

## **COMU Retreat**

**May 24, 1994**

**Paton Center - Business School**

**8:30 am**

### **Welcoming Remarks**

Good morning and welcome to our "Retreat on the Multicultural University."

Before we begin, I would like to recognize the efforts of the Council on a Multicultural University. This group has worked hard to promote multiculturalism at Michigan over the past four years, and the entire university community benefits from your actions.

I appreciate the dedication you have shown, and I value your wise counsel.

Today we are here to reaffirm our commitment to a multicultural university. This commitment continues to be a high priority of my presidency, and I am determined to continue moving forward.

The University of Michigan has long been among the most faithful realizations of the Jeffersonian concept of a public university. It has been

responsible for and responsive to the needs of the people who founded and supported it, even as it sought to achieve quality equal to that of the most distinguished private institutions.

Throughout its long history, perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the University has been its commitment, as stated by President Angell, to provide "an uncommon education for the common man." This aspiration--to provide an education of the highest quality to all who had the ability to succeed and the will to achieve--stood in sharp contrast to the role of the nation's earliest eastern colleges, which traditionally served the elite and specific religious groups.

Yet, despite the degree to which the University eventually broadened its commitment to encompass gender, race, religious belief, and nationality, it has faced serious obstacles to accomplishing this goal. Many of these groups suffered from social, cultural, and economic discrimination. Simply opening doors--providing access--was not enough to enable them to take advantage of the educational opportunities of the University.

Over the past two decades, the University of Michigan has taken a number of steps designed to better enable underrepresented groups to participate more fully into the life of the institution. In the early 1980s major resources were committed to help support their presence in the University. Administrative structures were established to support affirmative action and equal opportunity, and an array of recruiting and retention programs were developed.

Despite these efforts, the University made little progress in its goal to reflect the rich diversity of our population among its faculty, students, and staff. Furthermore, underrepresented people experienced difficulty in achieving

success in the face of a University (and national) culture still largely shaped by a white, male majority.

To address this challenge, the University of Michigan transformed itself five years ago to bring all racial and ethnic groups more fully into the life of the University. This process of transformation was guided by a strategic plan known as The Michigan Mandate. The fundamental vision was that the University of Michigan would become a leader known for the racial and ethnic diversity of its faculty, students, and staff; a leader in creating a multicultural community that would be capable of serving as a model for higher education and a model for society-at-large. We were convinced that our capacity to serve our state, our nation, and the world would depend on our capacity to reflect the strengths, perspectives, talents, and experiences of all peoples--all of America's rich diversity of races, cultures, and nationalities--in everything that we do. To be sure, many of the most formidable challenges to this vision remain. Yet the University has made remarkable progress, and its commitment to the goals of the Michigan Mandate have continued to intensify.

Drawing upon the experience gained through the Michigan Mandate, we believe it is time for the University to launch a complementary and parallel effort to address the concerns of another group that has all too frequently been deprived of the opportunity to participate fully in our society and our institution: women. Gender equity, while accepted as an important principle by most, nevertheless remains an elusive goal. The University simply has not made adequate progress toward its obligation of providing full participation and opportunity for women. The time has come to develop and execute a series of strategic actions aimed not only at gender equity, but moreover at creating an institution capable of fostering the success of women students, faculty, and staff. It is time to develop The Michigan Agenda for Women.

The Michigan Agenda for Women is an inclusive plan which augments the Michigan Mandate. There has been some concern that one initiative will take precedence over the other, but this is simply not going to happen. The two are interconnected, and we will work to achieve the goals of both initiatives as we move forward.

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

The reasons are simple:

First and foremost, it is the morally right thing to do. Plurality, equality of opportunity, and freedom from discrimination are the foundations upon which the University is built. It is more than what we do; it is what we must be.

Second, we are convinced that the University cannot achieve excellence in teaching and scholarship without also reflecting the growing diversity of intellectual perspectives and experiences of America and the world in every aspect of our campus community.

Third, to serve America's rapidly changing population, institutions such as the University of Michigan must provide the educated people and ideas needed by our society to build unity out of diversity. America is rapidly evolving into one of the most diverse, multicultural societies.

Fourth, if we do not draw on a vast diversity of people and ideas, we cannot hope to generate the excitement and vitality we need to respond to a world characterized by great change. Without a population that mirrors that of the world, we cannot hope to educate our students to be citizens of the world.

In order to be successful, every facet of the University--from teaching to research to service--must reflect this diversity.

I know that COMU has done some work in several areas thus far this year, and I would like to comment briefly on your progress.

One of the items for discussion today is COMU's proposed recommendation that the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic and Multicultural Affairs establish a Multicultural Teaching and Learning Resource Center within the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching.

I support your efforts to increase the focus on multicultural teaching and the multicultural classroom, and I look forward to the discussion this morning.

And I know that COMU has been working to counter the view that diversity detracts from excellence. As we convene this meeting here at the Business School, we remember some of what Joe White has said on this issue, calling it a “hard-wired connection between excellence and diversity.”

In the past, universities have often made the assumption that their students were basically the same, had the same needs, the same aptitudes, the same goals. The increasing diversity of our campus communities has forced us to acknowledge that there has always been more diversity on campus than we ever accommodated.

When we consider the learning process, we realize that by its very nature, scholarship challenges prevailing truths and myths. Scholarship will only flourish at Michigan if we remain open to new or opposing ideas and evaluate them on their merits.

Our losses are incalculable when we restrict ourselves to a single world view. If we do not make room for those who see the world differently, then we can

never gain from their insights. Multiculturalism means that we respect and value differences, and that we learn from them.

We cannot sustain the distinction and merit of the University of Michigan in a pluralistic society without diversity and openness to new perspectives and experiences. I firmly believe that we draw strength from diversity. My background as a scientist leads me to recall the tenet that the broader and more diverse the population, the more successfully it is able to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. Excellence and diversity are not only mutually compatible, they are mutually reinforcing objectives.

COMU has also recommended additional University support for multicultural research. Such research must be encouraged, fairly reviewed, and appropriately rewarded.

Finally, COMU has emphasized the importance of the broader issue of climate and societal danger signals.

I appreciate the careful review of the Michigan Mandate submitted to me in December by COMU, as well as the additional input on issues including the teaching and learning climate, campus climate, and community climate.

At a time when we face a lot of “bad news,”

- about the decrease in doctorates awarded to minority students, particularly African-Americans in science and engineering fields

- about the increased violence in our nation and the number of young minority males being killed or imprisoned

- about the breakdown of neighborhoods and community spirit; about polarity and ethnocentrism.....

there is also some “good news” at this University, thanks to the work of individuals such as yourselves

- a continuing increase in the number of students and the number of faculty from underrepresented groups

- the success of the Program in Intergroup Relations, the 21st Century Program, the Comprehensive Studies Program, for example

- the leadership provided by minority peer advisors and minority peer advisor assistants in the residence halls.

- the linkages we are building with the broader community, including Ann Arbor and the metropolitan Detroit.

We know that there is a great deal of work ahead of us, in so many areas of this institution. It will be hard work, yet it won't be impossible. We have set

high goals for this University, for each of you and for all members of the Michigan community, because nothing we do is more important than meeting these goals.

Your presence at today's retreat reflects your concern and your willingness to work toward making multiculturalism a permanent part of Michigan's educational mission. On behalf of the entire University, I thank you for your commitment and I look forward to participating with you in what promises to be an excellent opportunity for progress.

**May 20, 1994**