

# Realizing the Vision:

## Liberal Arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Land Grant University

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Last November, Provost Lou Anna K. Simon asked the university community to consider the significant intellectual and fiscal challenges facing Michigan State University on the eve of its sesquicentennial. She noted the worsening state budget and other long-term trends that had made state funding an ever-shrinking portion of the university's budget. She also drew attention to the academic and program challenges facing the university, especially in the liberal arts. Yet Provost Simon also reminded the community of Michigan State University's long history of innovation and positive response to challenges. She invited the university community to discuss together the future of liberal arts.

That discussion took place in a series of focus groups in November and December, as well as in numerous less formal meetings and discussions all around campus. These events generated a wide range of concerns but also ideas for the future. They inspired groups and individual faculty and staff to submit their own proposals. Reflecting on these proposals and consulting widely about them with faculty, staff, and administrators throughout the campus, Provost Simon is today announcing a set of interconnected initiatives designed to do the following:

- **Strengthen the coherence and organization of the undergraduate experience at MSU;**
- **Strengthen graduate programs;**
- **Expand the university's successful living and learning programs; and**
- **Strengthen the liberal arts core of the university for the 21<sup>st</sup> century by changing college structures.**

Embedded in each initiative are efforts to strengthen the international dimension of the university. Some of the work related to these initiatives has been under way. Other elements, including the reorganization proposals, will be submitted to the appropriate governance bodies. All the proposals need the university community's continued attention, engagement, and support. They are designed to position the university to emerge from the current programmatic and fiscal challenges stronger than ever. Collectively, they represent the most sweeping changes to the university since the Hannah era.

## **INITIATIVE ONE: Strengthen the Organization and Coherence of Undergraduate Education**

A major research university, Michigan State has nevertheless prided itself on its dedication to undergraduate education. Indeed, some of the university's greatest scholars and researchers have been its finest undergraduate teachers. This initiative seeks to infuse greater coherence and innovation into the undergraduate experience at Michigan State through the following steps:

- Expand the role of Assistant Provost for Undergraduate Education and add the title of Dean of Undergraduate Studies. This person will serve as the fulcrum for efforts to focus undergraduate education and function as the counterpart to the Assistant Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School. This person will be charged with reducing the fragmentation, excessive requirements, and other obstacles that stand in the way of a better undergraduate experience. A key aspect of this role will be the coordination of Integrative Studies, writing programs, career development, Undergraduate University Division, academic advising, new quantitative literacy initiatives, and international initiatives, including Study Abroad, as these relate to undergraduate education.
- Establish a single Center for Integrative Studies. This new center aims to integrate the arts and humanities and the social and natural sciences into a curriculum focused on the complex and interrelated questions and challenges facing human beings.
- Establish a broad-based faculty group on Integrative Studies. This group will provide intellectual leadership and foster a wide-ranging investment of time and resources in Integrative Studies. Its work will be similar to that of faculty groups associated with our most effective and prestigious interdisciplinary graduate programs.

This initiative promises to raise the visibility of the undergraduate experience. It will increase accountability and quality assurance for undergraduate programs through enhanced assessment of student learning outcomes, increased efforts to internationalize across undergraduate education, expanded links between hands-on learning and the classroom, and improved linkages between undergraduate education and advising. It will enable faculty to refresh, reinterpret, and renew the directions charted by the Council to Review Undergraduate Education.

## **INITIATIVE TWO: Continue to Strengthen Graduate Education**

Michigan State University has focused on graduate education during the last decade by reconfiguring the Graduate School. Improvements have been made in the completion rates for doctoral students through more explicit expectations in graduate handbooks and greater academic integration through mentoring. Graduate program reviews have been regularized and innovative master's degree programs initiated. This initiative will include:

- A major revision of graduate handbooks that will explicitly address research mentoring. Incorporation of concepts and recommendations from a research mentoring task force will generate dialogue within graduate programs and with graduate students that will improve academic integration.
- Improvement of the career advice and experiences for graduate students. Fostering further connections between Career Services and Placement and the Graduate School will enhance the programming available to graduate students who seek academic careers in two- and four-year colleges and in nonacademic employment.
- Improvement of pedagogical training for graduate students linked to the new undergraduate Integrative Studies and the Certification in College Teaching Program. Connections between the new Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the current Dean of the Graduate School will enhance knowledge and opportunities to practice new pedagogies as graduate students prepare for careers in two- and four-year colleges and universities.
- Continued focus on improving doctoral student completion rates. The Graduate School staff will work with faculty to identify the causes of attrition in their graduate programs and to formulate solutions.

### **INITIATIVE THREE: Expand the University's Successful Living and Learning Options.**

Michigan State University has always been a leader in designing living and learning options for undergraduates. Presently, James Madison College and Lyman Briggs School are most often cited as the “jewels” of MSU's undergraduate experience. Through this initiative, the number of students in degree-based living and learning programs will double in the next five years. This goal would be achieved by taking the following steps:

- Create a new residential program in the liberal and creative arts and sciences (using the Residential Option In Arts and Letters (ROIAL) as a basis for the new program).
- Expand James Madison College and Lyman Briggs School.
- Develop new links between residential programs and professional programs and between residential programs and other colleges (e.g., new efforts for pre-business students between Madison and the Broad College of Business or an enhanced program linking Briggs and the College of Engineering).
- Expand other residential options, particularly the Residential Initiative on the Study of the Environment (RISE) and the Residential Option for Science and Engineering Students (ROSES).

## **INITIATIVE FOUR: Organize the Liberal Arts Core for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

We live in a time of global change, in a world that is increasingly more interconnected and yet more diverse. We face this world with the strengths and resources of a globally-engaged and community-minded university. The structure of our core endeavors in the liberal arts ought to reflect both the changing times and our enduring strengths. With the changes outlined below, MSU aims to create new synergies among people and disciplines that better reflect the challenges and opportunities of the world around us; strengthen the links between the liberal arts core and the various professional and pragmatic arts and sciences, something that has always been MSU's comparative advantage; and create economies of scale. The key initiatives in this area would do the following:

- Expand and rename the College of Social Science. The expanded "College of Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences" will bring together History, Philosophy, Religious Studies and the current programs in Social Science. Religious Studies would be closely aligned with Anthropology. Other related jointly administered schools, centers, and institutes may also be aligned with this college.
- Create a new "College of Communication, Arts, Languages, and Media." This new college would reflect the diversity and complexity of communications in an era of globalization by bringing together programs in Communication, Information and Media, Journalism, Languages, Linguistics, Literature, Music, Telecommunication, Theatre, Advertising, Communication Disorders, Visual Arts, and Writing and Rhetoric.
- Realign Human Ecology programs. Programs now operating under the College of Human Ecology banner would be linked to a set of new relationships and resources that afford greater intellectual possibilities and greater potential for developing distinction. While at one time the college's three departments and their programs were clearly linked, over the years disciplinary specialization and growing social and scientific complexity have eroded many of the natural linkages. Now, new "locations" are needed to position programs where more vibrant synergies across disciplines are possible.

As a consequence of the above changes, the colleges of Arts and Letters, Human Ecology, and Communication Arts and Sciences would be dissolved, but the programs of these colleges would sustain their respective legacies and have new opportunities to strengthen and gain distinction.

This proposal for realignment of units and programs results in three colleges (Natural Science; Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences; and Communication, Arts, Languages, and Media) of more equivalent size, with a better balance of majors and service enrollment, and with a better blend of

opportunities for revenue generation. Further, each of these colleges has a significant role in the fundamental course of undergraduate education, a stronger balance between itself and the professional colleges, better opportunities for comparative scholarship including a broader international dimension, and a mandate to form partnerships outside the colleges to build strong programs, particularly graduate programs.

The reconfiguration builds on the success that strong and highly interconnected departments and programs have had at MSU. The changes open up new possibilities by generating faculty energy developed in the new structures. It will command national visibility for taking seriously the need to develop new and different connections, as outlined in the AAU (Association of American Universities) and AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities) reports.



The changes outlined above create the possibility for a new level of intellectual vitality and momentum across the university. They expand the influence of the liberal arts by extending their reach beyond a single college. They create new opportunities for continued globalization and internationalization of programs as a dynamic infusion of these dimensions into all aspects of the work of our faculty, staff, and students. Programs are aligned more closely with related areas of intellectual inquiry and interest, creating the potential for new synergies and connections that would not be possible under other arrangements.

The changes will not offset the effect of the approximately \$70M base budget reductions and the effect of the 1% annual reallocation (approximately \$12M) from 2002-03 and 2003-04 as well as reductions that are required for 2004-05. These initiatives were not undertaken simply to deal with the near-term budget shortfalls, though preliminary analysis by the Office of Planning and Budgets suggests they will in fact reduce operating costs by approximately \$1M. More importantly, they are intended to create a structure that will innovate, consolidate, and promote long-term intellectual vitality, quality, and reputation.

Such structural innovation is crucial. State higher education funding cuts likely will moderate, and general fund budgets probably will stabilize over the next several years. However, future state funding increases will likely be modest at best and will not offset the loss of programmatic funding we have experienced over the last few years.

In this light, MSU must continue to examine and re-examine all aspects of our work. In addition to the four initiatives outlined above, the following initiatives are under review:

- Continued actions related to the future of medical education and biomedical research at MSU.

- Increased academic integration between MSU-DCL and Michigan State University, building connectivity with undergraduate programs, the professional schools, and health programs.
- Exploration of jointly linking Computer Science to the College of Natural Science and the College of Engineering.
- Development of a more comprehensive “nursing and allied health” strategy that brings nursing, medical technology, community nutrition, and sports medicine more closely together.

As the university nears its sesquicentennial, it is faced with the challenge of either letting external circumstances dictate its future or seeking to address and alter these circumstances to enable it to continue to grow and thrive. Change is always hard, and Provost Simon looks forward to the community’s response to these initiatives and the dialogue they will engender. However, both she and the deans believe that action on this package is crucial this semester.

Comments and reactions to this blueprint, which distills and builds on the concepts and ideas from the focus groups and other communication, are sought by March 5. Please send your responses via email to: [newidea@msu.edu](mailto:newidea@msu.edu).

Based on your comments and refinements and Provost Simon’s review of the colleges’ reduction plans, which are due March 1, she will develop formal, more specific proposals that will be submitted to governance at the department, college, and university level for consultation and advice in accordance with the *Bylaws for Academic Governance*. Provost Simon expects this phase of the process to begin during the week of March 15.

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