

President M. Roy Wilson
Wayne State University
FEI Detroit Chapter Meeting
February 26, 2018



FEI Detroit Academic Dinner February 26, 2018



Good evening, everyone. For those of you who are on Wayne State University's campus for the first time—welcome. And for those of you returning to campus, welcome back. We are delighted to host this evening's FEI Detroit Academic Dinner.

I want to congratulate all of the all-star students who were recognized this evening. Your accomplishments are truly impressive, and we are honored to help celebrate your recognition with you here at Wayne State University.

I'm not sure how familiar all of you are with Wayne State. I hope all of you are at least passingly familiar with us. Some of you may be longtime supporters and alumni. Do we have any alumni in the audience today?

This is a very special year for Wayne State. This year marks the 150th anniversary of our founding. We are tremendously proud to have reached this milestone. And we didn't get here by accident.

I've been reflecting lately on what has given this institution such staying power, and I've been coming to the conclusion that a lot of it has to do with never losing sight of our mission and staying true to our values.

Our mission is to create and advance knowledge, prepare a diverse student body to thrive, and positively impact local and global communities. It drives what we do every day. And to help us serve this mission we rely on our core values—integrity. Excellence. Collaboration. Innovation. And diversity and inclusion.

We may use different words today, but our mission and values today are directly linked to our founding 150 years ago.

Where we stand today was almost rural then, and five civil war doctors who had seen the carnage of war and the rudimentary medical treatments of the battlefield decided they must find a way to do things better. To advance the science of medicine, and help people here and the world over. To teach others to be effective healers, using the latest medical techniques. They were doing what they could with what they had in the time they lived.

They could not have imagined that from their aspirations and humble beginnings one day, 150 years later, Wayne State would become a thriving university with 13 schools and colleges, 27,000 students and a research portfolio of more than \$220 million. A place where anyone with the talent and drive is welcome to pursue a quality education in almost any field of their choosing. A place whose impact is felt not just here in Michigan, but around the world. In a city that has seen brilliant rises and catastrophic falls, but is now in the midst of an epic resurgence.

But here we are, inheritors of their dreams, and caretakers of a university with a great history and unlimited potential.

But that's me talking. I'm a university president, so it's natural that I would be excited by all that Wayne State has given this world and all the prospects for the future. I've observed that not everyone shares this enthusiasm. Not everyone understands how much more universities do than teach students and confer degrees. Not everyone understands how important universities are to our community and our state, and the world we live in.

That's because a number of myths about universities have been cultivated by people for various reasons, and the myths are starting to take root. I'd like to cut some of these myths down to size today, and hopefully give you reasons to view universities in a more favorable light.

Since I'm addressing financial experts, I thought I'd go right for the numbers myth.

Myth #1: Universities cost taxpayers too much money. I won't try to attack this myth directly by saying universities don't cost a lot; they do. But what this myth fails to address is the economic return on funds invested in universities.

Figure 4



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- It's no secret that Detroit is in the midst of a remarkable revitalization. Much work remains to be done, but the city has made considerable progress, and Wayne State is helping to lead the way.
- We leverage university assets for the benefit of our neighborhood and city to create an **economic impact of \$2.5 billion**.
- TechTown, Wayne State's business incubator and accelerator, continues to have a positive impact on our local economy. In the last eight years, TechTown has **served nearly 1,600 companies** which created more than **1,200 jobs** and leveraged in excess of **\$120 million in capital**.
- We are the seventh largest employer in Detroit. But our impact is felt well beyond the city's borders.
- The state of Michigan would be a very different place without Wayne State. Nearly 40 percent of practicing physicians in Michigan received all or part of their training at Wayne State.
- Walk into any large business in Michigan, and chances are you'll meet a Wayne State alum. That's because 75 percent of our nearly 250,000 alumni live here and contribute to the state's economy.

- Wayne State is one of the safest campuses in Michigan with a fully professional police force, who also patrol the surrounding neighborhood. Thanks to their work, Midtown has seen a **58% drop in crime since 2009**.
- We see the evidence of their work every time we walk down the streets in Midtown—a place that has become the preeminent neighborhood in Detroit to live, work, study, invest, and play.
- With the resurgence of the Midtown neighborhood, the university has seen a tremendous surge of interest in housing. As I speak, a new 800-bed facility to accommodate exploding demand for student housing is well under construction on Anthony Wayne Drive.
- As I said, none of this comes cheaply. Universities require investment—but they are **worthy** of investment, because they pay rich dividends to our city, our state, and our world.

Myth #2: *University students today are “snowflakes.” They’re too sensitive. They can’t handle the challenges of adult life. They’re not ready for the real world.*

There may be students like this out there, but at Wayne State, they are the exception rather than the rule. Allow me to share a little bit about how our students show their grit:

- Take Brandon Kennedy, a student in our School of Medicine. He’s the first in his family to attend college, but he refuses to let any obstacles deter him from his dream of working in an underserved community one day. And Brandon believes that Wayne State has been key in empowering him to pursue that dream: As he said, “The sense of community here really shows you that you can overcome any adversity.”
- Our students don’t just study—they work. We estimate that at least 64 percent of all our students are working at a job while pursuing their degrees. They’re not hanging out at the bars or frat houses. They’re hanging out at work, and earning paychecks and paying taxes and raising families. It doesn’t get much more “real world” than this.
- But they’re also serving others. Many young students are in their ideological prime. When they say they want to change the world, they mean it. It’s not a cliché for them. We want that in our youth, don’t we? And the good thing is, many of them do something about it.

Street Medicine Detroit



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- Take, for instance, Street Medicine Detroit, a School of Medicine student organization that delivers health care and related services directly to the city's homeless, who are often service-resistant and living on the streets. They've had well over 700 patient encounters since their start.
- Our Warrior athletes are accustomed to giving their all both on the field and in the community. They've completed 60,630 community service hours over the last six years, including 10,136 hours last year.
- The students I've just described? They are driven. Hard working. Compassionate. Innovative. Engaged. Persevering. Strong. These are Warriors. Snowflakes? I think not.

Myth #3: Professors have cushy part-time jobs where they idle away their time under the protection of tenure.

- I am a tenured professor, and I can tell you from experience I didn't idle away my time. In my case, I came up through the academy, rising to the rank of full professor and earning tenure. I continue to participate in publishing and other scholarly pursuits. For me, doing so is a thrill that I will never tire of.
- I support tenure because of the freedom it provides for people to pursue knowledge without the fear of repercussion.
- The great majority of faculty here and across the country are committed, hard-working people dedicated to their field of study and the students they teach.

- However, there are a few who are not. And some of the negative mythology around professors flows from a few people who are, in fact, idling their time away.
- I said I support tenure, but I also support accountability.
- Some of you may have read in the news over the past year that we are working to strip tenure from five faculty members in our medical school who have been grossly underperforming.
- Such a move is unprecedented in higher education, and this action has brought considerable attention to Wayne State, both negative and positive.
- De-tenuring is not a popular pursuit in higher education, and I've noticed that I am very lonely in these efforts. But it is the right thing to do, and we will continue our efforts because I believe it's unfair for students to shoulder the burden of faculty who willingly abdicate their responsibilities, thereby draining the institution of much-needed financial resources.
- But, as I said, far and away the great majority of our faculty are passionately dedicated to their professions, and the ultimate measure of our faculty's success is the success of our students. That's why you'll see Wayne State graduates in doctor's offices, courtrooms, Broadway stages, and C-suite offices around the world.

Myth #4: *Academic research is mostly dabbling with arcane and obscure subject matter that provides no benefit to people. It's mostly a waste of time.*

I'm sure we've all heard the proverbial story about people with PhDs working in labs to understand the reproductive life of cockroaches, or the DNA of fruit flies. People get a good chuckle out of such notions, but what if understanding the reproductive life of cockroaches helped us eradicate them from the earth? Or eradicate bedbugs, or mosquitoes carrying the West Nile virus? What if understanding fruit flies helped us cure cancer?

Does that sound far-fetched? In a lab on campus right now we have a professor working on cancer treatments by studying zebra fish. Yes, zebra fish. Her discoveries may save the life of one of your relatives.

There are many examples of the benefits of research that has been or is currently being conducted right here at Wayne State:

- Wayne State is the birthplace of AZT, the first FDA-approved drug to treat AIDS.

- Our School of Medicine conducted the world's first successful open-heart surgery. Dr. Forest Dodrill was inspired by the way a car engine pumps fluids through a car, and developed a mechanical heart that saved countless lives while also paving the way for other heart research breakthroughs.
- Speaking of cars, if you've ever driven or ridden in one, then you've benefitted from Wayne State research on vehicle safety. Since the 1970s, we've been instrumental in developing crash test dummies to improve every aspect of automobile safety.
- Wayne State is home to a number of cutting-edge and life-saving research initiatives, including the NIH-funded Perinatology Research Branch, which has assisted more than 20,000 at-risk mothers and spurred more than \$347 million in economic activity.



University Research Corridor

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- This is just the smallest sampling of our research portfolio, which has helped to put us on the map. We are a partner with Michigan State University and the University of Michigan in the *University Research Corridor*, which is one of the top research consortiums in the U.S. Together, we've spun off 210 startup companies since 2002, and our economic impact is nearly \$17 billion.
- Let me share an eye-opening example of how university research impacts us all.

Omaha World-Herald

Big bucks for medical research
February 2, 2011

“Since 2002, medical researchers have turned \$106 million from a court settlement with tobacco companies into \$959 million in health research funding, the study found. Using the settlement as seed money, the scientists obtained an additional \$853 million from other sources — more than \$8 for every dollar from the tobacco money.

“The funding supports nearly 1,800 jobs, the study showed, and as it rippled through the state’s economy over the nine years had an economic impact of \$2.2 billion and generated \$98 million in state and local tax revenue.”



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- When I was Vice-President for Health Sciences at Creighton University in Omaha, Hal Mauer, the Chancellor from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and I successfully lobbied the State of Nebraska to invest a portion of the payout from the court settlement with tobacco companies into medical research. We ended up receiving \$12- 14 million per year for biomedical research.
- This article reported on the return on investment at that specific point in time. Over a period of 9 years, \$106 million had been provided and that translated into an economic impact of \$2.2 billion and nearly \$100 million in tax revenue. The research multiplier result in all these numbers? Almost \$21 for every dollar invested.
- I don’t think it’s a stretch of the truth at all to say that every person in this room has benefited in some way from research done at universities—and specifically at Wayne State.

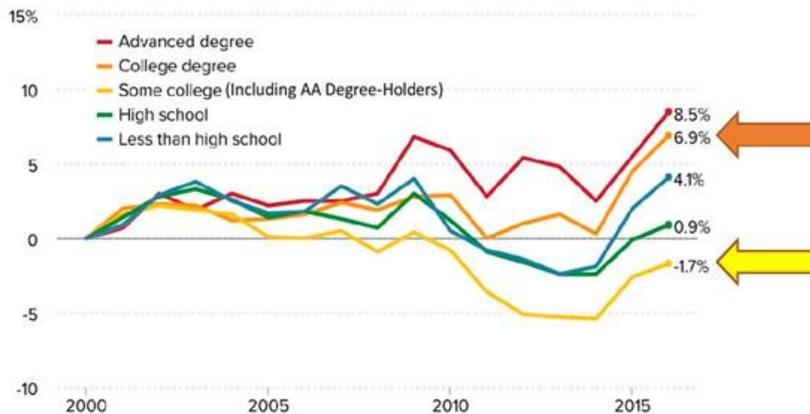
Myth #5: *Four-year degrees are too expensive, and students don’t get a positive return for all their money.*

Students are better off going into the trades.

- This argument has been gaining momentum for a while now. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support it. Every study that has been done shows that a four-year degree is by far the best way to ensure a long and prosperous career.
- In fact, the four-year degree wage premium continues to grow.

The Four-Year Degree Wage Premium Continues to Grow

Cumulative percent change in real average hourly wages, by education, 2000–2016



Note: Sample based on all workers age 18–64.

Data: EPI Current Population Survey / Analysis: Michigan Future, Inc.

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- Recent studies show that bachelor's degree holders earn more than twice as much as the lifetime earnings of a high school graduate.
- People who say more students should go into the trades are usually talking about somebody else's kids – not their own. They want somebody else's children to be plumbers and electricians, but they want their own children to get college degrees, or maybe more than one.

Myth #6: Universities are ivory towers disconnected from the “real world.”

Not anymore – at least not at this university. I've already talked a little bit about what our students do outside the classroom. Wayne State has been in Detroit for 150 years. We've been an active and productive member of the community, and students and faculty alike continue to serve it in many ways.

College of Engineering GO-GIRL Program



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- For example, the College of *Engineering* runs *27 summer camps which impact over 500 K-12 students*, promoting discovery and exploring technology. Collaborative programs like GO-GIRL and Camp Infinity seek to narrow the gender gap in STEM education and careers.
- The Detroit Fellows Tutoring Project is a service-learning project designed to improve the reading skills of elementary school students through one-on-one mentoring with Wayne State students. The project helps K-2 students in 10 DPS schools.
- In the past five years, the *Detroit Fellows Tutoring Project has aided 2,638 DPS students* through 30,118 hours of service.
- The *Legal Advocacy for People with Cancer Clinic* is a very unique medical-legal partnership between Wayne Law and Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Center that offers students training in practical lawyering skills while providing an invaluable service to low-income cancer patients receiving treatment at the center. In its initial two years of operation, they've helped *172 individuals* and conducted legal education workshops for more than 600 professionals and clients.
- These are just a few of the ways that Wayne State students, faculty and staff are engaging with the “real world” and building a brighter future for our state every single day.

CLOSING

- I've shared a lot of information about Wayne State University with you today. And I hope I've dispelled a myth or two for most of you.
- We have significant challenges to address, but I'm confident that we have the right people and the right plan in place to get us where we want to be.
- Like the city we're in, Wayne State is transforming. We've made a lot of progress. We're growing a culture rooted in excellence, accountability, and integrity. We have a new plan for the future and a vision of preeminence.

Mike Ilitch School of Business



Hilberry Gateway Performance Complex



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- We're making tremendous progress with our **Pivotal Moments campaign** as well to ensure we have the resources to carry out our mission. We're currently at **\$720 million of our \$750 million pledge**. Included in this amount is the largest gift in Wayne State's history: **\$40 million from the Ilitch family** to establish the Mike Ilitch School of Business. In just a few short months, we'll be celebrating the ribbon cutting for our beautiful new business school downtown. We're also making tremendous headway with our Hilberry Gateway Performance Complex.
- I have never been more optimistic about our future.

- But I don't want you to just take my word for it. I invite you to come back to campus soon, take a tour, and see the university for yourselves.
- Attend a lecture or a theatre performance. Visit one of our art galleries. Check out the new Mike Ilitch School of Business this summer on your way to a Tiger's game. Come cheer the Warriors on to victory at one of our athletic events.
- Or just walk around and enjoy the campus. From the newly renovated Student Center to the McGregor Reflecting Pool, we've made a number of major improvements lately, and the campus has never been more beautiful.

Once again, I want to thank the FEI Detroit chapter for hosting their Academic Dinner on our campus this evening. And my congratulations again to tonight's honorees.