

University Address
President M. Roy Wilson
October 2, 2013

Thank you, Adham. Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here today. And thank you all for the very, very warm reception that Jacqueline and I have both had here over the past two months.

I want to acknowledge a few Board members who are here, Paul Massaron and Sandra O'Brien. Thank you very much. They were partly responsible – in fact, predominantly responsible, for my being here today, so I have to thank them every chance I get.

In the past, I understand the university address was primarily for the campus. Today, I've asked others to join us—our alumni, our neighbors, donors, members of the community and government. We did this because we appreciate your support and your participation, and, in one way or another, we all have a stake in the success of Wayne State University. We're in this together, so I'm glad you're here.

I want to start by reading from a letter I wrote when I formally applied to be president of Wayne State University.

Now just to set the context, the letter was dated in January 2013. Usually, when there's a search for university presidents, it happens in the fall of the prior academic year, and I had received a number of inquiries from other universities seeking a president that fall, but I wasn't interested in any of them, and I said no. And a part of the reason was because I was very satisfied at the NIH. Although I felt at some point I would go back into university administration, the time just wasn't right then. In January I did get a call from Wayne State, and for some reason, Wayne State was different for me. I want to read you a part of this letter because I think that it very vividly personifies why I believe that Wayne State is different.

“Ultimately, I desire to lead a university with the following attributes as essential:
comprehensive, urban, public. Because of my familiarity with research development/funding

and with medicine, highly desirable attributes include high research activity and presence of an academic medical center. Wayne State University satisfies these institutional characteristics and is well poised to take its place among the very top tier of urban-serving public research universities in the country.

Yet, one of the most attractive aspects of this presidency is the sense of mission and purpose of the University. I believe that public, urban research universities have a critical and obligatory role in contributing to the economic vitality and improved quality of life of its surrounding community; as the first in my extended family to be educated beyond high school, improving access to quality higher education is a deeply held personal conviction.

To lead an institution that is, in no small way, defined by these values and commitments, while also unwaveringly committed to excellence and to the pursuit of excellence, would be a rare opportunity that may not present itself again for many years. To lead such an institution to even greater prominence would be a dream fulfilled and a capstone to my career in academic leadership.”

Each one of these attributes that I mention is important to me and each defines Wayne State—but the combination of them makes Wayne State what it is—something unique, something special; in fact, something extraordinary.

What I’d like to do is delve into each a bit, explain why it’s important to me, and why I think it defines Wayne State: “Comprehensive, Public, Urban, Research, Academic Medical Center, Community.”

Before I start though, allow me to share with you my general impressions of the faculty and students. These are impressions I’ve formed over the first couple of months.

I believe that the faculty are extraordinarily committed and talented. Many, if not all I’ve met, care deeply about the university and wish to contribute to it becoming one of the great institutions of higher education in this nation. The students are no less committed and willing to

play their part. They are remarkably diverse in every sense of the word. It's been particularly enriching for me to have had an opportunity to break bread with Jewish students from the Hillel Center one week and then participate in a cultural celebration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with another group of students just a few weeks later. That's what a university is about, and I feel particularly fortunate to be a part of such a vibrant, inclusive university life.

Early last week, I had an opportunity to have a conversation with the editorial board of the Detroit Free Press. One of the reporters in trying to describe Wayne State said something about it being a bit of an outlier: not quite the University of Michigan or Michigan State in one sense, but not quite Western or Eastern Michigan in another. I politely steered him toward a different word with a different connotation that I believe more fairly describes Wayne State: "unique."

The combination of attributes mentioned earlier is what makes Wayne State uniquely Wayne State. Let's go through each.

COMPREHENSIVE: Wayne State University has 13 schools and colleges and more than 350 programs of study. With a couple of exceptions, students can choose almost any academic course at any level. That has certain advantages, especially in a time of exploding information growth that demands coordination and collaboration across disciplines.

However, undergirding this comprehensive offering must be—*must be*—EXCELLENCE. Comprehensiveness for the sake of comprehensiveness is nothing to be proud of and we must make sure that all of our programs are grounded in excellence; and if a program isn't, we need to either change it or stop offering it. Grounded in excellence, a comprehensive university offers students tremendous opportunities to be well-educated citizens of the world.

Students need to understand how DNA and RNA function, understand the principles of supply and demand, understand how our government functions (or currently, doesn't function); but they are also incredibly enriched by appreciating a Picasso, by experiencing the genius of Shakespeare, and by reading books for the pure pleasure of it.

ACADEMIC MEDICAL CENTER: Partly because of its budget and research productivity, the medical school is extremely important to the university; I hope that my knowledge and experience with medical schools and teaching hospitals is value-added for the university. From my initial assessment, I would say that the medical complex and the university are not optimally aligned. We need to address this issue. Among other things, I've asked the Dean of the Medical School, Dr. Valerie Parisi, to be a member of my Cabinet. We meet weekly, major decisions are made at these meetings, and the voice of the medical school, the practice plan, and teaching hospitals must be a part of the discussion. But the reason I wanted to lead a university with a medical school is a selfish one. I love academics to its core.

With the many administrative leadership positions I've held, one thing has always been a constant: I was always a faculty member and took great pride in continuing to contribute to the academy. As of Friday, September 20th when the Board of Governors met, I am officially on the faculty of Wayne State University with the School of Medicine as my academic home.

But it's not all self-serving. I hope that my strong identification as a faculty member will provide the perspective necessary to make better decisions on behalf of the university.

RESEARCH: As someone with a research background and most recently from the NIH, I value research immensely. Research is a big part of Wayne State University's identity. We enjoy a Carnegie classification as a National Research University with very high research activity, a distinction shared by less than 4% of this nation's higher education institutions. We also enjoy, along with the University of Michigan and Michigan State, being a member of the University Research Corridor.

But there are cracks in the veneer. Our research productivity, as measured by grant funding and expenditures, is headed lower, in contrast to the situation at both of our research partners. This trend must be reversed! And we will reverse it by utilizing every strategy possible including supporting our research faculty through strengthening core facilities and facilitating trans-disciplinary teams, by holding non-productive research faculty accountable as outlined in the

recent collective bargaining agreement, and by recruiting new faculty who are thrilled with the discovery of knowledge and the translation of that knowledge.

The opportunity is there: we have an incredible resource in the Perinatal Research Branch of NIH and in the Karmanos Cancer Center, the new multidisciplinary biomedical research building, the strengthening of our affiliations with our hospital partners, particularly Henry Ford Hospital and its research capabilities, the presence of the auto industry and the many partnership possibilities with the College of Engineering. Also, we have the ideal setting in Detroit for research to reshape and lead the urban agenda in healthcare, sustainability, housing, and transportation.

We must seize the moment and have the discipline to do what must be done to move research forward.

PUBLIC: To me, a public university represents a higher sense of purpose than does a private one. As a public institution, we must be responsive to the state's needs and be accountable to the tax payers to ensure that their dollars are well spent. Two points I would like to make in this regard:

(1) Michigan, as is true of many other states throughout our country, is increasingly concerned with the workforce and is increasingly expecting its public universities to train students with specific skills that are sought by the workplace. We must rise to this challenge and make sure that our students are able to find good jobs upon graduating.

The comprehensive nature of our university, as discussed previously, affords us the ability to respond to the marketplace responsibly. However, we must always be mindful that we are not a trade school nor do we want to resemble one to any extent.

Unlike in the past, the average college graduate will hold 11 jobs in their lifetime. And chances are, this number incorporates a career change—or two, or three. Many of the categories of jobs

of the next decade are not even in existence today. More than ever, the workplace needs people who can evolve with the rapid pace of the world—people with nimble minds, and curiosity, and the ability to look beyond what there is to what could be. The greatest public contribution we can provide to the state of Michigan is graduating well-educated students who are critical thinkers, able to function effortlessly in an increasingly diverse world, and who are good civic citizens. That's what Wayne State University is and that's what it does.

(2) As an institution accountable to the public, our performance is increasingly being measured by various outcome metrics. As I've said often, "metrics are fine. Let's just make sure we have the right ones, the most important ones." I recall being a candidate for the presidency of another institution several years ago in which they had a very explicit goal of increasing their national ranking by a considerable amount.

Most ranking measures include selectivity of students, 6-year graduation rate, even how much money students earn after graduation. But many of these measures can be "gamed." For example, increase your graduation rate by not accepting at-risk students. You can ensure that your graduates earn a lot of money by focusing on recruiting students who desire to be engineers and doctors and limit the numbers who wish to teach or pursue the arts. That's not what I'm about and that's not what Wayne State is about.

Several evenings ago, I had an opportunity to attend an evening gala event for our Law School. It made me proud to meet so many alumni who were public servants and advocates for justice and equity. That is not by accident. I learned that is what our Law School stands for and promotes. That is Wayne State, and that is what our state needs, that is what our society needs.

URBAN: We are an Urban Research University. What's special about that? Let me tell you a story; it happened just 2 weeks ago.

I was at a Business Leaders for Michigan retreat which was held in Ann Arbor on the campus of the University of Michigan. Mary Sue Coleman, the president of Michigan, was a great host and during dinner she proudly displayed a video—it was about how the university was facilitating

their students experiencing Detroit, mainly through internship opportunities. Now, I don't fault her by the way—I think it's terrific. The University of Michigan is a great university, and they should be offering their students the opportunity to learn and train in Detroit.

It's not just the University of Michigan. Ask yourselves why other universities are trying to establish a presence in Detroit. It's because they're trying to give their students something very valuable that they can't offer on their campuses. The experience of living and learning in the modern-day urban world. Because that experience provides a deeper education. One that combines the theoretical with the practical. And makes students more ready to contribute—and succeed—in the world to which they graduate.

Many of you have heard about land-grant universities. The Morrill Land-Grant Acts were signed into law in the mid-1800's and allowed for the creation of land-grant universities—Michigan State is one. The purpose was to “promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes.”

These Acts were created in response to a political movement calling for the creation of agricultural schools. These schools offered programs that were at the time vital to the country's well-being, including agriculture and military tactics. These were areas of growth—even revolution.

But the times have changed. Our landscape has shifted. Economic drivers have changed, and agriculture is no longer predominant. In 2011, for the first time in nearly a hundred years, the rate of urban population growth outpaced suburban growth. People are moving back into urban cores. More than three quarters of Generation Y plan to live in an urban core. They're returning because of the excitement, the connectivity, the convenience, the diversity, and the opportunity.

If we were to start a political movement of our own today, we would call for the establishment of urban-grant universities—because that is where the 21st century is headed. This is where our revolution is taking place. It is now time to focus on an urban agenda with the many health,

economic, and educational challenges confronting urban communities. And that responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of urban universities like Wayne State.

We hear from companies that hire Wayne State graduates that our students are better prepared for the world of work. Part of the reason is that many of our students are already in the workforce, are already in the world of work. But part of it is that we are surrounded with opportunities to experience the world as it is. Other universities offer a semester in Detroit; we offer *every* semester in Detroit. Our students don't need to take a shuttle to get to experience real-world urban challenges and the excitement of being a part of the solution in addressing them. They're right smack in the middle of it.

COMMUNITY: Wayne State has had an inextricable bond with the community of Detroit since 1868. At the heart of Wayne State University is a legacy of access that goes back to the institution's roots. If you were Jewish in the early 20th century, you couldn't go to Yale. And women couldn't go to a lot of universities. But Wayne State would welcome them.

Couple this with the understanding that Detroit, at the turn of the century, was one of the most diverse cities in the nation. The city had a high proportion of immigrants and first-generation families, along with a solid Jewish community that had been present since the 19th century. After World War II, the African American population grew considerably in Detroit as did the Arab-American population in the Detroit metro area. Throughout its long history, Wayne State has been welcoming to all and has been the university of choice for Detroit's—often marginalized—populations. Furthermore, Wayne State has, for a very long time, been a place that was friendly to people who were working full-or part-time, because of Detroit's strong work ethic and culture.

Wayne State University must continue to be the home of the sons and daughters of native Detroiters and its metropolitan areas. We've stuck by them for nearly 150 years, and they've stuck by us.

Yet, students from out of state and out of country greatly enrich the educational environment and university life, and we should—and we will—increase their numbers. The two, however, are not contradictory comments. Wayne State has a national and international reputation. Accordingly, we must increase the numbers of out-of-state and international students—but, not at the expense of students from Detroit and Michigan. Our enrollment has dipped in recent years; we have room to grow and must do so.

Engagement with the community is also evident in our tangible investments in Midtown's resurgence—by the public safety we provide, the incentives we provide for people to live in Midtown, by financial commitment to the M1 project.

Finally, engagement in our community is evidenced by the many services provided by schools and colleges of our university—too many to enumerate in this already too long address.

I mentioned earlier that less than 4% of universities in the country have the Carnegie Foundation's highest research classification. Wayne State also is recognized by Carnegie for its community engagement with recognition in both categories of "curricular engagement" and "outreach partnerships". Only 6 universities in the country hold both the Carnegie highest research classification and the community engagement classification in both categories.

So, the confluence of all of these attributes makes Wayne State, uniquely Wayne State.

Let me tell you a story. I was having an interview with Crain's business journal several weeks ago, and Keith Crain asked me sort of a curveball question. And it was somewhat offensive, actually. He said, "Is Wayne State always going to be third? Is it destined to always be behind the University of Michigan and Michigan State?" I took five seconds to think about it, and I told him no, because you see, that's a false comparison. We're not trying to be the University of Michigan. That's an apples and oranges comparison. *We are what we are, we do what we do, and we are going to be second to none at what we do!*

Our collective vision is bold: to become the **pre-eminent public urban research university** in the country.

How do we get there? There is certainly no shortage of things we must address. Key among these is the disparity between our substantial research reputation and capability and our underperforming undergraduate educational output measures. To get to where we want to be, we must be focused, deliberate, and very strategic. I will leave much of the details to be worked out through a strategic planning process that we will undertake soon. However, there is one thing that I do know and would like to spend a bit of time talking about that.

I've thought deeply about a comment Judge Damon Keith made when he swore me in as president two months ago. He said, "Wayne State is great because it is good. When it ceases to be good it will cease to be great." Judge Keith was paraphrasing a line that has at times been attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville: "America is great because she is good. If America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great."

I have become convinced that in our quest to be great, we must be good. I think we all kind of know what it means to be great. What does it mean to be good? As a university community, we must ask "do our actions and policies reflect a 'good' university?"

- A good university cares about every member of its staff—from the custodians who keep our buildings clean, to the groundskeepers who make our campus beautiful, to the very top level of management;
- A good university is a good neighbor within the complex fabric of a community and uses its influence and decision-making authority to benefit both rather than taking advantage of one for the betterment of the other;
- A good university does not make major decisions on narrow considerations alone without also considering the broader implications of these decisions on individual people;
- A good university celebrates the accomplishments of its faculty and encourages them and supports them to achieve even more;

- Ultimately, though, it's all about the students. A good university takes care of its students. A good university makes them feel wanted when they apply, welcomed when they arrive, supported when they are here, and appreciated when they graduate.

Since I mentioned graduation, let's talk about that for a moment. As all of you know, our six-year graduation rate is not good. Our state funding is increasingly being based on performance and the six-year graduation rate is one of the main metrics used. The federal government is looking at similar metrics. Now, maybe that is unfair because many of our students are not "traditional" and often—even from the very beginning—expect to take longer to graduate. But we are not getting any sympathy on this. Not from the State. Not from the Federal Government. Not from other Michigan universities. Not from anyone. So we need to just own this problem and do something about it. We need to make it our responsibility.

I wish to commend my predecessors Allan Gilmour and Phyllis Vroom for tackling this issue and making it a priority. I also wish to commend our staff in the Provost's office for their committed work on improving student access and student success. Because of their efforts, these metrics are showing signs of improvement. But it's not just them. Student success is something that we all must hold as our responsibility.

A good university does everything it can to make sure that every single student who entrusts their education to us graduates! Every single student.

Many of our students face multiple life challenges: financial, housing, family dynamics. When they arrive, many face another set of challenges simply navigating the world of registration, financial aid, and other processes. I'm not suggesting that we be a social welfare agency—we have no control over many of the challenges and barriers confronting some of our students. But we do have control of some things though and can make things a lot more student-friendly.

I've received many e-mails from students facing this or that barrier that we've imposed on them that makes it more difficult for them to stay in school and graduate.

Look, I understand that there are policies and procedures in place and for very good reasons, that it would be utterly chaotic if they were not routinely followed. But,

- Do we really have to block students from registering for class because he or she has an outstanding balance of \$200.00 from the prior semester? We have a budget of \$800 million, can't we be creative and find some way to allow the student to enroll while at the same time be assured that the student will honor his or her financial commitments?
- Do we really need to hold classes or offer student services at times convenient for us as faculty and staff rather than what is most convenient for our students?
- Are we really doing everything we can to assist our students?

We must empower our staff to make decisions on behalf of the student with the understanding that we will occasionally make mistakes, and may even get scammed. But I'd be willing to bet that for every student who scams us, there will be 10 where we genuinely helped them—usually at no or marginal cost. Let's care and go the extra mile for them. It's okay to take risks—the potential upside of a right decision is exponentially greater than the potential downside of a wrong one.

Now, I want to tell you about another interview that I was doing—this time, it was with the Detroit News, a couple of weeks ago. We were talking about a broad range of topics, including retention and graduation rates, and so forth. And one of the reporters said, “I know you're placing a lot of emphasis on that, and your six-year graduation rate is low, and your retention is low. Do you have a three-year or a five-year goal on what numbers you want to reach?”

I was stumped for a moment, because I didn't have a specific goal, but at the same time I didn't want to admit that I didn't really have one. So I thought about it for a few seconds, and... Any guesses what I said? 100 %, that's my goal. Because anything less, no matter how high it is, 80%, means that there's still 20% there, and that's not right.

It's the right thing to do because we are a good university. We must take care of our students because we are a good university. But also, in taking care of our students, enrollment will

follow, we will have the resources to support our faculty, and we will be heading up the pathway to becoming a great university—the **pre-eminent public urban research university of this nation.**

After a couple of months on the job, I've formed some impressions and I've shared them with you today.

I'm optimistic about the future, but I'm not foolishly optimistic. I know that there are miles to go, and there's a lot of work ahead. But I'm up for the journey, and I hope you are too. We will be beginning a strategic planning process soon to guide us on this journey. In the meanwhile, I've shared with you a few of my priorities: research growth, embracing an urban agenda, becoming more student-focused, to name but a few. I know that I emphasized the student focus hard, and some of you are probably thinking I'm naïve.

You're thinking that the university is so big and we can't possibly help each and every student. I have a different attitude and I want to share with you a parable in conclusion:

One morning, an old man was walking on a nearly deserted beach. He came upon a boy surrounded by thousands of starfish. As eagerly as he could, the boy was picking them up and throwing them back into the ocean.

The older man looked at the young boy and asked, "Little boy, what are you doing?"

The boy responded without looking up. "I'm trying to save these starfish, sir."

The old man chuckled aloud, and said, "Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?"

Tossing a starfish into the water, the boy turned to the old man and said, "It will make a difference to that one!"

My concluding message is a simple one: Each and every one of you can make a difference, and I urge you to do so.

It has been my honor and privilege to be a part of Wayne State these past few months and I look forward to many years of working together. Thanks for the opportunity, thanks for your warm welcome, and most importantly, thanks for everything you do in supporting this very special university.

Thank you.