

Diversity in Higher Education

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The political climate swirling around Washington these days and sweeping westward from California raises serious questions about our commitment to achieve equity and social justice for all Americans. A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News survey found that two out of three Americans oppose affirmative action. Federal courts are pondering cases that challenge racial preference. At both the federal and state levels, conservative politicians are taking aim at the nation's commitment to civil rights. It is almost as though there is a new form of slash-and-burn politics abroad in our society—characterized by an angry, postmodernist, deconstructionist spirit that aims to reverse past social commitments and destroy existing social institutions—although without any sense of what will replace them.

At a time when some would try to squelch discussion about diversity on our campuses—labeling it as just another example of political correctness—it seems particularly important that we in academe talk openly, with boldness, about the need for more, not less, diversity. Today it is more important than ever, to reaffirm the importance of diversity for our institutions and our society.

Our universities are at important turning points in their histories. The students we are educating today will spend most of their lives in the 21st century. Theirs will be a very different world than the one we have known. Most of us who are leaders and teachers in the university are products of the 20th century. Furthermore, the structure of the American university as we see it today is a product of the 19th century; and, of course, many of its features originated long before that in a far different and distant times and places.

While it is always risky to speculate about the exact shape of things to come, especially in the face of the accelerating pace of change we are experiencing, three themes dominate the future we foresee in 21st century America:

- America is rapidly becoming a truly multicultural society, with a cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity that will be greater than we have ever known before.
- Our nation will be “internationalized” as every aspect of American life becomes ever more dependent on other nations and other peoples. Through immigration, too, we are becoming truly a “world nation,” with ethnic ties to every corner of the globe. Increasingly, all of our activities must be viewed within the broader context of our interdependence in the global community.
- The United States and the world community will rapidly evolve from a resource- and labor-intensive society to a knowledge-intensive society, in which intellectual capital—educated people and their ideas—become the keys to our own and, indeed, world productivity, prosperity, security, and well-being.

We cannot ignore these trends and their profound implications for our society and our universities. Nor should we react to them passively. Rather, we must act directly to determine our own destiny, to make our ideals a reality.

The Michigan Mandate

At Michigan we became convinced a decade ago that our university's capacity to serve our society, our nation, and the world successfully in the challenging times before us would depend in large part on our ability to achieve and sustain a campus community recognized for its racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Indeed, our diversity would become a cornerstone of our efforts to achieve excellence in teaching, research, and service in the years ahead.

To this end, we launched a strategic initiative we named the Michigan Mandate, designed to change the institution in profound ways so that it could more capably serve a changing nation and a changing world and to link academic excellence and social diversity.

More specifically, the Michigan Mandate was based on the following premise:

Embracing and, even more importantly, capitalizing on our racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity will be a critical element of the university's ability to achieve excellence in teaching and research while serving our state, nation, and the world in the years ahead.

The purpose of the Michigan Mandate was to guide our University in creating a community that:

- Supported the aspirations and achievements of all individuals, regardless of race, creed, national origin, or gender;
- Embodied and transmitted those fundamental academic and civic values that must bond us together as a scholarly community and as part of a democratic society;
- Valued, respected, and, indeed, drew its intellectual strength from the rich diversity of peoples of different races, cultures, religions, nationalities, and beliefs.

Of course, planning models for the institutional change necessary to become a genuinely pluralistic, multicultural community are still difficult to find. However, we were fortunate to be able to draw on the expertise of faculty colleagues with experience in other arenas, particularly in the corporate world, where significant cultural changes in the workplace have been achieved, using strategic approaches and techniques. A small group of advisors with first-hand corporate experience was assembled to help forge the first outlines of the Michigan Mandate. This group, nicknamed "the Change Group," conceived this Mandate not as a bureaucratic directive, but as an organic and evolving framework for organizational change that would attract and reflect the active participation of faculty, students, and staff at all levels of the University.

The Change Group recognized early on that the real goal was institutional change. The objective was to develop a plan, a new agenda, a vision of the future of the University of Michigan that would respond more effectively to the imperatives of change characterizing our times.

But it was also recognized at the outset that the strategic plan would really become only a road map. It was intended to set out a direction and point to a destination, but the journey itself would be a long one and much of the landscape through which the University would travel was still to be discovered. As the effort evolved, it attempted to deal with two themes that heretofore had appeared to be incompatible: community and pluralism. The goal of the effort was to strengthen every part of the University community by increasing, acknowledging, learning from, and celebrating the ever-increasing human diversity of the nation and the world.

As president, I believed it important to assume personal responsibility for the design, articulation, and implementation of the plan. Credibility also required that I be held personally accountable for its success or failure

The Rationale

Universities are institutions that are persuaded by commitment of the mind rather than the soul. Hence, it was essential to develop a compelling rationale for why the University must change to better reflect and serve an increasingly diverse society.

We set out the following rationale for the Michigan Mandate:

- 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. It is more than what we do; it is what we must be if we are to call ourselves a truly public University.
- America of the 21st century will be a nation without a dominant ethnic majority. It will be truly pluralistic. To serve America's rapidly changing population, our universities must provide the educated people and ideas needed by our society both to understand and to build unity out of diversity.
- We do not believe a university can achieve excellence in teaching and scholarship unless it also benefits from the varied intellectual perspectives and experiences of America and the world in every aspect of our community.
- Diversity is essential to any university as we approach the new century for a fourth reason. 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.

Diversity and Change

In the midst of lively debate, the scientific community has begun to realize how central diversity can be to the survival of many groups. Homogeneous populations are often much less able to respond to change in their environment. A field of monocultural wheat, for example, can produce explosively under relatively controlled conditions. But it is in great danger from climatic change or new diseases. The wheat has a very limited library of genetic material, giving it few options with which to respond.

Universities, of course, are not fields of wheat; they are much more complex. Yet the analogy in many ways is apt. While we may, in general, be able to control the conditions in a wheat field, this is much less true for a university. In fact, our world today is characterized by a burgeoning complexity and a rapidly increasing rate of change. Perhaps (and I say this advisedly), our society could tolerate singular answers in the past, when we could still imagine that tomorrow would look much like today. But this assumption of the status quo is no longer plausible. As knowledge advances, we uncover new questions we could not have imagined a few years ago. As society evolves, the issues we grapple with shift in unpredictable ways. A solution for one area of the world often turns out to be ineffectual or even harmful in another. Academic areas as different as English and sociology have found their very foundations radically transformed as they attempt to respond to these dilemmas.

For universities to thrive in this age of complexity and change, it is vital that we resist any tendency to eliminate options. Only with a multiplicity of approaches, opinions, and ways of seeing can we hope to solve the problems we face. Universities, more than any other institution in American society, have striven toward a vision of tolerance and intellectual freedom. We must continually struggle to advance this heritage and to become places where a myriad of experiences, cultures, and approaches are valued, preserved, discussed, and embraced.

This need for multiple points of view is easier to establish in the social sciences and the humanities, but these different “ways of seeing” are also critical in the hard sciences.

But diversity alone is not enough. While we must celebrate differences between people, we also must make every effort to find common grounds around which to unite. The multicolored skein that is the modern university must be woven together, becoming a tapestry, with each thread retaining its unique character.

The Approach

The mission and goals of the Michigan Mandate were quite simple:

Philosophy: To recognize that diversity and excellence are complementary and compelling goals for the University and to make a firm commitment to their achievement.

Representation: to commit to the recruitment, support, and success of members of historically underrepresented groups among our students, faculty, staff, and leadership.

Environment: to build on our campus an environment which seeks, nourishes, and sustains diversity and pluralism and in which the dignity and worth of every individual is valued and respected.

Associated with these general goals were more specific objectives:

Faculty recruiting and development: to substantially increase the number of tenure-track faculty in each underrepresented minority group; to increase the success of minority faculty in the achievement of professional fulfillment, promotion, and tenure; to increase the number of underrepresented minority faculty in leadership positions.

Student recruiting achievement and outreach: to achieve increases in the number of entering underrepresented minority students as well as in total number of underrepresented minority enrollment; establish and achieve specific minority enrollment targets in all schools and colleges; increase minority graduation rates; develop new programs to attract back to campus minority students who have withdrawn from our academic programs; to design new programs and strengthen existing outreach programs that have demonstrable impact on the pool of minority applicants to undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs.

Staff recruiting and development: to focus on the achievement of affirmative action goals in all job categories; to increase the number of underrepresented minorities in key University leadership positions; to strengthen support systems and services for minority staff.

Improving the environment for diversity: to foster a cultural and diverse environment; to significantly reduce the number of incidents of racism and prejudice on campus; to increase community-wide commitment to diversity and involvement in diversity initiatives among students, faculty, and staff; to broaden the base of diversity initiatives, for example, by including comparative perspectives drawn from international studies and experiences; to ensure the compatibility of University policies, procedures, and practice with the goal of a multicultural community; to improve communications and interactions with and among all groups; and to provide more opportunities for minorities to communicate their needs and experiences and to contribute directly to the change process.

The Results

The Michigan Mandate has become a model nationwide for institutions of higher education that 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 percent of our student body (and 27 percent of this year's freshman class)—an increase of over 60 percent over the past seven years.
3. African American enrollments also have risen over 60 percent to 2,715, bringing their enrollment to 8.5 percent of our student body. So too, enrollments of Latino students increased to 1,533 (4.7 percent); and Native American at 258 (1 percent).
4. Our graduation rates for African American students have risen to 70 percent, 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 percent.
6. More generally, the representation of faculty of color has now risen to 13 percent.
7. Since the University of Michigan ranks among the leading sources 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.
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. Established the 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.

Seeing Difference Differently

Yet we continue to face great challenges . . .

We must work 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 their ethnic and cultural traditions and to share them 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.

We must move in two directions at once. We all must stop assuming that people from groups different from ours necessarily have the same needs, experiences, and points of view that we do. Yet, at the same time, we must not succumb to the equally pernicious assumption that "they" are all the same. Real barriers, experiences, and culture may be shared by many in a group, but that does not give us permission to treat people as though they conform to some stereotyped image of "white," "gay," or "Latino." We must create a community where various cultures and ethnicity are valued and acknowledged, but where each individual has the opportunity to find her or his own path.

At the same time, we must recognize that not everyone faces the same consequences for their differences. The experience of an Asian American person is not the same as that of an African American person or a white woman or a person with a disability. We cannot forget that issues of difference are inextricably intertwined with issues of power, discrimination, and with the specific histories of groups and of each individual. As we pursue a pluralistic campus, we must remember that equality will require effort, resources, and commitment to both structural change and education. We must learn to see difference differently.

Moving Forward

As we move into the future, it is becoming increasingly clear that the University's excellence and national leadership will be greatly determined by the diversity of our campus community. Different ways of conceptualizing and addressing intellectual issues give new vitality to our education, scholarship, and communal life. Excellence and diversity are not only mutually compatible but mutually reinforcing objectives. We draw great strength from our extraordinary multiplicity.

True diversity means accepting new members not only into our classrooms, but into dialogues about how classrooms are structured and what is taught there. Diversity is not just about "numbers"; it requires profound structural change. As we have learned to be more open to different ways of seeing, we have discovered that there has always been more diversity on campus than we have ever been aware. Many of the new programs that were created to support students of color or women have actually improved the opportunities for success for all students. We will not succeed until all who come here feel a sense of ownership, until the experiences and points of view they bring are reflected in every aspect of our communal life.

We are far more diverse today than we were twenty years ago or even ten years ago. Our commitment has increased our recognition, world-wide, for academic excellence in every field. We cannot know beforehand where this journey will take us. Progress toward plurality will involve many different actors at multiple points in our community. The University is not monolithic and neither is discrimination; both are shifting constantly. We move ahead, knowing we can never simply rest.