

Dear Colleagues:

As the time approaches for me to leave the presidency of this great University, I am writing for the one last time from this office. I want to tell you of my urgent concerns for the future of our own and other leading research universities; to share my plans for addressing some of these issues as I return to the faculty; to invite your interest and engagement in these efforts; and to thank all of you who have given so much help and support to Anne and me over the last eight years.

First let me point to the challenges I see ahead for us as an institution and as people who have invested our lives in the furtherance of learning. I believe our country is at the brink of a profoundly important debate about the future of higher education in America. The extraordinary growth and importance of universities in national life seen over the past fifty years will not continue as we have known it.

Of course, criticism of universities has been building for some time and comes from many directions. We are all familiar with the themes. The values of the academy are challenged—from scholarly ethics, to affirmative action, to political correctness. Our commitment to teaching is questioned and so is our ability to teach well. Faculty tenure is under serious attack. The quality and relevance of scholarly research is doubted. Tuition is protested. I don't need to go on.

Until recently, this criticism of higher education has been diffuse and sporadic but now it is gaining greater force and direction. In the next few years, we face a widespread and fundamental questioning of our structure and mission. Some of this may be the price of success. We would not warrant such scrutiny if our role in society were not so significant. More and more citizens and politicians have a stake in what we do and how we do it. We are more publicly accountable.

Over the past decade, Michigan and its peers have tried to address many of the issues being raised by our critics both inside and outside the academy. We have also used this time to rebuild our foundation, refocus our energies on those things most central to our purposes.

As the attached report on Michigan's strategic planning initiatives demonstrates, much has been accomplished thanks to the extraordinary creativity and commitment of the Michigan family. The report also shows how important it is to keep our vision clearly focused on long term objectives. I am intensely proud of what we have accomplished together in these eight

years.

It is often said that Michigan has been fortunate to find the right leader for the particular challenges of his or her times. The particular challenges of my administration have not been glamorous nor certainly of my choosing. But we have been able to build a solid foundation on which our next president can drely as he or she leads us into the new century.

We are improving undergraduate education; fostering interdisciplinary research and social importance; investing in technology to support teaching, research and service; raising more than a billion dollars of private support, cutting costs and streamlining administration to free money for our basic mission; rebuilding our physical plant; improving our communications with significant constituents, and so on. Thanks to your efforts, we have come a great distance in the past decade to reinforce our foundation, refine our mission, and improve the quality of teaching, research and service. We have ventured further and made some fundamental changes through such initiative as the Michigan Mandate, the Womenís Agenda, international initiatives, and technological infrastructure all of which lay the groundwork for more far-reaching institutional change.

So far, change has been accomplished in the tradition of slow, linear, evolutionary progress that universities have followed for a thousand yearsóimprove, expand, contract, reformóbut without altering the fundamental institutional mission, approach, or structure. This will not be sufficient for the future we face. We dare not complacently assume that the forces challenging us will pass and universities will be allowed to return to the status quo ante with any change being incremental and at a leisurely pace with no real alteration of our institutional disciplinary structures.

On the contrary, the world-wide shift to a knowledge based society challenges every one of us to re-envision what we do and how we do it. We will need to question everything and to experiment with radical solutions. If we do not lead in re-inventing our mission and structures, we will see the role of universities marginalized, and our values compromised as the forces of change (and the multitude of competitors they generate) overtake and overwhelm us.

As the flagship of American higher education, we have a responsibility to help show the way to change. Our voice must clearly be heard in the public forum of ideas. Make no mistake, the social compact that created and shaped research universities and bound us so closely to our society is being debated and is attracting broad public engagement. No question will be out of bounds: What is our purpose; What to teach, how to teach, delivery; who

measures of quality; who pays for education and research; who benefits; who controls and how; what and how much public service; what are appropriate alliances, partnerships, sponsorships?

As we look around us, we see that other institutions of government, the non profit sector and the corporate world are struggling with this same fundamental questioning and restructuring. We will not be immune and the forces at work are not transitory. We do not need to be passive victims of change either, not with the strength of values, history, tradition, intellectual rigor, and sense of purpose we bring to the table.

This brings me to share with you my plans for the next few years. The time has come to exchange action for rhetoric a shift much more in keeping with my natural talents and disposition and one for which my experience as president has prepared me.

FOLLOW WITH DESCRIPTION OF PLANS BUT PERHAPS SHORTENED.

My colleagues and I encourage you to take part in some of these enterprises. We need all the brain power we can muster. We hope to offer a platform and a risk free environment for the testing of creative innovations for preserving, creating, and delivering knowledge. While our efforts must reflect our scholarly values, they must also challenge complacency and individual and institutional rigidity. I can't predict where this adventure will take us; I can promise an exciting journey.

It is my great good fortune to turn over the reigns to my friend and colleague, Homer Neal. I know Michigan will flourish with his leadership and the great wealth of talent and dedication brought to it by our Board of Regents, faculty, students, staff as well as the unstinting support of Michigan's citizens and our extended alumni family. Michigan is blessed by its people and their tradition of excellence.

Finally, I want to thank you all. Anne and I have been honored to serve this University that we love so deeply. We are more grateful than I can ever say for all your help and support in these years. We look forward to working with you in the future and to continuing to do everything in our power to keep ours the very best public university in the world.

Sincerely,