

Parents Welcome

Welcome 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 experiences of modern American life:

the great American dropoff!!!

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 known 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...

Incidentally, I should warn you that there is yet

another momentous event that exceeds even the Great Dropoff in traumatic impact...

It is that moment, when after all of those

years of worry and effort and investment,

your student finally graduates...

...and then announces that he or she is moving

back in with you until they decide what to do with their lives...

Thanks and Congratulations...

Let me begin by thanking you for granting us the privilege of teaching and learning with your sons and daughters during these 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 18,000 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**...

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...

Both as president of this university...

but, perhaps even more relevant, as a parent who has
watched this journey from a very personal perspective
in recent years

1. Michigan is not a small liberal arts college...it is a

great research university...in fact, it is appropriate
in a sense that we should be gathered this afternoon in
the great lecture hall of the Rackham School of Graduate Studies,
since this symbolizes the important link between teaching
and research on this campus.

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

Some parameters of the University

Parameters:

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

Faculty: 2,600 (14,000 employees)

Budget: \$1.5 billion

Academic Units

17 Schools and Colleges

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

We also run the largest health care system in
the Midwest, treating over 750,000 patients each year...

We conduct events in the performing arts which rival
New York and London...

whether it be Leonard Bernstein performing his 70th
birthday concert with the Vienna Philharmonic
or, God-forbid, the Grateful Dead....

And, speaking of entertainment, we also have the
Bo and Steve show...the Michigan Wolverines...
playing in the fall to 105,000 every Saturday afternoon
Or, in the winter and spring, to every household in America...
...at least if we make the Final Four....

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...)
Indeed, we are generally ranked even higher in our academic reputation than we are on the basketball court or the football field.

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, but through a full spectrum of cultural, social, athletic activities.

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

But that is how it should be in any great university.

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...

It will be a nation of peoples of vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs...peoples seeking to retain their cultural roots...to maintain their identities

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...

To learn how to resist the great pressures of separatism, fear, and bigotry which push us apart...
...and instead commit themselves to a university...
...indeed, to a nation, committed to working together, united by a common set of beliefs and visions.

Michigan is first and foremost a "UNI" versity.

Hence view our challenge...and the challenge before your sons and daughters...as learning how to weave together these dual objectives of diversity and unity in a way that strengthens our fundamental goal of academic excellence and serves our society.

In a very real sense, we believe that Michigan has a mandate to serve as both a microcosm and leader of society at large..

We believe in and we are committed to a diversity in our people, in our activities, in our intellectual endeavors, which mirrors the great diversity of our nation and the world...

But we also believe that our university has a special responsibility to develop effective models of multicultural communities, in which peoples from vastly different backgrounds study together and learn together.

We believe that this commitment to diversity and unity 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... and seek to learn from this remarkable diversity of people and ideas on this campus.

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. 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 committed...

Become involved...

5. 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!