

Corporate Remarks 2.0

Personal Introduction

As many of you know, I am a scientist by training and background...indeed, I am perhaps the worst of all types of scientists...a burned-out theoretical physicist.

I must also confess I tend to be one of those people who lives more in the future than in the present or the past...

My life as a scientist and engineer has been spent working on futuristic areas such as:

- i) Nuclear rocket propulsion
- ii) Laser-driven thermonuclear fusion
- iii) Supercomputers
- iv) robotics and artificial intelligence

Hence, perhaps it is natural that as we enter the 1990s, I should find myself looking once again to the future, facing the challenge of helping to build a University able to serve our state and our nation in the 21st Century.

As they say in the jargon of planning, I've been spending a good deal of time "futuring"...gazing into the crystal ball in an effort to determine just where our university should head in the years to come.

And as I look to the future, I have sensed the ever accelerating pace of change in our society, our nation, the world.

Yet I also fear that few have realized the enormous changes that our society is going through as it approaches the 21st Century.

In a very real sense, we are entering a new age... what has been termed, an "age of knowledge", in which the key strategic resource will become educated people and their ideas...

Over the years, I have become increasingly convinced that education -- or more generally, the development of human capital -- will become the dominant issue for our state, just as it will be for our nation, in the 1990s and beyond.

Themes of Change

Over the past year I have suggested that America today is undergoing profound change that will have major implications for higher education...

I have focused in particular on three classes of change:

i) It will be future in which our nation becomes a truly multicultural society, with a cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity that will be extraordinary in our history

In which those groups we refer to today as minorities will become the majority population of our nation in the century ahead...

In which women take their rightful place as leaders of America...

ii) It will be a future in which America will become "internationalized"... in which every one of our activities must be viewed within the broader context of participation in the global community...

Whether through travel and communication, the arts and culture, the internationalization of commerce, capital, and labor, we will become increasingly interdependent on other nations and other peoples.

Further, as the destination of roughly half the world's immigrants, the United States is rapidly becoming a "world nation"

with not simply economic and political but strong ethnic ties to all parts of the globe.

iii) The Age of Knowledge

But there are even more profound changes underway...

Looking back over history, one can identify certain abrupt changes, discontinuities, in the nature, the very fabric of our civilization...

The Renaissance, the Age of Discovery, the Industrial Revolution

There are many who contend that our society is once again undergoing such a dramatic shift in fundamental perspective and structure.

Today we are evolving rapidly to a new post-industrial, knowledge-based society, just as a century ago our agrarian society evolved through the Industrial Revolution.

In a sense, we are entering a new age, an age of knowledge,

in which the key strategic resource necessary for our prosperity, security, and social well-being has become knowledge--educated people and their ideas.

Concerns...

Needless to say, these same challenges of pluralism, of globalization, and of this age of knowledge that is our future will pose great challenges and demand similar changes in our state.

Indeed, I am personally convinced that our nation faces a very unusual period of challenge in the decade ahead...a watershed, in a sense, from which we can either emerge as a world leader...or as an also run...an economic backwater

My central theme is that education, broadly defined, will be the pivotal issue in determining which of these two alternative futures will be America's.

Indeed, I am absolutely convinced that the dominant issue of the 1990s will be the development of our human resources.

Previous economic transformations were closely associated with major public investment in infrastructure such as railroads, canals, electric networks, and highways. In the coming economic transition, an equivalent infrastructure will be an educated population.

Hence the challenge before higher education is the challenge before America...

And the actions we must take...

...and the investments we must make...

...will clearly determine our capacity to respond to this future...

The Challenge of Change

While it is always hazardous to speculate about the future, there is yet another theme I can predict with some certainty... and that is the challenge of change itself...

We face a future in which permanence and stability become less important than flexibility and creativity... in which the only certainty will be the presence of continual change...

Just as with other institutions in our society, those universities that will thrive will be those that are capable of not only responding to this future of change...

but indeed, have the capacity to relish, stimulate, and manage change.

In a very real sense, the university as we know it today was invented to serve an America of the past...
...a nation characterized by a rather homogeneous, domestic, industrialized society.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that it is time to develop a new model of higher education--- to re-invent the university, if you will--so that it is capable of responding to the needs of the highly pluralistic, knowledge-intensive, world nation that will be the America of the 21st Century.

The UM Heritage

And this is just the challenge I have set before the University of Michigan...the challenge of re-inventing the University for the 21st Century.

And isn't that, after all, also just the heritage of the University of Michigan

Although Michigan was not the first of the state universities, it was the first to free itself of sectarian control and become a true public institution, governed by the people of the state.

From its founding, Michigan was identified with the most progressive forces in American higher education...

In a very real sense, it was our University that developed the paradigm of the public university capable of responding to the needs of a rapidly changing America of the 19th century...
a paradigm that still dominates higher education today.

In a sense, we have been throughout our history the flagship of public higher education in America.

Perhaps it is time that we once again played that role...
re-inventing the nature of the university once again...
...a university capable of educating the citizens and serving the society of not the 20th, but rather the 21st Century.

I believe that the 1990s and beyond can be a time similar to the late 19th century when the University of Michigan was a primary source for much of the innovation and leadership in higher education in this nation.

And what more exciting mission could we have than to accept this challenge by striving to develop a new model of the research university capable of responding to the changing needs of our state and our nation...

The challenge of making the University of Michigan the model for the University of the 21st Century.