March 22, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of Academic Council

FROM: John K. Hudzik
      Acting Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Draft for Comment--Update on Change Initiatives

As the close of the academic year approaches, the Office of the Provost is providing an update on the status of academic initiatives. This update is organized around a specific set of comments regarding:

Why the “Realizing the Vision” Initiative?
Matters Regarding Resources
Matters of Organization and Re-organization

Considerable detail is included in ATTACHMENT A, a work-in-progress template that illustrates the present status of a broad spectrum of changes designed to strengthen the academic programs and reputation of Michigan State University.

Why the “Realizing the Vision” Initiative?

The publicly and frequently stated goals of the change initiatives in which we are engaged relate to the issues described below, particularly to enhancing MSU’s stature and the quality of our curriculum and programs. Goals include the following:

- Build upon and promote interdisciplinary and cross-unit collaborations in pursuit of institutional and mutual objectives.
- Strengthen the undergraduate experience at MSU.
- Strengthen liberal arts and sciences.
- Expand undergraduate living and learning options.
- Strengthen and enrich graduate programs and research initiatives.
- Improve the acquisition, use and allocation of resources.

In the context of these goals, the reasons for the “Realizing the Vision” review come from several sources, and span multiple academic years. However, there are three reasons that have played, and will continue to play, prominently in our analysis.
First was the desire to strengthen MSU’s position among the best research-intensive universities in the world, and to establish our position as the leading land grant university for the 21st century.

Although the core aspects of the land-grant philosophy of 150 years ago (for example, access and outreach and problem solving for society) remain fundamentally relevant, and perhaps even more deeply needed today, the environment of the land grant university is very different than 150 years ago, or even 30 years ago. With profound changes in society, a 21st century land grant institution can preserve its core values by candid and strategic examination of itself and its resources and strengths.

Strong universities engage in continuous change. They are responsive to the core values of their missions, and to society’s immediate expectation and long-term needs, and to the dynamics of the “marketplace” of ideas, resources, and people.

Strong universities periodically review their programs and organizational structures, including liberal arts. Subsequent adjustments respond to changing conditions and priorities.

The last large-scale organizational review at Michigan State University occurred in 1960s. Early in that decade, the College of Business name was changed from the College of Business and Public service, the College of Science and Arts was divided into three colleges (Arts and Letters, Natural Science, and Social Science), and the “Basic College” became University College. Also in the decade of the 1960s the name of the University was changed from Michigan State University of Agriculture and Applied Science to Michigan State University, and the colleges of Human Medicine, Justin Morrill, James Madison, and Lyman Briggs were established. The name of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources was changed from the College of Agriculture. The Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine and the Law College were added later.

The last major cross-University comprehensive program reviews occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s -- The Council to Review Undergraduate Education (CRUE) in 1988, The Council on the Review of Research and Graduate Education (CORRAGE) in 1991, and The Provost’s Committee on University Outreach in 1993, among other reviews related to potential program and/or policy changes.

Strategic review of organization, programs, and policies is overdue. Review in this context is a means to invigorate, strengthen, and innovate with regard not only to core land grant values of a research-intensive institution, but also the liberal arts and sciences for all graduates.

Second, no university achieves or maintains greatness without high quality liberal arts and sciences programs. Strong liberal arts and sciences programs are required not only
for majors and faculty productively engaged in research, scholarship and outreach, they also support the required undergraduate liberal arts and sciences core and general education which, in large measure, represents the collective values of an MSU education.

Among the most important elements of the liberal arts and science core at Michigan State University is general education programming in integrative studies, writing, and quantitative competencies. MSU’s living and learning programs also provide unique and focused options for students to study the liberal arts and sciences in a connected, cross-disciplinary and engaged manner. As part of general reviews associated with liberal arts and sciences, strong universities review their related general education curriculum on a regular basis.

Third, the current review was prompted by a concern that we had lost momentum in the liberal arts and sciences. Fiscal constraint and priorities, shifts in student interest, shifts in staffing models, limitations on curricular electives outside the majors with semester conversion, insufficient innovation in courses and curriculum, and ineffectiveness in how we organize and resource the liberal arts and sciences were long-standing concerns. Quite frankly, these phenomena are a mix of perception and reality. However, it is a fact that they were exacerbated by 30 years of public disinvestment in higher education in Michigan and compounded by a state budget crisis of historic dimensions during the last 3 years, continuing into the current budget planning and for the foreseeable future.

The impact of the current federal and state fiscal crisis on MSU is substantial and will be long term. It is unlikely that state appropriations will reverse 30 years of disinvestment. There are limits to how much we can expect tuition increases to make up for the state’s appropriation shortcomings. Certainly, every tuition increase is not only a burden on students and their families, but a responsibility placed on us to improve the quality and life-time value of their educational experience at MSU.

Resources

It would be a serious misread of the motivations behind “Realizing the Vision” to believe that its purpose was to reorganize as a way to save money. There is no credible evidence that review and possible re-organization would result in substantial cost savings of the scope required to deal with the institution’s fiscal challenges. Rather, review is a means for us to consider how to use resources more wisely and productively.
The goal of “Realizing the Vision” is to become a better and more highly regarded 21st century land grant institution with consideration to limits imposed by scarce resources. In practical terms this means, for example, asking:

- Whether program and resource allocation priorities need to be altered,
- Whether how we organize ourselves is optimal for our purposes,
- Whether organizational boundaries need to be “cross walked” in order to achieve greater collaboration and innovations for mutual benefit,
- Whether we can create conditions to diversify our revenue stream and make ourselves more financially self-supporting, and
- Whether, at a time when all major universities are fiscally challenged, we can improve our competitive position by acting boldly rather than entrenching.

These are examples, not the universe, of reasons why we engage in work associated with “Realizing the Vision.”

Given state budget projections over the next several years and with a commitment to a responsible tuition policy, the solution to enhancing MSU’s quality and standing cannot be dependent on more money alone. We must also look inward at our priorities, what we do, and how we do it. We must look to ourselves to provide the leadership, the ideas, and the will to “do it.”

Although we have had success toward reaching the Capital Campaign goals, and this will help to “keep us in the game” with our peers, it will not offset our base budget losses, nor our need to take actions that move us forward as an institution.

Energy and excitement in undergraduate and graduate education is contagious for both faculty and students, and expands to other core elements of the university mission: research and outreach. Increasing the value of graduate and undergraduate degree programs and the quality of research and outreach increases the sustained value-added and distinctiveness of MSU for our graduates, and the citizens we serve. Broadening the international dimensions of the institution, building on and beyond study abroad, international research, contract and grant activity, and the enrollment of international students, prepares us and our students for the realities of a 21st century global environment.

Organization and Reorganization

Organizational fragmentation (silos with no cross walks) and an unwillingness to consider change (e.g., we do it this way because we have always done it this way) are obstacles to MSU’s continued success. Fragmentation and barriers to collaboration consume more, not fewer, resources—both fiscal and human. This applies not only to graduate and undergraduate education but also to research and outreach/engagement. As we grapple with new challenges and opportunities, fragmentation coupled with an
unwillingness to consider change threatens emergence of a cohesive faculty voice and a shared sense of purpose on critical institutional matters, and embraces competition over collaboration. And, in a resource-constrained environment there is risk for the destruction of core education and scholarship values, especially the common liberal arts and sciences experiences for our students.

The strategy that built renown for MSU for a century and a half is one of innovation and proactive investment. Essential to our future is the capacity to innovate and the capacity to bridge traditional gulfs across disciplines and schools and professions, and gulfs between the liberal arts and sciences, and the conflict of immediate- and long-term investments that are essential to our future.

Structural reorganization is one approach among many to meeting these goals. There are other ways to solve problems and achieve goals. Finding the best solutions depends on a process of goal setting and problem diagnosis that precedes a search for solutions, including solutions imbedded in reorganization.

Suggestions prompted by “Realizing the Vision” take many forms from informal and small-scale to formal and large-scale changes. Examples across the spectrum include:

- Individual faculty efforts to collaborate with colleagues across units, fields and disciplines;
- Program and unit collaborations and partnerships to achieve common objectives;
- Joint degree and similar kinds of programming;
- Creating cross-unit “faculties” or advisory bodies to guide interdisciplinary and multi-unit programming interests and responsibilities.
- Joint faculty appointments and joint listing of units across MAUs;
- Movement of units from one MAU to another;
- Combining hitherto separate units and programs; and reshaping MAUs (e.g., changing their unit mixes; combining, creating new or eliminating MAUs).

Additionally, attention to needed changes in existing policy or the development of new policies provides a platform for organizational change at the University- as well as at the unit-level.

There are a number of re-organizations completed or underway at MSU. Some predate the “Realizing the Vision” initiatives, others result from it. They involve units and programs across campus, not just in the liberal arts and sciences. Most are the result of faculty initiatives. Status of these various re-organization initiatives are described in ATTACHMENT A. If you have comments and suggestions on the appended attachment and our collective commitment to strengthen the academic position and regard of Michigan State University, please send them using the following email address: Provost@msu.edu.
Next Steps

Many of the changes listed in Attachment A are underway and not yet fully implemented. Remaining curricular and program matters will be reviewed and processed through Academic Governance using established governance procedures involving standing committees and Academic Council. Proposed changes involving the relocation, merger, disbandment, and establishment of academic units will be reviewed and processed according to established governance procedures.

In addition to the items under consideration or in process as illustrated in Attachment A, other proposals surfaced from many sources over the course of the last year and a half. Some of these proposals would have involved minor changes and others would have resulted in large-scale change. Some of these prompted widespread discussion and concern. I want to be as clear as I can about the status of some of these proposals---what remains under consideration, and what does not.

- The Office of the Provost does not intend to pursue consolidation of colleges into a single college of liberal arts and sciences. However, the need for greater collaboration and partnership across the liberal arts colleges, which in part prompted consolidation discussions in the first place, remains important. The Office of the Provost strongly encourages proactive discussions and initiatives across all colleges which will strengthen the liberal arts and sciences at MSU.

- No action is anticipated by the Provost’s Office to further consolidate or condense colleges except as may come forth from colleges or faculty themselves. We will encourage and support conversations and actions within and among units and colleges to strengthen core areas of institutional programming such as the arts and humanities.

- Consistent with Option II proposed in the CCR Report, the Provost’s Office encourages innovative cross-unit, “bubble up” proposals for collaboration. These should aim to enhance core values of our institutional mission, better meet society’s expectations and needs, and be responsive to the dynamics of the marketplace of ideas, resources, and people.

- Efforts to improve general education will be pursued. Suggestions will come forth in many forms and from many sources, and might include sets of recommendations that combine organizational and curricular changes. A strengthening of students’ general education experiences and improvement in related student-centered outcomes will be the objective of such conversations. Particular attention will be directed to improving offerings and outcomes in writing, quantitative literacy, and integrative studies, broadening campus involvement and responsibility in these, and looking for ways of mutually reinforcing the objectives of each. Proposals for change will be reviewed and processed using established governance procedures.
I both acknowledge and express great appreciation to the faculty, students, and staff who have worked during the past year and one half engaging in thoughtful dialogue and assessment of potential changes, and in the development of new ideas. As the appended lists reinforce empirically, it is not just been hard work, but work with results. And, as the list also attests, a large proportion of the changes and innovations arise from the faculty.

In these months as Acting Provost, the reality of the enormous asset that the engaged faculty of our University represent for MSU and for the academy has been reinforced. It is a privilege to serve with you in my role as the University’s Acting Provost and as colleague. Thank you for your hard and productive work.

Attachments

Note: Cover letter and attachments posted to the Office of the Provost web site by Wednesday, March 23, 2005: http://provost.ur.msu.edu/