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Introduction

The University of Michigan has long been among the most faithful realizations of the Jeffersonian concept of a public university. It has been responsible for and responsive to the needs of the people who founded and supported it, even as it sought to achieve quality equal to that of the most distinguished private institutions.

Throughout its long history, perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the University has been its commitment, as stated by President Angell, to provide "an uncommon education for the common man." This aspiration--to provide an education of the highest quality to all who had the ability to succeed and the will to achieve--stood in sharp contrast to the role of the nation's earliest eastern colleges, which traditionally served the economically advantaged and specific religious groups.

Yet, despite the degree to which the University eventually broadened its commitment to encompass gender, race, religious belief, and nationality, it has faced serious obstacles to accomplishing this goal. Many of these groups suffered from social, cultural, and economic discrimination. Simply opening doors--providing access--was not enough to enable them to take advantage of the educational opportunities of the University.

Over the past two decades, the University of Michigan has taken a number of steps designed to ensure that underrepresented groups participate fully in the life of the institution. There have been three classes of major actions: a commitment of financial resources, the development of administrative structures to support affirmative action and equal opportunity, and the development of an array of recruiting and retention programs.

Despite these efforts, it is clear that more is necessary. The University will have to change dramatically if it is to remain faithful to its heritage--restated in contemporary terms--to provide "an uncommon education for all with the ability to succeed and the will to lead."

The Michigan Mandate

There is a national imperative for this transformation. The United States is one of the most pluralistic of nations. Those ethnic groups we refer to today as "minorities" will become the majority population of our nation in the century ahead, just as they are today throughout the world. Furthermore women have already become the predominant gender in our nation and our institutions.

In the future, the full participation of currently underrepresented people will be of increasing concern as we strive to realize our commitment to equity and social justice. This objective will be the key to the future strength and prosperity of America, since our nation cannot afford to waste the human talent--this human potential, cultural richness, and social leadership--of those currently underrepresented in leadership roles in our society. If we do not create a nation that mobilizes the talents of all our citizens, we are destined for a diminished role in the global community, increased social turbulence; and, most tragically, we will have failed to fulfill the promise of democracy upon which this nation was founded.

To address this challenge, the University of Michigan transformed itself five years ago to bring all racial and ethnic groups more fully into the life of the University. This process of transformation was guided by a strategic plan known as The Michigan Mandate. The fundamental vision was that the University of
Michigan would become a leader known for the racial and ethnic diversity of its faculty, students, and staff; a leader in creating a multicultural community that would be capable of serving as a model for higher education and a model for society-at-large. We were convinced that our capacity to serve our state, our nation, and the world would depend on our capacity to reflect the strengths, perspectives, talents, and experiences of all peoples—all of America's rich diversity of races, cultures, and nationalities—in everything that we do. To be sure, many of the most formidable challenges to this vision remain. Yet the University has made remarkable progress, and its commitment to the goals of the Michigan Mandate have continued to intensify.

Drawing upon the experience gained through the Michigan Mandate, we believe it is time for the University to launch a complementary and parallel effort to address the concerns of another group that has all too frequently been deprived of the opportunity to participate fully in our society and our institution: women. Gender equity, while accepted as an important principle by most, nevertheless remains an elusive goal. The University simply has not made adequate progress toward its obligation of providing full participation and opportunity for women. The time has come to develop and execute a series of strategic actions aimed not only at gender equity, but moreover at creating an institution capable of fostering the success of women students, faculty, and staff. It is time to develop The Michigan Agenda for Women.

The Michigan Agenda

We recognize that women at the University of Michigan are an incredibly diverse group in terms of race, age, educational background, sexual orientation, and many other characteristics. Women of color face a particular challenge as they struggle for success in the face of both gender and racial prejudice in our society. Today, we draw on the experience gained through the Michigan Mandate to launch a complementary and parallel effort which will provide for the full participation of women at the University of Michigan. The Michigan Agenda for Women is an inclusive plan which augments the Michigan Mandate. It draws on the strength of our diversity and ensures that all women at this institution are full beneficiaries of the various components of the plan. The Michigan Agenda for Women is a series of strategic actions aimed not only at gender equity, but also at creating an institution that fosters the success of all women in all facets of University life.

The University has benefited from a long line of women leaders who have pulled, pushed, and sometimes dragged the institution along the path toward equality for women. Activity on a range of issues concerning gender equity and the participation of women has been especially intense over the past two or three decades. For example, during this period the University established the Women's Studies Program, the Center for the Education of Women, and the Commission for Women. The University took a number of steps to recruit and support women staff and faculty. It modified University policies to better reflect the needs of women faculty and staff members. And it acted to provide a safe campus environment that was more inclusive of women faculty, students, and staff.

These actions have had an impact. Today, women comprise 48 percent of undergraduate enrollments and 40 percent of graduate enrollments. Furthermore, many of the University's professional schools (Medicine, Business Administration, Law) are making rapid progress in the participation of women students. In the past decade, many more women have assumed important roles at the middle and upper management as well as administrative levels.

Yet, it is also clear that the University has simply not made enough progress. Despite the increasing pools of women candidates in many fields, the number of women faculty has not increased to satisfactory levels. The retention of women faculty remains a serious concern. Many women students and faculty believe that numerous barriers remain to their full participation in the life of the University. Women of color face a particular challenge as they struggle for success in the face of both gender and racial prejudice in our society.

The University of Michigan is far from where it should be—from where it must be—in creating an institution that provides the full array of opportunities and strong support for women students, faculty, and staff.

Our actions to date, while characterized by the best of intentions, have been ad hoc, lacking in coherence, too independent of one another, lacking precise goals and strategies, and providing no assurance that we will actually get where we want to go. Now we are convinced that beyond a deep commitment, we also need a bold strategic plan characterized by firm goals. Programs must be tested against these goals, and our progress must be accurately measured and shared with the broader University community.

Such a plan has been developed in a companion document: The Michigan Agenda for Women: Leadership for a New Century. In this planning effort we have sought to develop:
1. clear, concise, and simple goals
2. specific actions and mechanisms to evaluate their impact
3. a process to involve the broader University community in helping to refine and implement the plan.

With these characteristics in mind, we propose a very simple yet challenging vision statement for the University:

The Michigan Agenda Vision Statement:

By the Year 2000, the University of Michigan will become the leader among American universities in promoting and achieving the success of women of diverse backgrounds as faculty, students, and staff.

The goals necessary to achieve this vision can be stated simply as:

1. To create a University climate that fosters the success of women faculty, students, and staff by drawing upon the strengths of our diversity.
2. To achieve full representation, participation, and success of women faculty in the academic life and leadership of the University.
3. To make the University the institution of choice for women students who aspire to leadership roles in our society.
4. To make the University the employer of choice for women staff who seek satisfying and rewarding careers and to provide opportunities for women staff who seek leadership roles.
5. To make the University the leading institution for the study of women and women's issues.

While the components of this plan are many and varied, some of the more significant actions and timetables proposed by this plan are the following:

1. Create an institutional commitment to national leadership in providing significantly expanded roles for University of Michigan women in higher education. (1994)
2. Conduct an extensive series of presidential townhall meetings with campus groups of faculty, staff, and students to learn more about the challenges faced by women and the steps which might be taken to address these challenges. (1994-95)
3. Develop a strategic plan to design and implement the Michigan Agenda for Women. (1994-95)
4. Gather data on the representation and experiences of women students, faculty, and staff at the University to assist both in informing the University community and designing an effective strategic plan to address these challenges. (1994-95)
5. Develop and implement a targeted strategy specific to each unit for dramatically increasing the presence and participation of women faculty and staff at all ranks where women are underrepresented, with special attention to increasing the presence and participation of women of color. (1995-96)
6. Commit the full resources necessary to reach the goal of the appointment and retention of 10 new senior women faculty, with the intent of continuing this program upon reaching this first goal. (1995)
7. Establish a Presidential Commission to evaluate and restructure faculty tenure and promotion policies to better reflect the contemporary nature of University teaching, research, and service and the increasing diversity of our faculty. (1995-96)
8. Create a Faculty Women Career Development Fund to help address the heavy service contributions carried by many women faculty through the provision of funds to assist in their scholarship. (1994)
9. Increase the number of women faculty recognized by named professorships, including the Distinguished University Professors and privately-endowed chairs. (1995)
10. Increase the presence of women in key University leadership positions (executive officers, deans, directors, chairs, and other senior positions). (1995)
11. Develop a program of management training for faculty newly appointed as chairs, deans, and senior administrators. (1995-96)
12. Develop programs to provide high level employment and training experiences for staff. (1995-96)
13. Conduct a series of presidential forums with women students, staff, and faculty of color to learn their specific concerns and to work with these groups to develop appropriate actions. (1994-95)
14. Develop and implement measures to ensure that women of color are full beneficiaries of all components of the Michigan Agenda for Women and the Michigan Mandate. (1995-96)
15. Develop and adopt a University-wide policy encouraging management flexibility in managing the intersection of work and family responsibilities for faculty, staff, and students. (1994-95)
16. Assess University policies, practices, and procedures from the perspective of family responsibilities (e.g., child care, elder care) and implement appropriate actions to address problems. (1995)
17. Launch a series of forums and roundtable discussions to identify key issues of concern to women
students and design effective strategies for addressing these concerns. (1994-95)

18. Charge the Executive Board of the Rackham Graduate School with the task of working with graduate programs to address the concerns of women graduate students. (1994-95)

19. Achieve full gender equity (varsity opportunities proportionate to undergraduate gender representation) in intercollegiate athletics. (1996)

20. Develop and implement a targeted strategy specific to each unit for dramatically increasing the presence and participation of women staff at all ranks where women are underrepresented, with special attention to increasing the presence and participation of women of color. (1995-96)

21. Working closely with various job families, developing a consultation and conciliation service to augment the current staff grievance process. (1994-95)

22. Develop and implement ongoing internal periodic assessments of gender patterns in compensation and resource allocation to staff, faculty, and students and remedy identified inequities. (1995-96)

23. Conduct ongoing surveys on the quality of the University environment for women students, faculty, staff, and administrators. (1995-96)

24. Design and implement a campus-wide program for students, faculty, and staff aimed at eliminating violence against women and discouraging the presence of behavior or activities that degrade women through the formation of a Task Force on Violence Against Women. (1995)

25. Continue the effort to implement fully the University policy prohibiting sexual harassment, including providing adequate central staffing to support the program, fully informing the campus community about the policy, training individuals at both the central and unit level to handle incidents, streamlining the present system for handling complaints, and reporting to the community about these activities. (1994-95)

26. Develop and execute a plan to make the University the leading institution for the study of women and gender issues, including the establishment of a new Institute for Research on Gender and Feminism. (1995-96)

27. Develop small action teams of deans, chairs, directors, and managers to address and implement actions in the Michigan Agenda for Women. (1995-96)

These and other actions will require the commitment of significant resources. However, the potential of or commitment to the Michigan Agenda should not and cannot be measured in terms of resource commitments alone. Indeed, perhaps the most important objective of this strategic initiative will be a major change in the culture and life of the institution, since true gender equity will require a profound transformation of the University.

Conclusion

This initial plan represents only a beginning. The Michigan Agenda is intended to be an organic, evolving tool for achieving the institutional change necessary for true gender equity. It is the sketch of a vision and a plan that will evolve over time as it is shaped through the interaction with broader elements of the University community. However, our commitment to move ahead will not change, nor will our conviction that the greatness of our University will be determined by the degree to which women assume their rightful role as full participants and leaders in our community.

The University of Michigan has the opportunity to emerge as a leader in the role of women in higher education. But to earn this leadership and to achieve the vision proposed by the Michigan Agenda, it will be necessary to change the University in very profound, pervasive, and permanent ways.

Women deserve full membership and equal partnership in the life of the University. Removing barriers and encouraging women’s participation in the full array of University activities will transform the University by creating a community in which women and men share equal freedom and responsibility.