

Throughout our long history, perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the University has been our commitment, as President James Angell noted in 1879, to provide “an uncommon education for the common man”. The University was created by a society to serve all of that society...not just a privileged few!

The journey from this early ambition to real diversity at Michigan, however, often required intense struggle. Our current successes did not come quickly, easily, or without detours along the way. Our slow but continuous advancement has come from the efforts of thousands of courageous individuals and groups who followed a vision of equality in the face of great opposition.

The political climate swirling around Washington these days or sweeping westward from California raises serious questions about our commitment to achieve equity and social justice for all Americans. A recent *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News survey found that 2 out of 3 Americans oppose affirmative action. Federal courts are pondering cases that challenge racial preference. In Washington, the new Republican majority in Congress is taking aim at the nation’s commitment to civil rights.

At a time when some would try to squelch discussion about multiculturalism – labeling it just another example of political correctness – I believe we in academe need to talk openly, with boldness, about the need for more, not less, diversity. At the University of Michigan, we believe it is time to stand up and be counted. Today it is more important than ever, to reaffirm the importance of diversity for our institutions and our society.

People ask why we have made this commitment to change, why diversity is the cornerstone of our efforts to achieve national excellence and leadership during the 1990s.

The most compelling reason is that it is the morally right thing to do. Plurality, equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination are the foundations upon which the University--and indeed, our nation-- are built.

But there are other reasons:

 n America of the 21st century will be a nation without a dominant ethnic majority. It will be truly pluralistic. It is clear that our academic institutions must change rapidly and profoundly to serve this increasingly diverse society.

n There is another reason why diversity is essential. Unless we draw upon a vast diversity of people and ideas, we cannot hope to generate the intellectual and social vitality we need to respond to a world characterized by great change. Only with a multiplicity of approaches, opinions and ways of seeing can we hope to solve the problems we face.

Hence at Michigan we believe--indeed, we are absolutely convinced--that diversity and excellence are not only mutually compatible but mutually reinforcing objectives. We draw great strength from our extraordinary pluralism.

At Michigan we are working diligently to create a welcoming community, encouraging respect for diversity in all of the characteristics that can be used to describe humankind:

age

race

ethnicity

nationality

gender

religious belief

sexual orientation

political beliefs
economic background
geographical background.

Hence we must move in two directions at once. While we must celebrate differences between people, we must also make every effort to find common grounds around which to unite. The multicolored skein that is Michigan must be woven together, becoming a tapestry, with each thread retaining its unique character.

I don't know if we can make the dream of the Michigan Mandate a reality during my presidency. I know that we will try. Of course, I also know that we will sometimes fail. We will take the wrong turn, stumble, lose our way at times, become confused. It is clear that we do not have all the answers. There is an old saying among engineers: If you never fail, you just haven't set your goals high enough. So a few missteps or detours won't bother me, as long as we hold to our basic ideals and direction. What will not change or falter is my personal determination to lead the University in a direction that serves all the people of our society. Of course, I know that our University can't accomplish its mandate alone. We are determined to do our part, but we also need your help, your support, and your understanding. And we ask you to join with us and others

throughout this state in a commitment to provide the best possible education for every child, for every citizen--and a commitment to create the models of multicultural communities so necessary for the new century which lies ahead.

In years to come I hope our children can look back with pride and gratitude and say that in this time and at this place, the University of Michigan, the people of Michigan, took a stand. They came together and worked together to build a new model of a learning community that thrives on the glorious and unique differences of our human heritage, which uses its common sense of values and objectives to bind itself together.

I hope that we can say that we made a difference, that together we became a mighty force for change.

Nothing we do in our lives is more important than this.

Thank you very much.