

First Presidential Lecture on Academic Values

Introduction:

Good afternoon. I'm Jim Duderstadt. It is my pleasure this afternoon to welcome you to the first lecture in a five-part series on academic values, which we have scheduled throughout this academic year, which marks the 175th anniversary of the University of Michigan.

In planning for the 175th anniversary year, a number of us thought it would be fitting to devote a special lecture series on the general subject of academic values. These values--whether they be freedom of speech, academic freedom, or scientific integrity--have been items of considerable debate over the past few years here at elsewhere on campuses across this country.

But there is another important reason for seeking opportunities to discuss the academic values which bind us together as a community of scholars:

Many have suggested that the 1990s should be
a time in which we re-examine the nature
of the American university.

Indeed, some have even suggested it is a time
to "reinvent" the university to better enable
it to serve a changing world.

Of course, "re-invent" is surely the wrong word...

Few propose that we change our
fundamental missions of teaching and scholarship.

They must always remain the core of the University's activities.

Indeed we must be concerned about
preserving what is most precious and fundamental
about our University and its scholarly life.

Rather I believe our challenge is to adapt
some aspects of what we do
to changing needs and conditions
both within and outside the academy.

Much of what is needed is a rebalancing

where the pendulum has swung too far
to one or another extreme
at the expense of our basic mission and values.

But now we must join together to focus our attention on
our primary endeavors of teaching and scholarship
and attempt to define the fundamental academic
mission of the University in light of the changes occurring
in our internal and external worlds.

And we should remind ourselves that

As institutions, universities are always changing--
probably never more so than in the past fifty years
as the modern public comprehensive research university
that we know today took shape.

Futhermore, while change and renewal will be important themes of
our future, they can only occur upon a foundation
of fundamental institutional values.

Of course, academic institutions usually focus first on
intellectual values...values of the mind....

The seeking of wisdom
Freedom of inquiry
Intellectual integrity
Discipline of the mind
Respect for reasoned conclusions

By focusing on academic values throughout this year, we hope to reflect not
only on the history of this university, and of higher education in America
generally, but also to think ahead, to explore how these values--sometimes
thought to lie at the core of education--will help shape the university in
the future. We have invited five of our distinguished colleagues from
around the university to explore this topic in any way they wish, and this
afternoon we will hear the first of these explorations--from Ejner Jensen,
the chair of the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs.

Before introducing Ejner, let me take just a moment to explain the format of
the presentations. After Ejner speaks, he and I will be joined by three of
our colleagues, who offer their reflections on what we have just heard. We

will then open the session for further comments and questions from the floor. At the close of our formal session, we will adjourn to the Assembly Hall directly behind the amphitheater for a reception, which will of course provide us with more time for informal discussion of the subjects Professor Jensen will raise in his talk.

I'm pleased that we are able to begin this session with a lecture by Ejner Jensen, not only because he is a provocative thinker but also because as chair of SACUA he stands for the strong role the faculty play in forming and transmitting values within the University.

Ejner is chair of SACUA and professor of English. He has written widely on topics as disparate as renaissance drama--his academic speciality--and softball, formerly a major love of his life, until a back injury forced him to retire to the comparative ease of the golf course.

For his address today, Ejner has chosen the topic: "Arresting Change: Visions and Values in the University." Ladies and gentlemen, Professor Ejner Jensen.