

President M. Roy Wilson
Wayne State University
University Address
September 15, 2015

Thank you, William. And I wish to thank all of you for being here today for my third university address. I'd like to recognize Gary Pollard, chair of the Board of Governors, who is with us today:

I also would like to thank my wife Jacqueline for being here this morning. Actually, she's at every Wayne State event of which I am a part, so I thank her, not only for her support of me, but for everything she does for Wayne State.

In preparation for today, I quickly reviewed my first and second university addresses.

In 2013, I reviewed the attributes of Wayne State University that are important to me and that attracted me to be a candidate for the position I am now privileged to hold here: Comprehensive, Public, High Research, Urban, Connected to the Community.

I discussed the concept that to be a great university, we had to be a good university and what it meant to be good.

I focused on my belief that a good university does everything it can to make sure that every single student who entrusts their education to us, graduates.

Last year, I mentioned that we were at a watershed moment in the history of the University. Specifically, I discussed the need to turn around declining enrolment, declining research funding, and poor student success metrics, particularly the 6-year graduation rate.

I discussed my belief that Wayne State and "excellence" were strongly bound and how the pursuit of "excellence" ran deep in the roots of Wayne State. And finally, I discussed the need for a Strategic Plan.

I recap all of this because the themes I will discuss today will sound familiar to you. The themes are similar but framed this time in the context of our newly completed Strategic Plan, titled "Distinctively Wayne State University."

Led by Michael Wright, we spent many months gathering input from all our stakeholder groups over the course of the past year, and I want to thank every member of the planning committee for their commitment and the hard work they invested into the Strategic Plan. The committee's work was facilitated by the Barthwell Group. I thank Akosua Barthwell Evans for a job well done.

But first, let me start off with some good news:

- Enrollment: As of Sept 14th, we have 2,565 freshmen enrolled, a 16.9% increase over last year. Our yield for admitted freshmen was 32.5%, which is 10 percentage points higher than last year's yield.
- We have 7,483 graduate students, a 3.9% increase over last year.
- There are 2,058 professional students enrolled, an increase of 1.4% overall. That includes a 10.5% increase in JD1 students, which of course goes against the national trend.
- Student Housing: Our residence halls are filled to capacity with a waiting list of more than 250 students. In fact, we had to rent out a couple of floors of the St. Regis Hotel down the street to house about 80 of our overflow students needing housing.
- Our retention of students is continuing to improve. Retention into the third year and into the fourth year is at the highest levels in at least 16 years. The improved retention is translating into an improved 6-year graduation rate.
- That means this year, for the first time since the State implemented performance funding, Wayne State will likely receive some funding tied to the 6-year graduation rate, thanks to our record of improvement over the past three years.
- Research: In comparing July 2013 to July 2015, total extramural funding has increased 32%; National Science Foundation funding increased 87%, and National Institutes of Health funding 31%. Our research awards at the end of August 2015 were \$150.3 million. This is up about \$20 million from the August 2014.
- Pivotal Moments campaign: Since the start of our campaign on October 9th, 2014, we have raised \$95 million. As of July 30th, we have \$452 million of our \$750 million goal.

I would like to thank the University community—the Board of Governors, the faculty, students, academic staff, and non-academic staff—for your part, individually and collectively, in these very encouraging outcomes. I caution, though, that we are still in that watershed moment, and we must continue to work hard to ensure that these positive numbers become the beginning of a positive **trend** over the coming years. Let's keep it going. Let's build some **momentum**.

We also encountered some unexpected challenges this past year. Despite very good student outcomes and performance, the School of Medicine had an unfavorable review from its accrediting body, the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME).

In truth, it was not a total surprise, and we had already begun to address some anticipated areas of noncompliance with the standards prior to the LCME visit.

Our Strategic Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Governors on July 30, 2015, is based on a foundation of certain core values: **collaboration, innovation, excellence, diversity and inclusion, and integrity.**

These are our North Star. They guide our way, and they cannot be compromised. Unfortunately, I believe that the School of Medicine did just that. It lost its North Star.

But, we are regrouping—not just regrouping but doing so with urgency and a clear sense of purpose. I have complete confidence in the current leadership of the School of Medicine and I declare to you, with a will that is absolutely resolute—that the SOM will emerge better than ever.

As a university—and as individuals who make up this university—we must be guided continually by these values that we, as a university community, believe to be important: **collaboration, innovation, excellence, diversity and inclusion, and integrity.**

Actually, there is nothing distinctive about these values that sets us apart from our peer institutions or the other 14 public universities in Michigan. Most universities tout similar if not identical values.

What separates one university from another is the extent to which these values are truly embraced, the extent to which they are truly lived, and the extent to which they are incorporated into everything the university does. In that regard, I've seen progress over the past few years but believe that we still have some work to do.

One thing I do know: the work we are doing today is better than the work we did yesterday.

More importantly: the work we do tomorrow will be better than the work we do today. We learn every day, modify as necessary, and evolve toward our full potential.

That's where the Strategic Plan comes in. The plan focuses on seven broad areas: (1) student success, (2) educational excellence, (3) research, (4) entrepreneurship, (5) community engagement, (6) diversity and inclusion, and (7) financial sustainability.

Time does not allow a discussion of each of these areas of focus. I will, however, spend some time on the vision and mission statements, particularly the mission statement.

Our vision is to be a preeminent, public, urban research university known for academic and research excellence, success across a diverse student body, and meaningful engagement in its urban community.

You've heard something similar from me previously. In both my prior university addresses, I mentioned my vision for the university was that it become *the* preeminent public, urban research university in this country. I'm not going to quibble about whether we use "a" or "the". There is no question that we will soon be *a* preeminent, public, urban research university.

At that point, we will set our sights on being *the* preeminent public urban research university, one known for academic and research excellence, success across a diverse student body, and meaningful engagement in its urban community. Visions evolve, they can change.

Our mission is a different matter altogether. A university's mission endures through time. It's a statement of why the university exists, and it's a statement of what we all do.

Wayne State's mission is to create and advance knowledge, prepare a diverse student body to thrive, and positively impact local and global communities.

This is why we exist; this is why Wayne State matters. Not many universities can claim this mission. Only three in Michigan can claim a mission "to create and advance knowledge." I'm not sure how many have a mission explicitly to educate a "diverse student body" but I doubt it's more than a few; and only a few can claim a truly global impact.

When you put it all together, this mission is what makes Wayne State distinctive.

Let's review each of the segments of the mission statement in greater detail:

Create and advance knowledge: The United States has the finest research universities in the world, and "to create and advance knowledge" is what research universities do. Leading the world in the discovery of knowledge for the sake of knowledge has contributed substantially to the United States becoming a great country. Basic research is indispensable, and all research universities, including Wayne State, should participate in the process of basic discovery.

However, Wayne State has an opportunity—disproportionate in comparison to many research universities—to have a huge positive impact in its local community through its applied and translational research.

I will thus take the liberty to combine this part of our mission statement—to **create and advance knowledge** with another part of our mission statement—**positively impact the local community**.

Given our limited resources, we cannot excel in all aspects of research. We can be a leader, though, in addressing society's major urban challenges: whether it be related to health, transportation, housing or environmental sustainability. In fact, we can and we should be *the* national leader in this space.

Let me assure you that I understand additional resources will be required. I understand that there are infrastructure issues that must be addressed.

For example, electrical outages have had an adverse impact on faculty research. This is simply unacceptable. We are addressing many of our infrastructure issues systematically, including the electrical outage problems, and we're making progress.

Our new state-of-the-art IBio Building is now open; Scott Hall, our main building for our School of Medicine researchers, as well as the Elliman Building, which will house our cancer researchers affiliated with the Karmanos Cancer Institute, are about to undergo upgrades of their HVAC systems and other renovations; and old non-functional laboratories in the Engineering Building, some of which were being used for storage, are being renovated.

But it's not just a physical resource issue. We must collaborate more, across departments and across schools and colleges, and work more in interdisciplinary teams. We must be efficient and maximize our people resources.

And why is this part of our mission—**to create and advance knowledge and positively impact local communities**—important? Is it because of national and global rankings? Being acknowledged in rankings is nice, but that really is not the reason. It seems like a new ranking comes out every year. In some, we do very well; in others, just okay. In truth, we like it when we do well and we tout it. In truth, we would like to rise in all of the rankings. But—and this is critically important—we don't create and advance knowledge for the sake of rankings.

We do what we do to ensure that better health and better quality of life are available to all communities, regardless of the wealth or other sociodemographic characteristics of that community. We do what we do to benefit society, all of society. That is our *raison d'être*, our reason for being.

Prepare a Diverse Student Body to Thrive: There's a lot packed into these few words. Historically we have taken great pride in preparing a diverse student body; students from different socio-economic backgrounds, students from different religions, different racial and ethnic backgrounds, older students, younger students, full-time students, part-time students, students with different levels of high-school preparedness for a rigorous college curriculum.

To do so is part of who we are; it's part of our DNA. To “thrive” means to do well in the society of which they will become active participants. That society is increasingly pluralistic, increasingly diverse, increasingly global. I think we do a good job here.

To thrive also means to get a degree in a reasonable period of time and to have the skills and knowledge to get a good job. Wayne State graduates are well educated, and they are highly prized in the workforce. Our most recent class for which we have data, the December 2014 graduates, had 90% employed within 6 months of graduation.

But those are our graduates. That “success” has not been generalized across the entire student body, and too many of our students have had to abandon their quest for a degree for a multitude of reasons.

I do think we’ve been making significant progress in this regard. What I have seen over the past two years is a relentless focus on student success. Our advising is better, our student services are more student focused, and perhaps most dramatically, we are more empathetic to the plight of students who need extra support, extra help to thrive.

I have over and over again, witnessed Wayne State faculty and staff go the extra distance to assist individual students in need of help, students who might otherwise have simply gotten lost.

One student at a time—we must do everything we can to help them thrive and become productive members of our society.

Let me tell you about a student I became aware of just recently, and what a Wayne State staff person did. The student was a medical student. He finished medical school but he still had to pass step two of his medical board in order to get his residency. And because his studies were on hiatus, having to pass step two, he was no longer getting his military benefits, so he didn’t have any source of income. He was in the process of being evicted.

It was on a Friday afternoon that I learned about this. The School of Medicine wanted to do something to help this person and committed to doing something to help him. But unless the apartment complex had a check for \$2,100—a certified check for \$2,100 that day—that student was going to be evicted.

It was now 4:30 p.m., and there was no way the School of Medicine was going to figure out the logistics of getting \$2,100 over to the apartment complex. So one of our staff members convinced the apartment complex to take an online payment, and they finally agreed to do so, and she debited \$2,100 from her own account.

This act was an extraordinary one; but I also think it’s representative of the kind of empathy being displayed by our faculty and staff on a daily basis.

Yet, we do still have a ways to go. Our 6-year graduation rate, though improving, is not acceptable—even taking into account the often special needs of many of our students.

One student at a time—every student counts.

I mentioned that we improve every day and that we will do a better job tomorrow than today. Well, within two years, I want Wayne State to make the commitment that a student will graduate in 4 years—not 6 years—in 4 years if they do everything they are supposed to do. That Wayne State will do its part to commit to a 4-year graduation—the

pathway will be there for whatever major the student decides upon; the advising will be there to help guide the way; the required classes will be available for the students to take. Students do their part, and Wayne State does its part.

Why is this part of our mission—**to prepare a diverse student body to thrive**—important?

Sure, a higher graduation rate will translate into more state funding through the metrics system. Sure, a higher graduation rate will help us in our national rankings. Both are important.

But we do this because every student deserves the opportunity to obtain the best of a college education, every student deserves the opportunity to aspire to—and achieve—excellence, the type of excellence that is part of the value system of Wayne State. Every student deserves the opportunity to thrive—REGARDLESS of their family wealth or the circumstances to which they were born. Every student deserves that opportunity.

Positively impact local and global communities:

I already mentioned some of this in my comments about creating and advancing knowledge for the good of the local community. Our reach goes well beyond our local community, as the impact of our research is widespread and our student body is increasingly international.

Locally, we are inextricably linked to Detroit and to Southeast Michigan.

At the same time, we are a national university with global recognition, and our relevance and impact go well beyond our local geographical borders.

Why is this part of our mission—**positively impact local and global communities**—important? We are steadily rising in world recognition and rankings. That's great, but that's not it. One aspect of Wayne State is local; another is global. That's a part of who we are, and it is distinctive. To impact society, both locally and globally is the reason we **create and advance knowledge** and the reason we **prepare a diverse student body to thrive**—it's special, it's what makes us distinctively Wayne State, distinct from the other 14 public universities in Michigan, distinct from the vast majority of institutions in the country and even worldwide. We are both local and global. That's what makes us distinctively Wayne State.

We create and advance knowledge;
We prepare a diverse student body to thrive;
We positively impact local and global communities.

This is who we are; this is what we are about; this is what we do!

What I ask of you is this: that you learn our mission. That you *understand* our mission. That you understand, not just the words, but the essence of who we are as exemplified by our mission; that our mission and our values guide us in everything we do; that we do better work tomorrow than we do today.

I ask that you understand and embrace your specific role in our strategic plan—in your strategic plan. We're going to help you with this.

The plan will be available in its entirety on the website, but I've asked the members of my Cabinet to share the plan in detail with all members of their team, and describe the unique contributions, expectations and responsibilities of their respective units. This will take place over the next two months.

Make this plan your plan. Make the vision and mission I described today your vision and mission. And make these values your values—your North Star.

Thank you for your many contributions, for being partners with me in the work that we do and the future we will make together. It is a joy and privilege for me to be associated with you.