

## Parents Orientation

### Welcome to you as parents...

and also as new members of the Michigan family,!!

### Let me also convey a sympathetic understanding

as you participate in one of the most traumatic...c  
experiences of modern American life:

### the great dropoff!!!cb

### For you(see, a couple of years ago

my wife and I went through the same experience as we  
dropped off each of our daughters into that brave,,new world  
that we know as a college education.

Ah, I can still recall many of my thoughts at the time:

- i) How can we possibly fit all of the stuff she wants to  
take into the car...and how can we possibly  
get it out of the car and squeeze into her  
room--particularly when there are three other  
families trying to do the same thing.
- ii) What about a phone...a bank...a laundry...  
Gad, will she ever be clean again...?
- iii) If she can't keep her room straight at home, how  
will she ever survive here without us to keep  
after her...
- iv) How can she ever find her way around here...  
if I can't even find a parking place, how can she  
ever find her classes...

And then there are all of those haunting, more

philosophical questions

Can she stand her roommates...

can they stand her...

Will she be able to survive academically?

And what about boyfriends...

(Actually this was ONE question we soon decided we  
didn't want to know the answer to...)

But somewhere, in all of that confusion of the great dropoff,

I still recall those prophetic words of a wise university  
official...

"You may be losing a child...

but you are gaining a friend..."

Ah, yes...but a VERY, VERY expensive friend...

### Thanks and Congratulations...

Let me begin by thanking you for granting us the privilege  
of teaching and learning with your sons and daughters during  
the years of their college education.

Let me also congratulate you on the extraordinary achievements  
that each of your children have already attained...

This past year we had over 19,000 applications for  
the 4,500 positions in our freshman class.

We therefore had the opportunity to build a class drawn  
from students across the nation with  
extraordinary achievements

...in the classroom...

...in the studio or concert hall...

...on the field...

...as scholars, musicians, artists, athletes...

...as leaders...

...as young people with character, motivation  
and discipline

I can assure you that we regard each and everyone  
of your sons and daughters as someone very special...  
and I must confess that we are already very proud  
of them...

I should also know note that their class, the  
Class of 1992, is academically the  
strongest class in Michigan history...

That's the **good news**...

Now for the **bad news**...

Next year's class will probably be every better...

It's been like that for several years now...

So I'm afraid that the Class of 1992  
can't slow down!

**Despite their obvious academic talents, many...**

most...probably **ALL**...of your son's and daughters will find  
the Michigan experience very challenging...

...through their formal coursework

...mastering the size and complexity of the university

...through athletics or social activities

But, of course, that is what a college education is all  
about...

Not to simply learn facts...or prepare for a profession...

But rather, a college education is a time of challenge  
and discovery, of curiosity and intellectual growth,  
of learning about oneself.

In a sense, the purpose of a college education  
is to learn the art of life...

**Hence, as your children prepare to take those first**

steps down the exciting trail of a college education, I felt it  
appropriate as to pass along a few observations about  
this journey, so that you as parents can better  
gain a better perspective of what we are trying to  
do at Michigan.

**1. Michigan is not a small liberal arts college...it is a  
great research university.**

It is also a very large, complex, and exciting place...

Some parameters of the University

Parameters:

Enrollment: 35,000 (Ann Arbor) (47,000 total)

Faculty: 2,600 (14,000 employees)

Budget: \$1.3 billion

Academic Units

17 Schools and Colleges

Hundreds of research centers, institutes,  
and other types of interdisciplinary  
programs

Mission:

i) Provides instruction, research, service

ii) Spans all intellectual disciplines and  
professional areas

iii) Attempts to conduct programs that rank  
among the nation's best in all areas  
(and succeeds...)

On this campus, we provide one of the most  
incredible intellectual smorgasbords in  
the world--a fascinating cornucopia of  
ideas supported by some of the finest  
facilities in the world -- one of the nation's  
great libraries, museums, laboratories,  
computers, concert halls,  
athletic facilities -- and even more  
important, one of the world's most  
distinguished and dedicated faculties.

Our philosophy is to use these incredible  
resources not simply to teach facts...indeed

students of the ability of your children can learn facts pretty much on your own.

Furthermore, In many fields, the knowledge base is doubling every five years...hence an undergraduate education only serves as the stepping stone to a process of lifelong education

Moreover, save for the most basic information, it is no longer necessary at the college level to commit vast amounts of knowledge to memory. Indeed, we now live in a world where knowledge and information can literally be plucked out of the air...or off your computer terminal.

Hence, of more lasting value are the broadly applicable skills and wide-ranging perspective that is characteristic of a liberal education .

Thus our goal is to expose students to the world's leading scholars, people who are struggling every day to create new knowledge, not simply to relate old content.

Our goal is to teach them methods of inquiry...methods of critical analysis and thought...and beyond that, to expose them to the most fundamental of human values which are essential to our civilization

Our objective is to give them the capacity to learn for themselves...

This can be frustrating at times, but we are convinced... as are the other great research universities of this nation...that students of the quality we are fortunate enough to attract to Michigan will be far better prepared to be leaders of our society through this type of an education.

## **2. From this perspective, it is critical to**

understand that your students will probably be learning as much if not more OUTSIDE the classroom than in it. This University is designed to provide a rich environment of intellectual experiences...

Not just through the wealth of formal instruction we provide, or through the array of cultural, social, athletic activities.

But, I suspect that many students end up learning more from their interaction with other students than from the faculty!

## **3. Importance of diversity to this campus**

UM has made a very deep commitment to the achievement of an environment which seeks, nourishes, and sustains racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity.

We believe it essential to develop an environment of mutual understanding and sensitivity on this campus that not only tolerates diversity, but moreover seeks and embraces it as one of our most cherished characteristics.

There seems little doubt that America of the 21st century will probably be the most pluralistic, multicultural nation on earth...and perhaps in the history of civilization...

Note: It is important to realize here that 21st Century America will NOT be a mixing pot in which all cultures are homogenized into a uniform blend.

Rather, it will be pluralistic...composed of peoples of vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs...peoples who seek to retain their cultural roots...to maintain their differences.

On this campus your sons and daughters will encounter for the first time in their lives the remarkable diversity and richness of peoples of different races, cultures, religions, nationalities, and beliefs.

One of the most important things our students must learn on this campus is to respect others for their differences...as well as their similarities.

As both a microcosm and leader of society at large, we believe the University has a special challenge and responsibility to develop effective models of multicultural, pluralistic communities.

At Michigan we are firmly convinced that the ability of this University to achieve excellence in teaching, research, and service will be determined increasingly by our capacity to achieve and sustain a campus community characterized by its racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity.

We believe that this commitment to diversity is key to the quality and distinction of this University--and to the quality of the education your sons and daughters will receive.

For that reason, it is absolutely paramount that our students, just as our faculty and staff, demonstrate the sensitivity and tolerance toward others of differing races, cultures, and nationalities. This will be an essential component of their education.

And we hope you will support your son's and daughter's growth in understanding and commitment.

#### **4. An Activist Campus (possibly omit)**

Now that you have a student at Michigan, I suspect that each of you will pay far more attention to newspaper articles or television stories on the University.

And I have no doubt that from time to time you will be concerned...if not shocked...when you read that yet another student group has taken over my office...or attempted to disrupt other University functions as protest against the "administration"... of the University...or possibly society at large.

From the earliest moments in our long history, the UM has been known for a spirit of democracy and tolerance among its students and faculty.

Almost a century ago, Harpers Weekly noted: "The most striking feature of the University of Michigan is the broad and liberal spirit in which it does its work."

As you listen or read about these incidents, I would caution to bear a couple of things in mind:

- i) First, because student activism has both a long tradition on this campus and plays an important role in a Michigan education, there are always a long laundry list of protest movements going on at any particular time...whether it be military research, gay rights, concerns about racism, South Africa, Latin America, and so on... However it is also the case that while the media generally finds these protest movements make great press...only a very small fraction of our students are ever involved in them--although the media frequently portrays them as burning the campus to the ground.

- ii) Second, while it is of paramount importance that we protect the fundamental freedom of students and faculty to explore new ideas and concepts, to state their beliefs and values, no matter how far they may be from mainstream thought...  
...it is also essential to recognize that without the acceptance of responsibility, freedom is meaningless.

In a very real sense, I suppose, the acceptance of responsibility along with freedom implies that one also accepts a commitment to move away from a negative stance of merely complaining or protesting... and rather making a positive effort to address the challenges before our society.

#### **5. Preparation for leadership**

As I noted earlier, your sons and daughters are an extraordinarily talented group...  
It is likely that regardless of what happens during their college education, they will go on to become leaders of our society...  
Hence, we believe it important that they prepare for this life of leadership now by taking advantage of all that this University has to offer.  
That they...  
Broaden their horizons...  
Develop a personal philosophy of life...  
Become involved...  
Become committed...  
And if they have to come over and take over my office in protest from time to time, then so be it...it is all part of an education for leadership.

#### **6. Finally, let me stress that an education at Michigan**

**is not a passive process...** While it is true that we probably have more opportunities on this campus than any other university in the nation...it is also true that they will not be presented to your sons and daughters on a silver platter.  
We expect them to play an active role in their education!  
To explore, to discover, to challenge themselves  
After all, life is one of those do-it-yourself experiences...  
We believe it important to deliberately leave the fundamental freedom and responsibility of choice to the individual student. After all, this is part of their education.  
But, we also believe they should steer themselves with care, for as the saying goes...  
"At Michigan you will be given unusual freedom and responsibility...  
The freedom to do what you want...  
And the responsibility to choose the right things..."

#### **What are we trying to do at Michigan?**

Prepare your sons and daughters for a career?...  
As doctors, lawyers, engineers,...  
or even investment bankers...?  
Well, we will do our best to give them the foundation necessary for such careers, but that is not our real mission.  
Perhaps Emerson put it best 150 years ago in his famous Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard when he noted...  
"Colleges have their indispensable office, to teach elements. But they can only serve us when they aim not to drill but to create; when they gather

from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth aflame..."

And, that perhaps is the simplest and best statement of what we are trying to do at Michigan...  
Ignite the intellectual fires within each of our students

We want to stimulate in each of them a spirit of liberal learning...a spirit that will be a part of them for the rest of their lives...

**Michigan is an exciting, challenging...sometimes frustrating...but always a rewarding place.**

Let me once again thank you for your confidence in lending us your sons and daughters for the next several years...

We look forward to working with them as they journey down the fascinating and rewarding road of a Michigan education.

And we look forward to welcoming them as the newest members of the maize and blue!