

October 16, 1989

Dear Michigan Student:

Welcome to the new academic year! I expect that your first weeks have been times of great excitement and challenge as you move into your housing and adjust to the demands of your new courses--not to mention experiencing the prime-time drama of the Michigan victories over UCLA and Michigan State! Now that you are settled in, it seems appropriate to share some reflections with you once again about the special nature of life in this exceptional academic community we know as the University of Michigan. And in addition, I am writing to seek your help on a matter of great importance both to your University and to our country.

You are being educated during one of the most challenging periods in history, a time of great change in our society, our nation, our world. Through changing demographics and immigration, America is rapidly becoming a multi-cultural society, with a cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity that is unique in our history--at the same time as we become ever more interdependent with other nations, other peoples, and other cultures. It is clear that as future citizens and leaders of this richly diverse, knowledge-intensive, world nation that will be the United States of the 21st century, you must seek to learn not simply to tolerate and respect, but to seek out, work together with, and understand peoples of many different backgrounds, races, cultures, and nationalities.

To respond to this challenge, the University has embarked on an important mission known as the **Michigan Mandate**, which has two objectives: i) to reflect the growing diversity of our nation and the world in the composition of our students, faculty, and staff, and ii) to build a model of a multi-cultural community which values, respects, and draws its strength from the rich diversity of peoples of different races, cultures, religions, nationalities, and beliefs. We are making real progress toward the first of these objectives. Within the past few weeks we have learned our efforts to attract a more diverse student body are paying off. We have seen substantial increases in the enrollments of **all** underrepresented groups among our students this past year--African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Native American--bringing total enrollments from these groups to 5,454 students, 16.7 percent of our student body, which is the highest in our history. In addition, we have attracted to Michigan over 3,000 international students from every part of the globe, students who bring to Ann Arbor both their talents and their rich cultural backgrounds to share with us.

During the past two years we have made dramatic progress on other fronts. For example, we have been successful in increasing the diversity among our faculty, with the addition of forty new African American faculty (a 35 percent increase) and eleven Hispanic American faculty (a 120 percent increase). And most of our graduate and professional school programs now lead the nation in the diversity of their student bodies. Most significant for our longer term success, we are making major investments in school outreach to provide educational opportunity for students in primary and secondary levels, and we are supporting students in graduate school to increase the number of minorities who will eventually become faculty members for America's colleges and universities.

Yet, representation is only the first challenge of the Michigan Mandate. The second great challenge is to build an environment of mutual understanding and sensitivity on this campus that not only tolerates diversity, but moreover seeks it and supports it as one of our most cherished characteristics. And that is where you come in!

As we become more diverse as a University community, it becomes increasingly important that we resist the great pressures of separatism, fear, and bigotry that push us apart. Michigan is not a "DI"-versity--it is a "UNI"-versity. Hence our task is to learn how to weave together our goals of diversity and unity in a way that strengthens our fundamental objective of providing an outstanding learning opportunity for every member of our community.

I realize this is not easy. Most of us have grown up and gone to school with people much like ourselves. Because of the homogeneity of our home communities, many of us do not have the chance to know people of different backgrounds and experiences until we come to college. As one who faced the trauma of attending a "stuffy" Eastern college after growing up in a small Missouri farm town, I know all too well the apprehensions that can arise when encountering different cultures for the first time. And, of course, this "cultural shock" can be true for all people from all groups--for small town students from the UP or those from the cities; for Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, German Americans, or Polish Americans; for Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims; and particularly for those international students among us.

We all feel intimidated from time to time by differences. Yet we must learn to overcome this fear. The skill of relating and valuing multi-cultural diversity will be key to your future in an increasingly diverse society. Indeed, in the pluralistic and internationalized America of the near future, your ability to work effectively with peoples of different beliefs, nationalities, cultures, and ethnicities will be one of the most highly prized and rewarded skills in society. Further, through these skills, you will learn and be enriched by people who are different from yourselves.

Of course, in any community as large and diverse as this University, there will always be those who fail to respect others. Unfortunately at Michigan, just as throughout American society, and sadly throughout much of human society, we continue to see too many examples of discrimination, bigotry, and racism. Indeed, in our efforts to minimize these acts, we have developed policies to sanction anti-social behavior such as harassment and discriminatory acts. Yet we know we cannot legislate and regulate behavior and attitudes in a way that brings true change in individual behavior or in the campus climate. The only rule that will truly work is "the Golden Rule": Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!

A sense of community is a fragile thing. It can be shattered by hostility, separation and polarization of people. If that happens, we will all suffer--your education will suffer. So I appeal to each of you to do your part to build a greater sense of community and civility on this campus. And if you try and fail the first time, reach out to others and try again! Your commitment to working to improve our community will be critical to this University, just as it will be critical to your education.

Let me close with one final observation: With each passing day, I become more convinced that Michigan is really a very special place. It is one of only a handful of universities capable of truly changing not only higher education, but indeed the nation and the world. Further, as students at this University, you have joined a long line of maize-and-blue graduates who have provided leadership for the nation and the world. Hence, I hope that you will join with us in preparing for that life of leadership now, by committing yourself to building the spirit of ***diversity and unity*** that will be the key to the quality of the education you receive and the key to the future of our University and our country.

My best wishes for the year ahead! And GO-BLUE!!!

Sincerely,

James J. Duderstadt

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