

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, Board of Regents

FROM: James J. Duderstadt

DATE: August 27, 1991

SUBJECT: A Self-Evaluation of My Role as President and an Assessment of President-Board-Executive Officer Interactions

In earlier memoranda, I provided both my assessment of the state of the University and the quality of leadership provided by the University Executive Officers and Deans. It seems useful to extend this exercise to a self-evaluation of my own role as President and my assessment of the interactions between the President, the Board, and the Executive Officers. Clearly this memo can serve as the basis for a more thorough discussion in the fall.

1. An Evaluation of President/Board/EO Interactions

It is clear that strong channels of communication between the Board, the President, and other Executive Officers play an essential role in building the level of trust and teamwork necessary for University leadership. To this end, I have asked the Executive Officers to provide both their own assessment of Board/President/EO interactions and to make recommendations aimed at improving still further this critical relationship. The comments below are drawn both from this Executive Officer input and my own observations:

1. It is our sense that communication between the Board, the President and the Executive Officers has improved significantly over the past year. Key in this effort has been the effort to provide the Board and Officers with more opportunity to discuss important strategic issues together long before actual decisions are made. Important as well are a broad array of tools to keep the Board better informed, including

my monthly reports; luncheon and dinner discussions with senior executive officers; occasional retreat-type events on major strategic issues; FAXes and E-mail, and lots of one-on-one interactions. In this regard, it is also important to recognize that the "management

committee" of the University--Gil Whitaker, Farris Womack, Dick Kennedy, and I--work as a very closely knit team and tend to share Board communication responsibilities. In communicating an issue to any one of us, you can usually be assured of communicating the matter to the full team.

2. We also believe the Board has worked quite hard to avoid being drawn into partisan politics. Board members have frequently set aside deeply held personal convictions in their efforts to work together to best advance the interests of the University. We have also sensed a real effort on the part of Board members to treat one another with the respect and trust that these demanding and significant roles require.
3. While most Board members are quite good about controlling the number of personal inquiries or requests they make of University officers and staff, there continues to be some overload from time to time. As I have noted, the leadership and management of an institution of this complexity requires not only great skill and effort, but all-consuming time commitments as well. As officers reporting to the Board, we feel obliged to respond in a timely fashion to all Board requests. But when the requests reflecting the personal interests and agendas of Board members become too numerous, they can begin to affect the capacity of the officers to deal with University matters and eventually push us into a gridlock situation in which there is inadequate time to devote attention to more urgent University priorities.
4. It is our belief that we could benefit from more time for the Board and the Executive Officers to discuss together long-range planning issues such as:
 - i) the changing nature of Michigan as a "public" university
 - ii) the learning environment and undergraduate education
 - iii) student behavior and discipline policies
 - iv) infrastructure challenges (particularly facilities)

This would provide the Board both with more opportunity to become actively involved in policy development as well as the time to build

consensus on key issues facing the University.

To this end, we wish to make two suggestions: First, we would like to make more use of the late Thursday morning and luncheon sessions to engage in such planning discussions involving both Regents and Executive Officers. Second, as we finish the renovation of the guest rooms in Inglis House in late fall, we would like to encourage out-of-town Regents to stay in Inglis House on Thursday night so that we can

have more opportunity for Regent discussion both at the Thursday evening dinner and the breakfast with the President on Friday morning.

5. A final comment on Board activities: While the primary responsibilities of the Board involve internal University policy matters, it is also the case that the Board can and should play critical roles in the external agenda of the University. In this regard, we hope to see members of the Board playing more active roles in the state political arena (since, after all, each of you were elected through a partisan political process). We intend to look for opportunities for such political involvement in the months ahead. So too, we expect the Board to play a leadership role in the upcoming Campaign for Michigan. Tom Roach will be working with each of you in the months ahead to explore possibilities for such participation in the Campaign.

2. A Self-Evaluation of My Role As President

The role of president at the University of Michigan has many facets, combining as it does the responsibilities of a university system president, a campus chancellor, a corporate CEO, a national spokesperson for higher education, a politician, a fund-raiser, a cheerleader...and less enjoyable roles as a lay psychiatrist for frustrated faculty and staff, a media personality, and a public "target" for frustrated activist groups with various special interest agendas. Fortunately, it also involves the responsibilities of a teacher, educating those both on and off campus about the nature of this remarkable institution.

Of course, each University president will define in a unique way the role most appropriate for the particular times faced by the University--and consistent with particular skills of the individual. In my case, I believe my most important role is to provide strategic leadership for the University during the 1990s--that is, to provide the vision, the energy, and the sense of excitement necessary to propel and guide the University of Michigan into the next century. I do not see my role as one of tactical leadership, responsible for making the broad array of day-to-day decisions characterizing an institution of this complexity (although I always admit a personal character flaw in allowing myself to be drawn into such

micromanagement from time to time!).

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