

From the Chancellor's Desktop

March 24, 2004

Dear Colleagues,

Late last month, I spoke to the Michigan Senate's higher education appropriation committee about our ambitious plans for the campus, and our needs for state support to make those plans into reality. While it is abundantly clear that the state's resources are seriously constrained, and that it is unrealistic to expect much higher levels of support in the near future, I still believe in taking the opportunity to talk with legislators about the campus and about the great work we do with our students that leads them to enjoy successful and productive careers, and allows them to make major civic contributions in their communities.

In my testimony, I said that as part of the University of Michigan, those of us at the Dearborn campus take the university's well-known commitment to excellence and apply that commitment to serving our local region. On this campus, we are located in the heart of the state's largest metropolis, and in the heart of the economic and social engine of the state. At the Dearborn campus, we are focused not on the discovery of new fundamental knowledge in all disciplines, but rather on addressing tough, resistant real-world problems using the best available knowledge from the natural sciences, engineering, behavioral and social sciences, mathematics and other fields. We believe that the University of Michigan-Dearborn can be an intellectual workshop where these forms of advanced applied knowledge are brought to bear on the problems of industry, race, education or environment that our region faces.

I reaffirmed to the legislators that we are fully aware of the difficulties caused by the dire condition of the state's economy. We know that all of the institutions and agencies in the state have absorbed significant budget cuts in the past year, and could face more in the year ahead. I assured them that our campus community is prepared to help be part of the solution to this crisis.

At the same time, we know that the contribution that higher education makes to the state's prosperity is measured over the long term, in the productive careers of our graduates over a period of decades. In that context, the state's budget crisis is truly a short-term issue, and the state's continued support of public higher education is one of the best investments we can make in Michigan's competitiveness and economic growth.

To continue to contribute to the prosperity of southeastern Michigan, the University of Michigan-Dearborn must provide access to a high-quality education for a very diverse student population. Despite the manifest economic problems facing the state, at UM-Dearborn we are going to pursue a strategy that focuses on strengthening and extending our academic programs and deepening our commitment to serving our community.

For many of you, these are not new topics. Over the past several months, I have consulted widely among our students, faculty, and staff and supporters in the community, and have been very gratified at the shared commitment that all have expressed to do their parts to help us move forward. In addition to pursuing our challenging enrollment goals, and launching an ambitious capital campaign in the months ahead, we are going to continue to enhance and extend our undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

We also are going to continue to make progress on other major issues facing our region, in the environment, on health, and in addressing the needs of the automotive industry for sophisticated research in engineering and technology. Despite the economic problems facing the state, we are not going to abandon our community partners and the relationships we've built up over many years. Instead, we are going to continue our outreach activities that lead to improvements in the quality of life in our communities, whether it is restoring the Rouge River or studying the health care concerns of elderly immigrants from the Middle East who have made their homes in our neighborhood.

We are confident that Michigan's economy will rebound and that the state in the future will be able to provide public agencies, including higher education, with the resources they need to grow and thrive. During this period, it is important to remind the state government and the citizens of Michigan that our public universities are worthy of their support, are worthy of the great sacrifices that have been made over generations to create this system that is the envy of many states and our hope for the future. And when we do emerge from this difficult period, we will be able to point to the strength of our educational system and recognize the contributions it makes to the state's health and prosperity.

I am confident that this campus will emerge from this current crisis stronger and better prepared to help this region grow and prosper, thanks to the contributions all of you make every day to helping our students achieve in the classroom, laboratory, library and community. I'm proud to be working with you toward accomplishing this great and noble goal.

Respectfully,
Daniel Little