

Parents Orientation--9/1/91

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 experiences of a college education:
the great dropoff!!

For you see, several 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...

Incidentally, I feel it only fair to warn you that

there will be a second traumatic moment that you will face in several years...when, after the joy of seeing your son or daughter graduate, they inform you that they are going to move back home until they figure out what they want to do with their lives...

Thanks and Congratulations...

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

Congratulations because you deserve tremendous credit!

You have brought your student to this day.

Oh, I know. They certainly had the raw talent.

But thanks to you they developed the character to use it well.

In our times it isn't easy for young people to achieve unless they have strong families to support and guide them.

And now we see the results in our entering class.

I hope you take great satisfaction in this moment

We are especially grateful to you

because it is the quality of our student body

that most determines the quality of our education

and of our community life.

This may seem to be an odd assertion.

Considering the fact

that you are sending your students to learn from us

and paying a price for the privilege, at that.

But believe me

at Michigan education is a two way street.

Our students challenge, inspire and teach all of us---

faculty and staff and their fellow students.

Our students help to push us to the forefront of knowledge

with their questions, their insights,

their refusal to accept the "accepted" wisdom.

This new class will be no exception,

Indeed, we expect great things of it

as we stand here at the beginning

of the journey of discovery that lies ahead.

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 4,600 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 1994, 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 1995
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 cultural, athletic or social activities

The work load will be very heavy...

...for example, we estimate that the "B" level of studying
corresponds to roughly two hours of outside work
for every hour of class time--that is, for a 15 credit hour load,
roughly 45 hours of work a week just to aim at the average.
To do better, of course, will require far more effort.

...to this you will add the hours necessary for extracurricular activities
...athletics, music, art, student organizations, politics
...and then perhaps even a few hours for social activities...
...When do you sleep?

Not to worry...they are still young!!!

Nobody ever said a Michigan education was easy...
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 real 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

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

...attracting the world's greatest performers and orchestras

And, speaking of entertainment, we also have the Michigan Wolverines, the Michigan Marching Band, and the excitement of Michigan athletics...

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.

This extraordinary variety is demonstrated by the events of a single week this summer in which:

- i) A team of Michigan medical scientists announced they had discovered the gene responsible for neurofibromatosis...Elephant's Man disease ...incidentally the same team discovered and cloned the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis last fall.
- ii) A team of Michigan students won the solar car race from Florida to Michigan, thereby earning the right to represent the United States in the world competition in Australia this fall.
- iii) It was announced that two Michigan faculty members had won MacCarther prizes prizes, the key prize used to acknowledge
- iv) The major computer network, operated by the University in collaboration with IBM and MCI, passed the milestone of linking together over one million users in the U.S. and around the world...
- v) Michigan scientists achieved the world's most powerful laser--with power equivalent to 40 times the electrical generating capacity of the U.S.
- vi) Teams of Michigan business students spent the summer in Poland, Soviet Armenia, and Czechoslovakia

helping these rapidly changing nations in their transition to capitalism.

vi) A Michigan paleontologist discovered a fossil demonstrating that whales once had hind legs and feet!

vii) And while not much happens in athletics during the summer, one of our women engineering students won the American Gladiator competition... and one of our alumni--and a former Regent-- Bob Nederlander, succeeded George Steinbrenner as managing owner of the New York Yankees.

Not a bad week! But then, it was rather typical for this remarkable university.

So how do we take advantage of this remarkable environment for learning?

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.

An Aside:

There is very recent evidence that this approach
to education is actually the most effective,
at least for students of the quality of your
sons and daughters.

Study

Sample: Over 50,000 students majoring in S&E whose
1987 GRE score (quantitative and verbal) could be
matched by ETS with SAT score

Variables: GRE, SAT, gender, race, UG major, UG school

Value Added: Average addition to a student's total
GRE score associated with going to a particular
school, irrespective of SAT, gender, minority,
or UG major.

Results:

1. The top 20 research universities scored far higher
in the "value added" than any other institutional
type...even better than the small, prestigious
liberal arts colleges to renown for their teaching focus.
2. The educational value added was highest in those
institutions doing the most research.
3. It was also highest in the largest institutions.

Hence, it is clear that both the size and intellectual excitement
of major research universities such as Michigan, Berkeley,
Harvard, and Stanford create the most effective learning
environment--at least for students such as yours.

For that reason, there is no reason to be apologetic about the
research performed by our faculty--or the services
performed by our professional schools. They all add to
the educational experience of our undergraduates.

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 as much 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...

It will be nation of peoples of vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs...people 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 common values and goals.

Michigan is first and foremost a "UNI" versity.

Hence we 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 serving our society.

In a very real sense, we believe that Michigan has a
mandate to serve as both a microcosm and
a 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 different races, cultures, nationalities
and beliefs, and seek to learn from this remarkable
and rich diversity of people and ideas on this campus.

This will be an essential component of their education.

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

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 demoncracy 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.

And that is one of the lessons we will be trying to teach our students.

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 be active partners 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...

7. A special spirit

My colleagues from other institutions, invariably remark on this extraordinary loyalty

that holds Michigan people together.
They ask me what accounts for it.
in an institution that is so large, often competitive,
and seemingly impersonal.
There isn't a single or simple answer.
There are so many things that come to mind.

First and most importantly, is the Michigan education itself
that puts our students at the cutting edge
of research and discovery.

Then, too, Michigan has a special energy, a spirit,
that inspires and unites us.

It comes at least in part from the fact
that we are a public university

Our deepest commitment is to pursue academic excellence
to serve the public good.

From this our students derive a sense of obligation to society
they appreciate the need to give something back.

From the beginning Michigan has represented opportunity
for an education as good as any available anywhere in the world
for all those students with the ability and will to achieve
without regard for their background, wealth, ethnicity or belief.

Michigan is also a uniquely dynamic place.

Whether it is in the classroom, in the laboratory or library,
at a computer screen or on the playing field,
Michigan people demonstrate a special energy and drive,
they aspire to be the best.

to set the highest goals and go all out to achieve them.

But you already know that from your own student.

Our history and tradition are to be an academic leader
and to educate leaders

Our students develop a sense of personal responsibility to lead not
follow.

Of course we couldn't be what we are if we didn't attract
the cream of the crop of faculty and students.

And, believe me, the class of 1995 is no exception.

Your student is part of a class
that is among the best in our history.

They are sure to make you...and us...

proud while they are with us and long after they leave.

There is a special electricity
when so many talented people brought are brought together
when they are given the freedom to explore ideas
to create, to do the best they can do.

8. The Challenge

Michigan is a caring place but it is not always an easy place
To succeed, our students have to work hard
to commit themselves to academic achievement.

They have to be willing to go the extra mile.

At first, some students may find the University
a bit overwhelming
there are so many options...

Students from so many backgrounds and interests
Lectures, concerts, conferences, plays, movies, dances
There is a tremendous range
of world class cultural presentations
and countless social events to choose among.

And there also are so many opportunities to participate
whether in student government
or journalism, or political activism, creative arts,
competitive sports, drama, music.

Students are surrounded every day by so many choices.

But not to worry.

Before many days pass, students begin to know their way around,
make a place for themselves.
to feel at home
to understand they can't do it all
to be selective,
to explore and express the growing sense of their own individuality.

Actually I think it is this range of choice,
all this energy and excitement,
all the intellectual and social diversity and ferment
that makes Michigan unique.

The fact is that our students
learn nearly as much outside of the classroom as in it.
And they learn not just academically but socially.
we have an environment that helps develop

character, motivation, determination,
self reliance, and commitment to serve society.

Our students are challenged
and this accounts for their special spirit
and explains why our alumni go on to be leaders
in so many walks of life.

These are some of the things that bond
the University so closely to its extended family.

What are we trying to do at Michigan?

Prepare your sons and daughters for a career?...
As doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers...
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...

In short, we want them to be leaders who
will use their knowledge to serve humanity!

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

There is just nothing quite like it anywhere.

Now you and your student have taken your place here.
I look forward to seeing you often in coming years.
Best of luck and Go Blue!

Note: You and Mary Ann will offer to answer any questions.
I am delighted to welcome you and your student
to the University of Michigan family.
It's a big family
...some 370k strong--alumni, countless friends,
35k students, 2,500 faculty, XXstaff, and all their families.
Let me once again thank you for your confidence
in sharing with 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!