

Diversity

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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.

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”. This aspiration contrasted sharply with the goals of the nation's earliest colleges which traditionally served only the elite.

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.

Yet despite these efforts, it had become obvious by the end of the 1980s that the University had made inadequate progress in its goal to reflect the rich diversity of our nation and our world among its faculty, students and staff. Simply providing access to our institutions was not sufficient to provide full opportunity for those groups which continued to suffer from social, cultural, and economic discrimination in our society.

We knew we had to do more. We also knew that the University would have to change dramatically if it were to remain faithful to its century-old commitment of making education available to all people.

Seven years ago the U-M launched a strategic initiative we named the Michigan Mandate, designed to change the institution in profound ways to better enable it to serve a changing nation and a changing world. The Michigan Mandate reflects our commitment to make the University of Michigan a national and world academic leader in the racial and ethnic diversity of our faculty, students and staff. It is a plan to link academic excellence and social diversity.

The Michigan Mandate has become a model nationwide for institutions of higher education who are working to increase diversity on their campuses. Let me give you some highlights of the impact of this important effort:

1. Today, in every degree program, at every level, for every minority ethnic group, we currently enjoy the highest enrollments in our history.
2. Currently we enroll 7,927 students of color, over 24% of our student body (and 27% of this year's freshman class)--an increase of over 60% over the past seven years.

3. African American enrollments have risen also risen over 60% to 2,715, bringing their enrollment to 8.5% of our student body. So too, enrollments of Latino students increased to 1,533 (4.7%); and Native American at 258 (1%).
4. Our graduation rates for African American students have risen to 70%, the highest for any public university in the nation--indeed, higher than the graduation rates for white students at most public universities.
5. Since the beginning of the Michigan Mandate we have added over 100 new African American faculty, roughly doubling their number. And again, their quality is evidenced by the fact that they are achieving tenure at a rate of over 85%.
6. More generally, the representation of faculty of color has now risen to 13%.
7. Since the University of Michigan ranks among as the leading source of doctorates in the nation, it plays a key role in producing the next generation of faculty for American universities. Hence the importance of our commitment to dramatically expand the number of graduate fellowships we provided for underrepresented minorities, doubling these to over 600, the largest commitment of any university in America.
8. So, too, many of our professional schools have become national leaders in their diversity, including our schools of Business, Law, Medicine, and Engineering.

Even as the Michigan Mandate gained momentum and our University began to change, we launched other strategic efforts aimed both at enhancing our diversity and achieving social equity and justice.

A year ago we launched the Michigan Agenda for Women, aimed at making the University a national leader in overcoming gender discrimination and providing full opportunities for women students, faculty, and staff in all aspects of the

University. Although this major initiative is still in its early stages, thus far we have:

1. Allocated resources to establish a number of new faculty lines for senior women faculty (6 thus far...)
2. Overhauled our policies with respect to dependent care, family leave, and flexibility in the workplace.
3. Launched a major new task force aimed at improving campus safety and eliminating violence against women.
4. Made a series of appointments of women in key leadership positions, including deans and executive officers.
5. Institute for Study of Women and Gender
6. And next year Michigan will become the first major university in America to commit sufficient resources to achieve true gender equity in intercollegiate athletics, providing the same number of varsity opportunities for women as we do for men (50% - 50%).

We have moved ahead in some other areas that deserve mention:

1. Our Regents have expanded their nondiscrimination policies to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, and last year we extended staff benefits and housing opportunities to same-sex couples.
2. We are moving rapidly to achieve greater international diversity among our people and our programs. For example, within the past two years we have opened major new instructional centers in Hong Kong, Seoul, and Paris, and we expect to open a similar program in London this fall.

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

Let me give you a case study: The extraordinary contributions made to the University by Jewish faculty, staff, and students.

Today we estimate that about one-fifth of the students at the University of Michigan--Ann Arbor are Jewish--over 7,000 students, among the largest Jewish student enrollments of any university in America.

The Jewish experience at the U-M is a model of multiculturalism; Michigan has provided a welcoming home for Jewish students at least since the 1920s and

1930s – at a time when many other peer institutions had not yet opened their doors to Jewish students.

Much earlier than that some of our departments were training future faculty members who also happened to be Jewish. Moses Gomberg, an internationally known chemist, graduated from the U-M in and served as chairman of the Department of Chemistry.

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.

As the University becomes more multicultural, we see an increasing number of student groups organizing to preserve and share their ethnic and cultural traditions with the rest of the campus. Some think of multiculturalism as a melting pot where group identity is lost or as Balkanization into separate groups whose members refuse to mingle. It doesn't have to be that way. Groups can enhance their own cultural identity while inviting others to share in their history and traditions.

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.