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**Remarks by WMU-AAUP President Lisa Minnick  
Meeting of the WMU Board of Trustees, July 23, 2014**

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I'd like to share with you today a brief update from the faculty's perspective on the contract negotiations that have been underway for the past few months between the university administration and the board-appointed faculty.

Since my last report to the board, on June 10, the two bargaining teams have made progress on a number of issues concerning shared governance. As part of last month's report, I shared with the board a packet of information that included a draft of a new preamble to the contract, proposed by the WMU-AAUP bargaining team. As I mentioned at that time, we saw the proposed new preamble language as not only a philosophical statement but also as a summary of guiding principles going forward for what the faculty hopes will be a revitalized collaborative relationship between faculty and administration. In that spirit, the original draft preamble set out what we hoped would come to be a mutual understanding of how the stakeholders in university governance – including the faculty as well as the administration – can best and most effectively approach our responsibilities to our students and to the overall mission of the institution.

The draft preamble that the WMU-AAUP team brought to the table was in part a declaration of the core values of the university's academic mission, as the faculty sees it, emphasizing academic freedom, shared governance, and collaboration between faculty and administration. Their goal was to affirm our mutual commitment to modeling these values for our students and for the benefit of the institution.

During the 2011 negotiations, the WMU-AAUP and administration teams collaborated on a major revision to the contract article on academic freedom, Article 13. The faculty felt that the article should articulate more clearly a vision for academic freedom as a guiding principle for our work as teachers, researchers, creative artists, participants in the governance of the institution, and in service to the community and to the profession. The 2011 WMU-AAUP negotiation team brought a draft to the bargaining table that reflected these values.

Consensus at the table came neither easily nor immediately. The conversation became heated at times. But the negotiation process was thoughtful and deliberative and engaged the features of respectful academic discourse at its best, in ways that institutions of higher learning, when they are at *their* best, set out to model not only for students but also for the community and for the wider culture.

To put the process into more concrete terms: We – meaning both teams, faculty and administration – conducted research into the best ideas and practices we could find to help us find the language we needed to delineate and affirm the values associated with academic freedom. We wrote drafts, made arguments and counter-arguments. We supported our claims with evidence, revised our drafts and re-envisioned our objectives, argued and debated and disagreed but also listened carefully, thought critically, reconsidered, and re-imagined.

And finally, in July 2011, we reached consensus on a version of Article 13 that today codifies a set of beliefs and values that it turns out had been guiding all of us, faculty and administration, all along. It turned out that "academic freedom" represents not the abstraction that it is sometimes assumed to be but a set of shared cultural practices and values that are (to paraphrase Article 13), fundamental to the common mission of universities in general and to Western Michigan University in particular. These practices and values include our mutual charge, as outlined in Article 13, to promote free inquiry and to advance the sum of human knowledge and understanding.

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“Academic freedom,” we wrote three years ago – the faculty and administration teams wrote this together – “exists as a basic prerequisite for universities to fulfill their mission to our society.” At the table in 2011, our two teams reached the consensus that we all share an important “obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.”

Now, in 2014, discussions at the table of the draft preamble and several governance-related contract articles have evolved over the past several months in ways that once again highlight scholarly discourse at its best. Once again, our two teams have done the difficult work of deliberation and compromise in ways that illustrate precisely how we can all live up to the objectives set out in the latest version of the preamble, upon which we are close to agreement. While the WMU-AAUP team brought the original draft to the table, I would characterize the current, evolved version of the preamble as a jointly authored document that reflects a set of values that both teams and the constituencies they represent hold in common.

Emphasizing inclusion, civil discourse, and shared governance, including in the service of continually improving the quality of education and research at Western Michigan University, this document expresses in a powerful way the joint commitment of the faculty and administration to the obligations set out in 2011 in Article 13: to promote the conditions of free inquiry, to advance the sum of human knowledge and understanding, to promote these values beyond the walls of the institution, and to serve the public interest.

At a time when disinvestment in public higher education has come to be the new normal, when students and their families are struggling to make up the difference as the costs are transferred from all of us collectively as taxpayers to the individual end-users (also known as students); when pundits and political figures, from the President of the United States to state legislatures, are emphasizing individual financial return on investment as what a college education is supposed to be for and de-emphasizing the advancement of human knowledge that most of the people in this room have made their life’s work; and when the result of all this is that many of our fellow citizens in Michigan and nationwide are becoming less and less likely to see themselves as beneficiaries of any education but their own, the charge set out in Article 13 for all of us as a university faculty and administration takes on a new significance.

I hope as stakeholders in an institution of higher learning that together we will challenge the ideologies that assume investment in education is or ought to be an individual thing, that the point of education is an exclusively individual benefit, and that the benefit can only be measured as a return on investment that can be counted only in dollars.

During the negotiations now underway, the chapter leadership of the WMU-AAUP has emphasized with our faculty colleagues the theme that we are *stronger together*. There will surely be more challenges and new disagreements going forward, especially when the conversation turns to economic topics. But the progress at the bargaining table on shared-governance articles, for which we credit not only the WMU-AAUP team’s persistence but also the administration team’s willingness to hear us out and take these governance issues as seriously as we do, helps not only to illustrate how much common ground we all actually share but also to suggest a way forward in which we are all – faculty, staff, administration, students, trustees, alumni, and everyone else with a stake in this enterprise – *stronger together*.

