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Dear Colleagues:

I will leave the presidency at the end of this month, and I write to you from this office for the last time to share with you some of my concerns for the future of our own and other leading research universities and to describe my plans for addressing some of these issues as I return to the faculty. I invite your interest and engagement in these new initiatives. I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have given so much help and support to Anne and me over the last eight years.

First, let me focus on the challenges I see ahead for us both as an institution and as individuals who have invested our lives in the furtherance of learning. I believe our country is at the brink of a profoundly important debate about the future of higher education in America. It is impossible to predict the outcome at this point. But it is clear that the extraordinarily productive partnership that research universities have built with federal and state government and our society is unlikely to continue on the same terms and conditions we have enjoyed since World War II.

Criticism of universities has been building for some time, and it comes from many directions both within and outside the academy. We are all familiar with its recent themes. The values of the academy are challenged--from scholarly ethics to affirmative action to political correctness. Our commitment to teaching is questioned and so is our ability to teach well. Faculty tenure is under serious attack. The quality and relevance of scholarly research is in doubt. Tuition is protested. I don't need to go on . . . .

Until recently, this criticism of higher education has been diffuse and sporadic, but it is gaining force and direction. Some of this may be the price of success. We would not warrant such scrutiny and questioning if our role in society had not become so significant. More and more citizens and politicians have a stake in what we do and how we do it, and we are more publicly accountable today.

We have made significant progress during the past decade in addressing many of the issues being raised by our critics. We are improving undergraduate education; fostering interdisciplinary research and social importance; investing in technology to support teaching, research, and service; raising more than a billion dollars of private support, cutting costs and streamlining administration to free money for our basic mission; rebuilding our physical plant; and improving our communication with significant

constituents. Our faculty and student body are outstanding, and the ratings of our academic programs are the best ever.

Thanks to your efforts, in the past decade we have reinforced our foundation; refined our mission; improved the quality of teaching, research, and service; and refocused our energies on those things most central to our purpose. We have ventured further and made fundamental changes through such initiatives as the Michigan Mandate, the Michigan Agenda for Women, international initiatives, and technological infrastructure. All of these lay the groundwork for far-reaching institutional change in the years ahead.

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We will need our hard-won strength and stability in the years ahead. I am convinced it will be a time during which academia will face a more fundamental questioning. Make no mistake, the social compact that created and shaped research universities and bound us so closely to our society is up for re-negotiation. Politicians, pundits, and the public increasingly turn their attention to us. No question will be out of bounds: What is our purpose? What are we to teach, how are we to teach it, how are we to deliver teaching? Who teaches under what terms? Who measures quality and what measures are applied? Who pays for education and research? Who benefits? Who controls and how? What and how much public service is part of the mission? What are appropriate alliances, partnerships, sponsorships?

Some of the most significant pressures for change in public universities are driven by a converging political agenda at every level. The goals are to limit educational costs even at the expense of quality, to make education even more widely available, to draw back from the national commitment to basic research support, and to accelerate structural transformation through applications of information technology.

For a thousand years and more, change in universities has proceeded in slow, linear, incremental, evolutionary steps--improve, expand, contract, reform--but without altering the fundamental institutional mission, approach, or structure. We no longer can maintain this pace of change or contain its scope.

On the contrary, the world-wide shift to a knowledge-based society is transforming all our institutions. Too many among us complacently assume that if we bide our time we can emerge untouched. They are wrong. Every one of us in higher education is challenged to re-envision what we do and how we do it. We will need to question everything and to experiment with radical solutions. If we do not lead in re-inventing our mission and structures, we will see the role of universities marginalized and our values compromised as the forces of change (and the multitude of competitors they generate) overtake us.

As the flagship of public higher education in America, Michigan has a responsibility to help show the way to change. Our voice must be clearly heard in the public forum of ideas.

This brings me to my plans for the next few years, which I would like to share with you. The time has come for me to trade rhetoric for action--a shift much more in keeping with my disposition and one for which my experience as president lends a sense of urgency.

With the title of *President Emeritus and University Professor of Science and Engineering*, I will have a University-wide faculty appointment that will allow me to teach and conduct research in any of our academic programs. Of course, Anne and I will continue to be involved in a variety of roles associated with institutional advancement such as fund-raising and government relations. However, I also have agreed to serve in several additional roles in the months ahead.

This summer I will be launching a small research institute to explore the future of higher education. This center, known as the Millennium Project, will draw together scholars and students both from our campus and beyond to generate possible paradigms of the American university of the twenty-first century--or better yet, the Third Millennium.

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While the Millennium Project will explore a number of unique and radical visions of future universities, it will not simply be a think tank. It will be an experimental laboratory. It is our intent to use the center to develop working models or prototypes of future university paradigms. Like the famous Lockheed Skunkworks, every so often the hanger doors of the Millennium Project will slide back and something really weird will be wheeled out and flown away.

The Millennium Project will be located in the extraordinary environment provided by our new Media Union, a state-of-the-art facility for exploring the creative possibilities and impact of information technology on the disciplines and professions. To quote the prospectus for this complex:

“Our new Media Union merges the creative aspects of disciplines across the entire campus, ranging from art, psychology, and architecture, to engineering, philosophy and biology. Inventive scholars will come together with powerful resources, entering a free-wheeling space where extraordinary people can do exceptional things. Michigan’s portal to the rest of the world, the Media Union will reach out to the huge storehouses of information growing daily on the Web, while drawing national and international scholars and students into our campus conversations. New information technology will create a “virtual” community of thinkers, allowing face-to-face dialogue and collaboration across thousands of miles.”

Or, as succinctly put by Dean Paul Boylan, “We are creating an environment where students and faculty can dream and then act on their dreams.”

The executive officers and the North Campus deans have requested that I also serve as “chief scientist”--or perhaps more appropriately “executive producer” of the Media Union (the title “The Wizard of MU” has also been suggested . . .). While others will provide the ongoing direction for the technical support and operation of the facility, it will be my role, joined by my colleagues in the Millennium Project, to provide some of the intellectual momentum for this exciting new resource.

I have also agreed to work closely with Doug Van Houweling and his colleagues on a number of projects associated with our growing efforts in academic outreach. These include developing so-called “virtual” or cyberspace universities at the state, national, and international level; exploring new methods for the delivery of educational services such as multimedia; and designing and launching a major new academy for the education of future academic leaders.

My colleagues and I encourage you to take part in these programs. We hope to offer you a platform and a fault-tolerant environment for the testing of creative innovations for preserving, creating, and delivering knowledge. We hope to be a catalyst for change by enabling you to ask any question, try any method, and challenge any institutional rigidity. I can't predict where this adventure will take us; I can promise an exciting journey.

Of course, as a University faculty member, I gladly intend to resume my career as a teacher and a scholar. While fifteen years as an academic administrator have taken

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their toll on my career as a theoretical physicist--and destroyed a significant fraction of my mental RAM--I do intend to resume some of my old interests in fields such as statistical physics, nuclear systems analysis, and computer simulation. My experience as a member and chair of the National Science Board has provided an important perspective of the evolution of science in America, and I intend to develop and teach a course on this subject in the year ahead. I will also be leading a research seminar on strategic issues in higher education as a component of the Millennium Project in the fall term. Finally, I have been so outspoken about my belief that the classroom form of pedagogy characterizing education during the twentieth century is becoming obsolete that I feel obliged to develop and demonstrate some alternatives for undergraduates.

On a professional level, I will continue to be actively involved in national science policy through the National Science Board, the National Academies, and other national bodies. I will remain active in a broad array of groups and projects concerned with higher education. And, I hope my writing activity will resume the level it was at prior to my sentencing to academic administration.

I am intensely proud of what we have achieved together during the past eight years. Michigan today is more intellectually productive, culturally richer, more efficient, and more fiscally sound than it has ever been. This gives us a solid and secure foundation to build the University's future as the leading university in America and the world. Faculty, students, and staff have risen to the challenge set in 1988. This indicates that when we keep our collective eye on a vision, we can make it a reality.

It is my great good fortune now to turn over the reins of leadership of the University to my friend and colleague, Homer Neal. I know Michigan will flourish under his leadership. My own experience demonstrates that he has a great wealth of talent, good will, and dedication to draw from in our faculty, students, staff, and Regents as well as the unstinting support of Michigan's citizens and our extended alumni family. Michigan is truly blessed by its people and their tradition of excellence.

Finally, I want to thank you all once again. Anne and I have been honored to serve this University that we love so deeply. We are more grateful than I can ever say for all your help and support in these years. We remain fiercely loyal and dedicated to Michigan. We look forward to working with you in the future and to continuing to do everything in our power to keep this one of the finest universities in the world.

Go Blue!

Sincerely,

James J. Duderstadt