to improve the budgeting process and implement new tools and budget models. To this end, we launched a collaborative process across campus 18 months ago to develop a **new RCM Budget Model**, and we expect to roll this out by 2020.
3. Also in keeping with our goals of operational excellence, **Computing and Information Technology** is three-quarters of the way through a campus-wide WIFI upgrade. We hope students and staff are noticing the improvement in service. C&IT also is constructing a new data center—the first one on campus in 55 years! —and they expect to complete that project by the end of the year.

## SUMMARIZE

I've covered a lot of ground today, and there's much more I could have talked about. I hope you are heartened by this progress, as I am, but not completely satisfied. We have roughly two and a half years to go, and I'm optimistic we can make a good deal of progress in that time. Let's continue working toward our strategic goals, and let's even surpass them when we can.

Five years ago, I gave my first university address, and I shared my vision for the university. I shared my thoughts on where we should focus our efforts, and these became the basis for the strategic plan that I've talked about today. Think of how far we've come.

Thank you all for stepping up to the challenge. Your dedication and talent has made Wayne State University better, and thanks to your efforts we have much to celebrate during our sesquicentennial. I am proud to be part of this team. Go Warriors!