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Sesquicentennial Address: Boldness by Design

President Lou Anna Kimsey Simon

“The university is always in motion ... Our attitude has been that we should always be studying ourselves, revisiting our aims, reassessing our responsibilities.”

—John Hannah, *A Memoir*

Today is a special day in the continuing celebration of our 150th year. Amid festivities, revivals of past rituals, and remembrances of historical high points, we take time to honor our academic values by gathering some of the best thinkers of our time to reflect on these vital issues:

- Civility: How can we contribute to creating a more civil society—on campus, locally, nationally, and globally?
- Education: What is the best way to transform education to achieve real progress in transforming society to advance the public good?
- Creativity and innovation: How can we nurture and challenge the inventive mind, sharpening and freeing it to meet the rigors of problem-solving demanded in the 21st century?

Today, with this Academic Convocation, we celebrate “the life of the mind,” our trust in the benefits of knowledge, and our belief that the application of knowledge will lead to a better society. Today we remember that this faith in “the life of the mind” is the single universal passion that unites us to one another, to our founders and forebears, and to the generations that will follow us at Michigan State University.

Our approach to “the life of the mind” always has been distinctive and boldly experimental. One hundred and fifty years ago, the founders of this university imagined a learning institution the world had never seen—one that would empower practical knowledge and combine it with traditional scientific and classical studies to create a new model of higher education. This model—our model—became the prototype for the land-grant university envisioned in the Morrill Act, the Act of Congress establishing the land-grant system that was signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1862.

Our founders also committed to developing an institution that would apply the benefits of higher education to advance society and the public good—to build something enduring. Recent natural disasters—the tsunami in December and Hurricane Katrina just last week—remind us of how fragile the things we create can be.

Our land-grant spirit strives to create resilience and sustainability. Our land-grant heart opens to anticipate society's hurts and stands ready to bring healing by:

- Applying careful and persistent attention to the challenges—real and potential—facing society and preparing us through education and research to deal with the known and unknown, the predictable and the unpredictable.
- Connecting our institution and knowledge with people, building citizen leaders and making them present in every community.
- Listening to society's needs, building trust, and working to find answers—dealing not just with immediate needs, but taking the long view.

Strategic Positioning for the Future

Today marks a defining moment for Michigan State University, the unveiling of a strategic positioning initiative we have named “Boldness by Design.” We will gather forces to envision a new kind of land-grant university and reshape our collective future—for the 21st century and for the world. Everyone in the MSU community will be engaged.

Recalling the words of John A. Hannah in 1959:

“Michigan State University has been the very embodiment of the land-grant philosophy which couples instruction, research, and extension in the interests of the people of Michigan. The problem is not one of testing the validity of this proposition, but rather of being concerned with how this philosophy can best be implemented in a period far different from the one to which that philosophy was originally indigenous.”

That far different period has again arrived, and it is time for us—sharing his belief in the validity of the land-grant proposition—to strengthen and ensure our reputation and position. We will do this:

- Not by emulating others.

- Not by trying to become something we are not.
- But by boldly daring to be who we are and who we were created to be.
- By doing it even more boldly and better than we are now.
- By boldly recasting our land-grant mission to meet 21st century challenges and opportunities.

We will honor the values of our past and draw from them the energy to innovate our future—around the world, across the nation, and at home.

Founded in Values

The foundations for this “next bold experiment” were laid in my Founders’ Day speech in February. “Boldness by Design” will build upon, preserve, and advance our land-grant tradition and values:

- **Quality:** dedicating ourselves to achieving excellence in all of our endeavors—good enough for the proudest and recognized among the best.
- **Inclusiveness:** providing opportunity for learners from all backgrounds to experience and multiply the benefits of the power of knowledge through their lives.
- **Connectivity:** among one another, among academic enterprises, to society, and to those we serve locally, nationally, and globally.

In fact, the uniqueness of Michigan State University and the land-grant tradition is built upon connectivity—that we are built on connecting things that seem separate:

- Coupling liberal arts and practical knowledge in a way that exacts the highest academic standards of each and expects them of both.
- Coupling opportunity for people with the highest academic aspirations and opportunity for those who might not see themselves as daring to aspire to higher education.
- Coupling vision and execution in ways that dramatically accelerated our growth in value, defined both in traditional academic terms and in service to society and the public good.

This coupling into the equation of the “ands” that connect these things versus the “ors” that seemingly divide them puts an extraordinary demand on

Michigan State University to produce outstanding academic products and fulfill our goal of serving society and the public good—and while doing it, not sacrifice cutting-edge knowledge.

With “Boldness by Design” we are finding a new way to emphasize the “ands”—the alignment of vision and execution—while staying true to our values and, without pause, finding new energy and speed to compete in the international marketplace—for Michigan and for Michigan State University.

A monumental change is taking place, as the world shifts from a traditional industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy. This change poses a new set of challenges for MSU and all of public higher education:

- Global issues—from the prospects of global trade to the blight of global poverty and environmental stress.
- Competition—for attracting and developing talented students, outstanding faculty and staff, public and private funds, research dollars, and strategic partners.
- Society’s expectations—that public universities will assume a greater presence in building the national and local economy, deliver more breakthrough discoveries, and partner to address the nation’s most urgent social problems, all with less and less public funding support.

We cannot allow ourselves to be blown by the prevailing winds of change and be swept up and scattered in the storm. We must develop a tough-minded, entrepreneurial approach to allocating available resources and generating more resources to do our work. “Boldness by Design” gives us a framework to do just this and equips us to make firm decisions as the winds and storms of change and uncertainty continue to press upon us.

Our Strategic Commitment

“Boldness by Design” is based on our uniting to make a strategic commitment:

By 2012, Michigan State University will be recognized worldwide—I underscore “worldwide”—as the leading research-based land-grant research university, the model for “world-grant.”

You are probably asking: What does this mean? How will we get there? How will we measure results?

It means when people think of land-grant universities they think first of Michigan State. The example of our work in the classroom, in laboratories both on campus and around the world, and our engagement in serving society will redefine the power and relevance of the land-grant mission for the 21st century world.

We will get there by working together, by staying focused amid the fascination of possibilities—the kaleidoscope of problems to solve and opportunities to seize—by staying true to our strengths, by willing it ... by design.

We will measure our results using measurable indicators we establish together.

And you are probably asking: How did you arrive at “Boldness by Design”?

Since taking office on January 1, I have traveled widely around the state, across the nation, and abroad. I have engaged in countless conversations, received advice, and listened to people who care about Michigan State University and higher education.

What I heard was Michigan State University must:

- Focus, simplify, and become more nimble.
- Play to our extraordinary strengths.
- Take what is true about Michigan State University and recast it to address 21st century realities.
- Be the university that defines the relevance of the land-grant mission for the 21st century world.

Based on this advice, we have selected five imperatives—inspired by our historical strengths—that will be used to align existing initiatives, to guide decisions on investing in new priorities, and to focus our energy:

- Enhance the student experience—by continually improving the quality of academic programs and the value of an MSU degree for undergraduate and graduate students.
- Enrich community, economic, and family life—through research, outreach, engagement, entrepreneurship, innovation, and diversity.
- Expand international reach—through academic, research, and economic development initiatives and global, national, and local strategic alliances.

- Increase research opportunities—by significantly expanding research funding and involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in research and scholarship.
- Strengthen stewardship—by appreciating and nurturing the university’s academic and financial assets, campus infrastructure, and people for optimal effectiveness today and tomorrow.

Through “Boldness by Design” we will take these imperatives and chart our course, using them to provide us with focus, guidelines for decision-making, and milestones and measurements of our progress and success toward fulfilling our strategic commitment.

Applying Strategic Imperatives

Of course, these five imperatives represent areas where we are already working and excel. But we must do more than excel, we must dominate in these areas and redefine them for the 21st century world.

Student experience—We must be the best of class in enhancing the vitality of the student/faculty exchange and in meeting student/parent expectations for:

- Placement rates, both undergraduate and graduate.
- The best synergy between academic and student affairs to strengthen the connections between traditional academic and co-curricular experiences.
- Technology—creating a technology-rich environment that enables our graduates to be leaders.
- Boldness in the organization of our academic programs.
- Flexibility of our curriculum that allows more of a blend of liberal arts and professional programs.
- Continued domination of Study Abroad for undergraduates and expanded international programs for graduate students.
- Innovations like the new residential program that was affirmed by the “Realizing the Vision” process and now Provost Wilcox’s leadership is moving through a timely review for implementation and recruitment of students for fall 2007.

We want Michigan State to be known as the place with the most powerful synergy between academic programs and student life. We want to strengthen connections between traditional academic programs and co-curricular experiences. The issues and challenges that face college students today can best be addressed by focusing on the “ands” that connect them, not on the “ors” that divide them.

We will continue to be concerned about placement rates, but not solely in terms of viewing placement rates as a measure of success. We want to shorten the time between when our students graduate from Michigan State and when they start their own companies or become entrepreneurs. America needs more entrepreneurship. We need more cutting-edge ideas. That requires that students be engaged in research and outreach while they’re undergraduates.

We also want to build the idea of entrepreneurship into graduate programs, so graduate students not only think of themselves as living “the life of the mind,” but consider how the knowledge and ideas they generate here can make a difference and contribute to the economy and the public good in their own right.

Provost Wilcox will be talking about additional enhancements to the student experience in the coming months, among them the new residential program.

Community, economic, family—We want to engage with communities around the globe. In a world of “ands,” we see no trade-offs between thinking globally and acting locally; no sense of Michigan OR other nations, but rather as Michigan AND other nations. We therefore must be the national leader in defining outreach and engagement for the world, as a research university of international scope. We must be engaged both in our home communities and around the globe. We must apply our research strengths toward economic development and commercialization. This will include:

- A broadening of the role of MSU Extension and the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station that has already begun, to assure access to the cutting-edge knowledge necessary to make a region vital, in every community around the state, even those without a research university nearby. That is both the historic role of Extension and Experiment Station and a model we believe will work for the future, building on our past work.
- Expansion of the College of Human Medicine into western Michigan.
- A new concept for creating a permanent engine for community and economic development in the Greater Lansing area and the mid-Michigan region that will subsume the event-driven initiatives of the

past into a comprehensive, proactive, sustainable force. We are just beginning to take that conversation to the larger community.

The media has given a lot of coverage to Michigan State's partnering in regional economic development efforts around Michigan. I really appreciate Director Hollister being here today. We've worked with him on both a statewide agenda and a local agenda, because every region in the state must be included if we're going to be successful. Michigan State has a special responsibility to the entire state because of our land-grant mission, and that requires a different kind of approach.

It requires looking forward, not thinking about what we should have done in the past, but what we can do together now, using our asset base and borrowing from the most successful models around the nation and the world. We're looking at ways to develop angel networks of investors and to realign our assets. As well as being the leading land-grant university, we want to make this area the model for a capital city in any state around the country, improving quality of life and working on issues ranging from health care to economic development.

And, under Dr. Hiram Fitzgerald's leadership, we will continue as a national leader in defining the measurements and accountability for engagement in higher education.

International—We want to dominate the global agenda for American higher education, building on the extraordinary foundation that already exists at Michigan State University so that when people think about great international universities, they think about Michigan State first. It's really that simple.

Building on our recent Japan and China trips, and using our Extension model, we will continue to advance our strategic alliances around the globe. Those are not simply about economic development; they represent an extension of all that we do at MSU, around the world. Other universities may open branch campuses and call them extensions of the university. But those don't build the essential relationships and partnerships needed to support research, student engagement and education across the full range of a university's mission.

We recently announced the opening of an MSU office in China. We'll also be opening one in Brazil and have other international projects and partnerships taking shape in other parts of the world, including Africa and Europe. Those will be announced in the coming weeks and months.

The current North Central Accreditation review is focused on the international dimension of Michigan State—not just on Study Abroad, but how that international dimension infuses the institution and will be one of the great strengths of Michigan State in the years ahead.

We will extend the work we have done in preparation for our institutional re-accreditation. The self-study is a strategic platform of opportunities for the internationalization of our curriculum, research, and outreach. We really appreciate the work of the entire faculty led by Dean Sherman Garnett in that effort.

I have asked John Hudzik to continue in central administration to help lead these efforts. His experience as dean of International Studies and Programs and as former acting provost will serve us well.

Research—We will continue our trend of dramatic increases in research funding.

Redefining the land-grant university for the 21st century requires—in fact, demands—that our research agenda be fully informed by the humanities and social sciences in a manner that has not been the case at MSU or at other universities. The major challenges of the knowledge economy will be human-related challenges. As a result, the most robust solutions to these challenges must be informed by our cultural legacy.

We will continue to build our prominence in federal grant competition, including the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Energy.

We will be among the top 10 percent of research universities in the growth of our funding from all sources.

In this context, we will dramatically improve funding from the National Institutes of Health with a goal of doubling our funding from NIH by 2009 and reaching \$100 million by 2012.

We will strengthen our portfolio by identifying research priorities and by supporting select interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary programs, in addition to programs in the disciplines that are consistent with major research in cross-university areas. For example:

- Environmental Science and Policy Program—especially climate, land use, and sustainability; water sciences; and risk and policy.
- Health and biomedical research—established programs that bridge the clinical and basic sciences, such as cardiovascular research, cancer research, and respiratory research. Plus, we will make a major commitment to health, nutrition, and fitness to address issues such as

nutrigenomics, obesity, phytochemicals and human health, and linking agriculture to human health and medicine.

- A new family research initiative—to enhance and coordinate programs in the broad areas of family and health; family diversity and inequality; and family, work, and education.
- Renewable resources and sustainable ecology—involving enhancement of Michigan agriculture by using agricultural biomass as a raw material, including biofuels as energy alternatives; composites and nanofiber materials; and commodity chemicals, for example, the work of Professor Kris Berglund and his company, Diversified Natural Products.
- Humanities, arts, and social sciences—We cannot rely on our scientific and technical expertise alone. We must look to our colleagues in the arts, humanities, and social sciences for assistance in both defining the nature of the problems facing the world and in creating the solutions to those problems. If we are truly "bold" in our aspirations, we must pursue solutions that don't merely address a problem but, in the best spirit of the humanities, also ennoble the human spirit and inspire us to be the very best that we can be.

And we will develop cutting-edge models for speeding the translation of basic discoveries into impacts that can be felt in mid-Michigan, across the nation, and around the world.

Stewardship—We will successfully complete our capital campaign, meet our endowment goal, and continue to be among the top 10 percent of colleges and universities in the return on our investments.

MSU is now a \$2 billion-plus all-funds operation annually, with only \$300 million of that coming from state appropriation. Our future depends on our commitment to private fundraising, and we will work tirelessly to meet and exceed our goals.

We will also aggressively continue our plans and activities to upgrade our infrastructure, including facilities, technology, and human resources systems and services.

Most importantly, we will be purposeful stewards of our human assets. That requires a focus on how to increase the value of each individual in the context of a strong "Team MSU." Going back to the John Hannah era, we have always known that people and a network of relationships built on trust both at home and around the world have been the key to our success. Our human

assets can never be taken for granted, and they will be continually nurtured as a purposeful part of “Boldness by Design.”

Our next step in the months ahead is to take these imperatives and complete the design of our implementation plan.

Executing the Plan

“Boldness by Design” is not about launching a new planning process or a whole new range of initiatives. It is about picking and choosing among the things that are already planned or in place, integrating new ideas that emerge to reflect the dynamic nature of our academic community, and reassessing what we are doing in light of international competition.

We will involve the entire campus community in work sessions, as well as seek the perspectives of key external constituents. In the work sessions participants will:

- Identify and align initiatives already under way with our strategic imperatives.
- Stimulate analysis of our current position.
- Generate new ideas, new opportunities, and new proposals.
- Develop the measurable indicators of success that we will apply to determine our progress.

The strategic imperatives and measurable indicators will be used as criteria for assessing and selecting new initiatives and setting priorities for the future.

We will get down to work, move quickly, and release the details of the first phase of “Boldness by Design” on Founders’ Day, February 2006. Provost Wilcox is already asking deans for Academic Quality Fund proposals that will reflect key institutional priorities and support these strategic imperatives.

Working Together—“Team MSU”

The months and the years ahead are about implementation—execution—seizing these imperatives and not just excelling in them, but dominating higher education in our execution on them. For us to fulfill our strategic commitment, we must all work together—“Team MSU.”

Our strategic positioning initiative is bold in approach, in design, in its aspirations, in its timing. Our approach requires that we all work together in a

purposeful, determined way, taking stock of our position and our direction for tomorrow while continuing to do the work of today.

Our strategic commitment can be fulfilled by Michigan State University—with great skill, with great intellectual power, with the great land-grant spirit and heart. And I say this with great conviction: We can do it better than any of our peers and competitors.

Why do we want to push ourselves so hard? We will always strive to excel and sustain quality in everything we do because this great university and the people we serve—both here and around the world—deserve the best. Once again, Michigan State University is marching to a different step—but in step with the society we serve.

We call upon the entire campus community for boldness—in design, in execution, and in values. Boldness in the combination of these three things, as we make them the hallmark of Michigan State University, will make us the leader of the next bold experiment. We will transform land-grant into world-grant and become the prototype land-grant university for the 21st century world.