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President's Report

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Indiana University

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President's Report

Kim K. Metcalf
Indiana University

On behalf of the officers and Board of Directors of MWERA, let me wish you a happy and safe 1998. I hope that this finds each of you well into a productive and rewarding academic year.

As many of you know, MWERA is in the midst of a period of necessary change. Our colleagues and predecessors have done a remarkable job of guiding us in 25 years of tremendous growth. Through their wisdom we are undoubtedly among the largest and most active regional professional organizations associated with AERA. For most of us, our professional "roots" were established through MWERA early in our careers or in graduate school. Personally, I clearly remember my first MWERA conference as a graduate student. The thought of presenting my own work to a group of colleagues, many of whom were among those whose works I had read in my studies, was incredibly intimidating. However, from the moment I arrived at the memorable Bismark, I was struck by the hospitality and support I felt. In fact, it was at this and future MWERA conferences that I first began to get to know my more experienced colleagues and mentors not just as scholars, but as people and friends.

It has been this environment of professional and personal support that has helped MWERA grow and thrive over the years. And, I would argue, it is this environment that can enable us to continue to thrive as an active, valuable professional organization. However, our task is perhaps more difficult now than ever before. Our universities and employers continue to reduce the support they provide for professional conference travel; graduate students and early career faculty are forced to make difficult choices about the professional organizations they will join; and the professional benefits of conference participation are valued less and less in the merit, promotion and tenure process. Thus, while we are confident of the quality of our organization and of the professional and personal benefits it can have, it is imperative that we work harder than ever to inform our non-members of the benefits of MWERA membership and participation.

As an organization, we have emphasized the very reasonable cost of MWERA membership and of our annual meeting, particularly for graduate students. Certainly, there are few if any professional organizations that can boast of such low membership costs. But at a time when our students and early career colleagues are forced to choose to participate in only a small few of the many professional organizations that they might, we absolutely must ensure that MWERA is not only inexpensive, but a good investment in their professional future. We offer

our early career colleagues a variety of professional opportunities that they are unlikely to be afforded through most other professional organizations: an open, accessible, and supportive annual conference, publication opportunities in our regional journal, almost immediate opportunities for becoming formally involved in the organization through the journal, the conference, and the executive committee, and a small, close-knit network of established and emerging scholars throughout the midwest and Canada.

In spite of our amazingly affordable dues and the professional value we can offer, these attributes only draw new members when our colleagues and students are aware of them. I am confident that each of us believes strongly in the value of our organization. We each have our own reasons, but we share a commitment to and love of MWERA. But, I wonder if we may mistakenly take for granted that others will see the value of MWERA participation as easily as we do. For students and colleagues who are not familiar with MWERA, it may be easy to assume that their limited professional time and energy may be more efficiently invested in one of the many other organizations to which they are invited. It is up to us, those who know MWERA and who are committed to its continued success, to make the personal contact with our colleagues that can help them see the value of the organization.

During the coming year, I challenge each of us strive to promote MWERA in two ways. First, let us explicitly work to make known to our students and colleagues the important and unique benefits that MWERA membership can provide them. Let's help them see the opportunities for presenting, publishing, networking, and participating that we can provide, but that few other professional organizations can. Second, let us realize that we are no longer a small group of well acquainted friends who assume the value of our organization, who meet each year as much for social as for professional reasons. In order to remain viable, we must accept that our future depends on the long-term and active participation of young scholars who work in a rapidly changing, ever more competitive professional context. While maintaining the supportive, nurturing environment MWERA is known for, let us continue to improve the stature, visibility, and integrity of MWERA. Doing so will allow another MWERA to experience another 25 years of growth and success and allow another generation of scholars to experience the same feelings of collegiality and pride that we have felt as members of MWERA.