



## THE LEADERS AND BEST

The beginning of a new university presidency is usually associated with the pomp and circumstance of an academic inauguration ceremony. The colorful robes of an academic procession, the familiar strains of ritualistic music, and the presence of distinguished guests and visitors all make for an impressive ceremony, designed to symbolize the crowning of a new university leader. Of course, like most senior leadership positions, the university presidency takes many forms depending on the person; the institution; and, perhaps most significant, the needs of the times. Clearly, as the chief executive officer of an institution with thousands of employees (faculty and staff) and clients (students, patients, sports fans), an annual budget in the billions of dollars, a physical plant the size of a small city, and an influence that is frequently global in extent, the management responsibilities of the university president are considerable, comparable to those of the CEO of a large, multinational corporation.

A university president is also a public leader, with important symbolic, political, pastoral, and at times even moral leadership roles, particularly when it comes to representing the institution to a diverse array of external constituencies, such as government, business and industry, prospective donors, the media, and the public at large. The contemporary university is a political tempest in which all the con-

tentious issues swirling about our society churn together: for example, civil rights versus racial preference, freedom of speech versus conflicting political ideologies, social purpose versus market-driven cost-effectiveness. It is of little wonder that today's university president is frequently caught in the cross fire from opposing political points of view, making the presidency of a major university both considerably more difficult and less attractive now than in earlier eras.

My service on various advisory committees and as understudy to two earlier Michigan presidents had provided a rigorous education on the nature of the contemporary university presidency prior to my ascent—or perhaps descent, in the minds of some—to this leadership role. It was therefore perhaps not surprising that on that beautiful fall day in October 1988, my wife, Anne, and I approached my inauguration as Michigan's eleventh president with considerable apprehension. We viewed even the terminology used to describe the inauguration event, the "installation" of a new president, as suggestive more of bolting one into the complex machinery of the university administration than of coronating a new leader. Yet we also viewed this opportunity to serve our university as both a great privilege and a very considerable responsibility. Fortunately, after two decades at Michigan, we were well steeped in the legend and lore of the university, a very key requirement for a successful university presidency.

#### INSTITUTIONAL SAGA

Successful university presidents must be well informed (acclimated or indoctrinated) to the history, traditions, and cultures of the institutions they are leading. The way that academic institutions respond to changes in leadership is very different than, for example, the way that the federal government adapts to a new president or the way that a corporation is reshaped to accommodate a new CEO. Universities are based on long-standing traditions and continuity, evolving over many generations (in some cases, even centuries), with very particular sets of values, traditions, and practices.

Burton R. Clark, a noted sociologist and scholar of higher education, introduced the concept of "organizational legend," or "institutional saga," to refer to those long-standing characteristics that deter-

mine the distinctiveness of a college or university.<sup>1</sup> Clark's view is that "[a]n organizational legend (or saga), located between ideology and religion, partakes of an appealing logic on one hand and sentiments similar to the spiritual on the other"; that universities "develop over time such an intentionality about institutional life, a saga, which then results in unifying the institution and shaping its purpose." Clark notes: "An institutional saga may be found in many forms, through mottoes, traditions, and ethos. It might consist of long-standing practices or unique roles played by an institution, or even in the images held in the minds (and hearts) of students, faculty, and alumni. Sagas can provide a sense of romance and even mystery that turn a cold organization into a beloved social institution, capturing the allegiance of its members and even defining the identity of its communities."<sup>2</sup>

All colleges and universities have a social purpose, but for some, these responsibilities and roles have actually shaped their evolution and determined their character. The appearance of a distinct institutional saga involves many elements—visionary leadership; strong faculty and student cultures; unique programs; ideologies; and, of course, the time to accumulate the events, achievements, legends, and mythology that characterize long-standing institutions. For example, the saga of my alma mater, Yale University, was shaped over the centuries by old-boy traditions, such as secret societies (e.g., Skull and Bones); literature (from dime-novel heroes, such as Frank Merriwell and Dink Stover, to Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*); and national leadership (William H. Taft, George H. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Gerald R. Ford—although the latter was first and foremost a Michigan man).<sup>3</sup> Harvard's saga is perhaps best captured by the response of a former Harvard president who, when asked what it takes to build a great institution like Harvard, responded simply, "Three hundred years!" Notre Dame draws its saga from the legends of the gridiron, that is, Knute Rockne, the Four Horsemen, and the Subway Alumni. Big Ten universities also have their symbols: fraternity and sorority life, campus protests, and gigantic football stadiums.

While institutional sagas are easy to identify for older universities (e.g., North Carolina, Virginia, and Michigan among the publics; Harvard, Yale, and Princeton among the privates), they can sometimes be problematic to institutions rising rapidly to prominence.

During the controversy over inappropriate use of government research funds at Stanford during the 1990s, the late Roger Heyns—former Michigan dean; chancellor at the University of California, Berkeley; and then president of the Hewlett Foundation, adjacent to the Stanford campus—once observed to me that Stanford faced a particular challenge in becoming too good too fast.<sup>4</sup> Prior to World War II, its reputation as “the farm” was well deserved. Stanford was peaceful, pastoral, and conservative. The extraordinary reputation it achieved first in the sciences and then across all the disciplines in the latter half of the twentieth century came on so abruptly that the institution sometimes found it difficult to live with its newfound prestige and visibility, as its inquisition by a congressional inquiry into misuse of research funds in the 1990s demonstrated.

Again I quote Burton Clark: “The institutional saga is a historically based, somewhat embellished understanding of a unique organization development. Colleges are prone to a remembrance of things past and a symbolism of uniqueness. The more special the history or the more forceful the claim to a place in history, the more intensively cultivated are the ways of sharing memory and symbolizing the institution.”<sup>5</sup> A visit to the campuses of one of our distinguished private universities conveys just such an impression of history and tradition. Their ancient ivy-covered buildings and their statues, plaques, and monuments attesting to important people and events of the past convey a sense that these institutions have evolved slowly over the centuries—in careful and methodical ways—to achieve their present forms and define their institutional saga. In contrast, a visit to the campus of one of our great state universities conveys more of a sense of dynamism and impermanence. Most of the buildings look new, even hastily constructed to accommodate rapid growth. The icons of the public university tend to be their football stadiums or the smokestacks of their central power plants, rather than ivy-covered buildings or monuments. In talking with campus leaders at public universities, one gets little sense that the history of these institutions is valued or recognized. Perhaps this is due to their egalitarian nature or, conversely, to the political (and politicized) process that structures their governance and all too frequently informs their choice of leadership. The consequence is that the public university evolves through geolog-

ical layers, each generation paving over or obliterating the artifacts and achievements of its predecessors with a new layer of structures, programs, and practices. Hence, the first task of a new president of such an institution is that of unearthing and understanding its institutional saga.

#### THE MICHIGAN SAGA

To illustrate, let me adopt the perspective of a university archaeologist by sifting through the layers of the University of Michigan's history to uncover its institutional saga. Actually, this exercise is necessary both to explain my particular experience as a university president and to set the stage for a more in-depth analysis of the various elements of university leadership. So what might be suggested as the institutional saga of the University of Michigan? What are the first images of Michigan that come to mind? Academic activities such as students listening attentively to brilliant faculty in the lecture hall or studying in the library? Scientists toiling away late in the evenings in the laboratory, striving to understand the universe; or scholars poring over ancient manuscripts, rediscovering our human heritage? Not likely.

The University of Michigan is many things to many people, but its images are rarely stimulated by its core missions of teaching and scholarship. To some, the university's image is its football team, the Michigan Wolverines, decked out in those ferocious winged helmets as it stampedes into Michigan Stadium before a crowd of 110,000, rising to sing the Michigan fight song, *Hail to the Victors*. Others think first of a Michigan of the arts, where the world's leading orchestras and artists come to perform in Hill Auditorium, one of the great concert halls of the world.

For some, Michigan represents the youthful conscience of a nation—the birthplace of the teach-in protests against an unpopular war in Vietnam, site of the first Earth Day, and home of the century-old *Michigan Daily*, with student engagement in so many of the critical issues of the day. There is also the caring Michigan, as experienced by millions of patients who have been treated by the University of Michigan Medical Center, one of the nation's great centers of medical research, teaching, and clinical care.

Then there is the Michigan of the cutting-edge research that so improves the quality of our lives. For example, it was at Michigan fifty years ago that the clinical trials were conducted for the Salk polio vaccine. It was at Michigan that the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis was identified and cloned in the 1990s. And although others may have “invented” the Internet, it was Michigan (together with another “big blue” partner, IBM) that built and managed the Internet backbone for the nation during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Michigan can also be seen as a university of the world, long renowned as a truly international center of learning. If you walk down the streets of any capital city in the world, you will encounter Michigan graduates, often in positions of leadership. Indeed, Michigan is even a university of the universe, with the establishment of the first lunar chapter of the UM Alumni Association by the all-Michigan crew of Apollo 15.

These activities may serve as images of the university for many. I would suggest, however, that they are less a conveyance of the nature of Michigan’s institutional saga than a consequence of its more fundamental traditions and character. To truly understand Michigan’s saga, one must go back in time almost two centuries ago, to the university’s founding in frontier America.

It can be argued that it was in the Midwest, in such towns as Ann Arbor and Madison, that the early paradigm for the true public university in America first evolved, a paradigm that was capable of responding to the needs of a rapidly changing nation in the nineteenth century and that still dominates higher education today. In many ways, the University of Michigan has been, throughout its history, the flagship of public higher education in America. Although the University of Michigan was not the first of the state universities, it was the first to be free of sectarian control, created as a true public institution, and responsive to the people of its state.

The University of Michigan (or, more accurately, the Catholepistemead or University of Michigania) was established in the village of Detroit in 1817 (two decades before Michigan entered the Union), by an act of the Northwest Territorial government. It was financed through the sale of Indian lands granted by the U.S. Congress. The founding principle for the university can be found in the familiar

words of the Northwest Ordinance, chiseled on the frieze of the most prominent building on today's campus, Angell Hall: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."<sup>6</sup> This precept clearly echoes the Jeffersonian ideal of education for all—to the extent of an individual's capacity—as the key to creating the educated citizenry necessary for a democracy to flourish.

Actually, the first incarnation of the University of Michigan (the Catholepistemiad) was not a university but, rather, a centralized system of schools, borrowing a model from the imperial University of France founded by Napoleon a decade earlier. It was only after the state of Michigan entered the Union in 1837 that a new plan was adopted to shift the university beyond secondary education, establishing it as a "state" university after the Prussian system, with programs in literature, science, and arts; medicine; and law—the first three academic departments of the new university.

Both because the university had already been in existence for two decades before the state of Michigan entered the Union in 1837 and because of the frontier society's deep distrust of politics and politicians, the new state's early constitution (1851) granted the university an unusual degree of autonomy as a "coordinate branch of state government," with full powers over all university matters granted to its governing board of regents (although, surprisingly enough, it did not state the purpose of the university). This constitutional autonomy, together with the fact that the university was actually established by the territorial government and supported through a land grant from the U.S. Congress, has shaped an important feature of the university's character. In financial terms, the University of Michigan was actually a U.S. land-grant university—supported entirely by the sale of its federal lands and student fees (rather than state resources)—until after the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> Hence, throughout its history, the university has regarded itself as much as a national university as a state university, albeit with some discretion when dealing with the Michigan state legislature. This broader heritage has also been reflected in the university's student enrollment, which has always been characterized by an unusually high percentage of out-of-state and international students.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Michigan's constitutional autonomy, periodically reaffirmed through court tests and constitutional convention, has enabled the university to have much more control over its own destiny than have most other public universities.

Implicit in the new constitution was also a provision that the university's regents be determined by statewide popular election, again reflecting public dissatisfaction with the selection and performance of the early, appointed regents. (The last appointed board retaliated by firing the professors at the university.) The first assignment of the newly elected board was to select a president for the university (after inviting back the fired professors). After an extensive search, they elected Henry Philip Tappan, a broadly educated professor of philosophy from New York, as the first president of the reconfigured university.

Tappan arrived in Ann Arbor in 1852, determined to build a university very different from those characterizing the colonial colleges of nineteenth-century America. He was strongly influenced by such European leaders as von Humboldt, who stressed the importance of combining specialized research with humanistic teaching to define the intellectual structure of the university. Tappan articulated a vision of the university as a capstone of civilization, a repository for the accumulated knowledge of humankind, and a home for scholars dedicated to the expansion of human understanding. He maintained: "[A] university is the highest possible form of an institution of learning. It embraces every branch of knowledge and all possible means of making new investigations and thus advancing knowledge."<sup>9</sup>

In Tappan's view, the United States had no true universities, at least in the European sense. With the University of Michigan's founding heritage from both the French and Prussian systems, he believed he could build such an institution in the frontier state of Michigan. And build it, he did, attracting distinguished scholars to the faculty, such as Andrew D. White and Charles Kendall Adams,<sup>10</sup> and placing an emphasis on graduate study and research and on investing in major research facilities.

Of course, in many other ways, the university was still a frontier institution, as the early images of the campus suggest. Yet even at this early stage, the University of Michigan already exhibited many of the



characteristics we see in today's universities. One might even make the claim that the University of Michigan was not only the first truly public university in America and one of its first land-grant universities but also possibly even its first true university, at least in the sense that we would understand it today. To be sure, the early colonial colleges, such as Harvard and Yale, were established much earlier by the states (or colonies), as were several institutions in the south, such as the University of North Carolina, the University of South Carolina, and the University of Georgia. But all were governed by clergymen, with the mission of preparing young men for leadership in church or state. The University of Michigan, predating Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia by two years, was firmly established as a public university with no religious affiliation. Michigan's status as a land-grant university, provided through congressional action, predates by almost half a century the Land-Grant Acts establishing the great state universities (e.g., the Morrill Act of 1862). And Henry Tappan's vision of Michigan as a true university, stressing scholarship and scientific research along with instruction, predates by two decades other early American universities, such as Cornell University (founded by Andrew D. White, one of Tappan's faculty members at Michigan) and Johns Hopkins University.

From its founding, Michigan has always been identified with the most progressive forces in American higher education. The early colonial colleges served the aristocracy of colonial society, stressing moral development over a liberal education, much as did the English public schools, which were based on a classical curriculum in such subjects as Greek, Latin, and rhetoric. In contrast, Michigan blended the classical curriculum with the European model that stressed faculty involvement in research and dedication to the preparation of future scholars. Michigan hired as its first professors not classicists but a zoologist and a geologist. Unlike other institutions of the time, Michigan added instruction in the sciences to the humanistic curriculum, creating a hybrid that drew on the best of both a "liberal" and a "utilitarian" education.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout its early years, Michigan was the site of many firsts in higher education. Michigan was the first university in the West to pursue professional education, establishing its medical school in 1850,

engineering courses in 1854, and a law school in 1859. The university was among the first to introduce instruction in fields as diverse as zoology and botany, modern languages, modern history, American literature, pharmacy, dentistry, speech, journalism, teacher education, forestry, bacteriology, and naval architecture. It provided leadership in scientific research by building one of the first university observatories in the world in 1854, followed in 1856 with the nation's first chemistry laboratory building. In 1869, it opened the first university-owned hospital, which today has evolved into one of the nation's largest university medical centers.

Michigan continued as a source of new academic programs in higher education into the twentieth century. It created the first aeronautical engineering program in 1913, then followed, soon after World War II, with the first nuclear engineering (1952) and computer engineering (1955) programs. The formation of the Survey Research Center and associated Institute of Social Research in the 1950s stimulated the quantitative approach that underpins today's social sciences. Michigan was a pioneer in atomic energy (with the first nuclear reactor on a university campus), then later developed time-sharing computing in the 1960s. In the 1980s, it played a leadership role in building and managing the Internet, the electronic superhighway that is now revolutionizing our society. Michigan's influence as an intellectual center today is evidenced by the fact that it has long been one of the nation's leaders in its capacity to attract research grants and contracts from the public and private sector, attracting over \$800 million a year in such sponsored research support today.

Throughout its history, the University of Michigan has also been one of the nation's largest universities, vying with the largest private universities, such as Harvard and Columbia, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then holding this position of national leadership until the emergence of the statewide public university systems (including, e.g., the University of California and the University of Texas) in the post-World War II years. It continues to benefit from one of the largest alumni bodies in higher education, with over 450,000 living alumni. Michigan graduates are well represented in leadership roles in both the public and private sectors and in such learned professions as law, medicine, and engineering. Michigan

sends more of its graduates on to professional study in such fields as law, medicine, engineering, and business than any other university in the nation. The university's influence on the nation has been profound through the achievements of its graduates.

What can be said of the role of sports, such as football, in Michigan's saga? The Michigan Wolverines play before hundreds of thousands of spectators in Michigan Stadium and millions of viewers across the nation. Michigan leads the nation in football victories, ironically passing Yale (on whose team I played in my college years) during my presidency in the 1990s. Standing tall in the history of sports are such Michigan gridiron legends as Fielding Yost, Tom Harmon, Bo Schembechler, and Gerald R. Ford. Yet as difficult as it may be for many fans to accept, football and other Michigan athletics have always been more of an asterisk to the list of the university's most important contributions to the nation. Michigan's sports are entertaining, to be sure, providing students, alumni, and fans with the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat—and always a topic of conversation at reunions. But in the grander scheme of higher education, they have proven neither substantive nor enduring in terms of true impact on the state, the nation, or the world.

Michigan students have often stimulated change in our society, but they have done so through their social activism and academic achievements rather than their athletic exploits. From the teach-ins against the Vietnam War in the 1960s to Earth Day in the 1970s to the Michigan Mandate in the 1980s, Michigan student activism has often been the catalyst for national movements. In a similar fashion, Michigan played a leadership role in public service, from John Kennedy's announcement of the Peace Corps on the steps of the Michigan Union in 1960 to the university's involvement in launching the AmeriCorps in 1994. Its classrooms have often been battlegrounds over what colleges will teach, from challenges to the Great Books canon to more recent confrontations over political correctness. Over a century ago, *Harper's Weekly* noted that the university's "most striking feature . . . is the broad and liberal spirit in which it does its work."<sup>12</sup> This spirit of democracy and tolerance for diverse views among its students and faculty continues today.

Nothing could be more natural to the University of Michigan

than challenging the status quo. Change has always been an important part of the university's tradition. Michigan has long defined the model of the large, comprehensive, public research university, with a serious commitment to scholarship and progress. It has been distinguished by unusual breadth, a rich diversity of academic disciplines, professional schools, social and cultural activities, and intellectual pluralism. The late Clark Kerr, the president of the University of California, once referred to the University of Michigan as "the mother of state universities," noting it as the first to prove that a high-quality education could be delivered at a publicly funded institution of higher learning.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly enough, the university's success in achieving such quality had little to do with the generosity of state support. From its founding in 1817 until the state legislature made its first appropriation to the institution in 1867, the university was supported entirely from its federal land-grant endowment and the fees derived from students. During its early years, state government actually mismanaged and then misappropriated the funds from the congressional land grants intended to support the university. The university did not receive direct state appropriations until 1867, and for most of its history, Michigan's state support for its university has actually been quite modest relative to many other states. Rather, many people (including myself) believe that the real key to the University of Michigan's quality and impact has been the very unusual autonomy granted to the institution by the state constitution. The university has always been able to set its own goals for the quality of its programs, rather than allowing these to be determined by the vicissitudes of state policy, support, or public opinion. Put another way, although the university is legally "owned" by the people of the state, it has never felt obligated to adhere to the priorities or whims of a particular generation of Michigan citizens. Rather, it viewed itself as an enduring social institution with a duty of stewardship to generations past and a compelling obligation to take whatever actions were necessary to build and protect its capacity to serve future generations. Even though these actions might conflict from time to time with public opinion or the prevailing political winds of state government, the university's constitutional autonomy clearly gave it the ability to set its own course. The

university has always viewed such objectives as program quality or access to educational opportunity as institutional decisions, rather than succumbing to public or political pressures.

This unrelenting commitment to academic excellence, broad student access, and public service continues today. In virtually all national and international surveys, the University of Michigan's programs rank among the very best, with most of its schools, colleges, and departments ranking in quality among the top 10 nationally and with several regarded as the leading programs in the nation. Other state universities have had far more generous state support than the University of Michigan. Others have had a more favorable geographical location than good, gray Michigan. Yet it was Michigan that made the unusual commitment to provide a college education of the highest possible quality to an increasingly diverse society—regardless of state support, policy, or politics. The rapid expansion and growth of the nation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demanded colleges and universities capable of serving all of its population (rather than simply the elite) as the key to a democratic society. Here, Michigan led the way both in its commitment to wide access and equality and in the leadership it provided for higher education in America.

Particularly notable here was the role of Michigan president James Angell in articulating the importance of Michigan's commitment to provide "an uncommon education for the common man." Angell challenged the aristocratic notions of leaders of the colonial colleges, such as Charles Eliot of Harvard. Angell argued that Americans should be given opportunities to develop talent and character to the fullest. He portrayed the state university as the bulwark against the aristocracy of wealth. Angell went further to claim that "the overwhelming majority of students at Michigan were the children of parents who are poor, or of very moderate means: that a very large portion have earned by hard toil and by heroic self-denial the amount needed to maintain themselves in the most frugal manner during their university course, and that so far from being an aristocratic institution, there is no more truly democratic institution in the world." To make a university education available to all economic classes, Michigan kept tuition and fees minimal for many years. President

Angell put it, “The whole policy of the administration of the university has been to make life here simple and inexpensive so that a large portion of our students can support themselves.”<sup>14</sup> This commitment continues today, when even in an era of severe fiscal constraints, the university still meets the full financial need of every Michigan student enrolling in its programs.

As historian Frederick Rudolph suggests, it was through the leadership of the University of Michigan after the Civil War, joined by the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin, that the state universities in the Midwest and West would evolve into the inevitable and necessary expression of a democratic society.<sup>15</sup> Frontier democracy and frontier materialism combined to create a new type of institution, capable of serving all of the people of a rapidly changing America through education, research, and public service. As Rudolph notes, these institutions attempted to “marry the practical and the theoretical, attempting to attract farm boys to their classrooms and scholars to their faculties.”<sup>16</sup>

The university has long placed high value on the diversity of its student body, both because of its commitment to serve all of society and because of its perception that such diversity enhanced the quality of its educational programs. From its earliest years, Michigan sought to attract students from a broad range of ethnic and geographic backgrounds. By 1860, the regents referred “with partiality” to the “list of foreign students drawn thither from every section of our country.”<sup>17</sup> Forty-six percent of the university’s students then came from other states and foreign countries. Michigan awarded the first U.S. doctorate to a Japanese citizen, who later was instrumental in founding the University of Tokyo. President Angell’s service in 1880–81 as U.S. envoy to China established further the university’s great influence in Asia, when he later persuaded the United States to allow China to invest the reparations from the Boxer Rebellion in a new university, Tsinghua University.

The first African American students arrived on campus in 1868. Michigan was one of the first large universities in America to admit women in 1870. At the time, the rest of the nation looked on with a critical eye, certain that the experiment of coeducation would fail. Although the first women students were true pioneers (the objects of

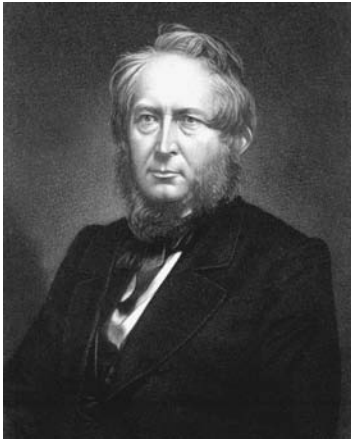
intense scrutiny and some resentment), the enrollment of women had increased by 1898 to the point where they received 53 percent of Michigan's undergraduate degrees, roughly the same percentage they represent today.

One of Michigan's most important contributions to the nation may be its commitment to providing an education of exceptional quality to students from all backgrounds. In many ways, it was at the University of Michigan that Thomas Jefferson's enlightened dreams for the public university were most faithfully realized. The university has always taken great pride in the diversity of its students, faculty, and programs, whether that diversity is characterized by gender, race, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, or nationality—not to mention academic interests or political persuasion. The university's constitutional autonomy enabled it to defend this commitment in the face of considerable political resistance to challenging the status quo, eventually taking the battle for diversity and equality of opportunity all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in landmark cases in 2003. In more contemporary terms, it seems clear that an important facet of the institutional saga of the University of Michigan would be its achievement of excellence through diversity.

#### A HERITAGE OF LEADERSHIP

Of course, while university presidents are most successful when they understand and respect the institutional saga of their university, they are also capable of shaping it to some extent. Perhaps more significant, the long history and unusually strong traditions characterizing some universities, such as the University of Michigan, inform, define, and shape their leadership. It has sometimes been suggested that the regents of the University of Michigan have been fortunate to have always selected the right leader for the times. Yet history suggests that the achievements of Michigan's presidents have been due less to good fortune or wisdom in their selection than to the ability of this remarkable institution to mold its leadership. For this tradition, all should be grateful, since change inevitably happens in both rapid and unexpected ways in higher education, as evidenced by the diverse roles that the university's presidents have played over time.

## Henry Philip Tappan (1852–63)



Henry Philip Tappan, Michigan's first president,<sup>18</sup> brought to Ann Arbor a vision of building a true university that would not only conduct instruction and advanced scholarship but also respond to popular needs. He aimed to develop an institution that would cultivate the originality and genius of the talented few seeking knowledge beyond the traditional curriculum, along with a graduate school in which diligent and responsi-

ble students could pursue their studies and research under the eye of learned scholars in an environment of enormous resources in books, laboratories, and museums. Although his expectation that university professors should engage in research as well as teaching disturbed some, it also allowed him to attract leading scholars and take the first steps toward building a "true university" in the European sense.

Yet Tappan also had an elitist streak. His vision, personality, and European pretensions eventually began to rub the frontier culture of Michigan the wrong way, with one newspaper describing him as "the most completely foreignized specimen of an abnormal Yankee we have ever seen."<sup>19</sup> Although Tappan's first board of regents strongly supported his vision, they were replaced in 1856 by a new board that, almost immediately after its election, began to undermine Tappan's leadership, by using a committee structure to weaken his executive powers. The board's opposition to Tappan was joined by several faculty members strongly resistant to change, along with the powerful editor of a Detroit newspaper. Eventually, the convergence of these hostile forces emboldened the regents to fire Tappan in 1863, ironically during a secret session soon after the regents' defeat in the statewide election. The lame-duck board named as his successor Erastus Haven, a former faculty member who had long sought the position.

Despite this ignominious end to his tenure by a hostile board of regents, Tappan is viewed today as one of the most important early



American university leaders, not only shaping the University of Michigan, but influencing all of higher education and defining the early nature of the American research university. Years later, President James Angell was to have the last word on the sordid incident: "Tappan was the largest figure of a man that ever appeared on the Michigan campus. And he was stung to death by gnats!"<sup>20</sup>

Erastus Otis Haven (1863–69)



A professor of Latin language and literature from 1852 to 1856, Erastus Haven had been among those seeking Henry Tappan's dismissal and viewed himself as a possible successor. Although the newly elected regents were lukewarm to Haven, they quickly concluded that it would be too disruptive to bring back Tappan, particularly after, following his departure from Ann Arbor, he had lashed out publicly at those who had undermined him at Michigan.

Although Haven had no personal agenda, he was able to win over elements from both campus and community and succeeded in consolidating some of the reforms Tappan instituted. He secured a modest annual appropriation from the state legislature. He defended Michigan's unusually large out-of-state enrollments (then two-thirds) by reminding the legislature that the university had been funded through the sale of lands granted by the U.S. Congress rather than through state tax dollars and hence had national obligations, an argument subsequent presidents would frequently repeat.

However, Haven broke no new ground in moving further toward Tappan's vision of a university. He sided with the regents to deny admission to women. The unusual nature of his appointment in the wake of Tappan's firing would continue to deprive Haven of strong faculty and regental support. He soon became frustrated with faculty criticism and left in 1869 for the presidency of Northwestern University.

## Henry Simmons Frieze (1869–71)



The regents asked Henry Frieze, professor of Latin language and literature, to serve as president pro tempore until Erastus Haven's successor could be selected. Frieze would later serve in the interim role on two other occasions, when his successor, James Angell, went on overseas assignments. Despite his brief tenure, Frieze accomplished much, quietly moving to admit women; obtaining the funds to build University Hall, the dominant academic building of the nineteenth-century campus; and establishing the University Musical Society, the center of cultural life in the university and Ann Arbor to this day.

Perhaps most significant, Frieze created the American secondary school systems, the high schools, as we know them today. Prior to the Civil War, most public education occurred at the primary level, and colleges and universities were obliged to create associated academies to prepare students for college work. Frieze began the practice of certifying select Michigan public schools as capable of offering respectable college preparation, thereby freeing the university from preparatory commitments and stimulating the schools of the state to extend their responsibilities into secondary education. This device unleashed the high school movement in the Midwest and later the nation, not only enabling the state universities to cultivate scholarly aspirations, but reshaping public education into clearly differentiated elementary and secondary schools.<sup>21</sup> James Angell put Frieze's contributions well: "No man except President Tappan has done so much to give to the university its present form and character. No one was ever more devoted to the interests of this institution or cherished a more abiding hope for its permanent prosperity and usefulness."<sup>22</sup>

James Burrill Angell (1871–1909)



Michigan's longest-serving president (38 years), James Angell, had served as president of the University of Vermont and on the faculty of Brown University before coming to Ann Arbor. He presided over Michigan's growth into the largest university in the nation. He was persuasive with both the regents and the state legislature. He managed to convince the state to fund the university through a mill tax (a fixed percentage of the state property tax), thereby avoiding the

politics of having to beg the legislature each year for an operating appropriation (as is the practice today).

Although Angell himself was not an educational visionary, he recruited many faculty members such as John Dewey who strongly influenced the direction of American education. It is during Angell's long tenure that we can mark the first appearance of many of the University of Michigan's present characteristics, such as the academic organization of schools and colleges, the four-year BA/BS curriculum of 120 semester hours, the *Michigan Daily*, the Michigan Marching Band, and the Michigan football team. When Angell arrived, the university had 33 faculty and 1,100 students, and the university administration consisted of only three people: a president, treasurer, and secretary. By the time Angell retired in 1909, the university had grown to over 400 faculty and 5,400 students.

As noted earlier, Angell was an articulate and forceful advocate for the role of the public university in a democracy. He continued Frieze's efforts to shape coherent systems of public elementary and secondary education and replaced the classical curriculum with a more pragmatic course of study with wider utility and public accountability. With other public university leaders of the era, such as Charles R. Van Hise at Wisconsin, he established the state universities of the Midwest in a central role in the life of their states.

Yet Angell also embraced much of Tappan's original vision for a true university in Ann Arbor. He favored eliminating the freshman and sophomore years and focusing the university on upper-division and graduate education. Interestingly, Angell joined Andrew White of Cornell in attempting to slow the professionalism of college football. When Michigan students invited Cornell to play its football team in 1873, White replied to Angell: "I will not permit thirty men to travel 400 miles merely to agitate a bag of wind!"<sup>23</sup> Thirty years later, in 1906, Angell called the formative meeting in Chicago of the Western Conference (later to become the Big Ten Conference), with the intention of reforming the sport. But he suffered an embarrassing end run when Michigan's famous coach Fielding Yost persuaded the regents to withdraw Michigan from the new athletic conference in 1908, because the conference would restrict the outside income of coaches. (Walter Byers observes that it took a decade—and a new board of regents—for Michigan to end this "flirtation with foolishness," restore faculty control of intercollegiate athletics, and rejoin the Western Conference.)<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps most indicative of Angell's vision was the advice that he gave a visiting committee of trustees from the newly formed Johns Hopkins University. He convinced them that the time was right for the development of a great graduate university on the German model. Very much in the Michigan spirit, he argued that whatever they did ought to be something new and different,<sup>25</sup> that a rapidly changing nation required new colleges and universities that could change with it. Angell was the last among Michigan's "headmaster" presidents, men who fostered an intimate relationship with students and faculty. The large, complex university of the twentieth century would require a far different type of leadership.

#### Harry Burns Hutchins (1909–20)

At the age of 63, Harry Hutchins, dean of the University of Michigan Law School, was named interim president in 1909, to succeed James Angell. After several candidates, including Woodrow Wilson, declined to accept the Michigan presidency, the regents decided to appoint Hutchins president for a 3-year term, which was later



extended to 5 and then 10 years. Hutchins largely continued the Angell agenda, with the first significant additions to the campus from private gifts: a large concert hall (Hill Auditorium) and a women's residence hall (Martha Cook Hall). Hutchins made the first concerted effort to pull together Michigan's growing alumni body, with such major projects as the Michigan Union (the nation's first student union). However, he also faced the difficult challenge of leading the university

through World War I, which rapidly exhausted his remaining energy and led to his retirement in 1920.

#### Marion Leroy Burton (1920–25)



Marion Burton was attracted to Michigan from the presidency of the University of Minnesota (and, before that, Smith College). Tall, with a commanding presence and a persuasive voice, he captivated students and legislators alike. His talent for organization and his vision of an expanding university precisely fit the needs and spirit of the post-World War I years. He understood that following the Great War, the demand for a college

education would be enormous. It would be a time for the university "to spend boldly rather than conserve expediently," as Hutchins had done. Burton recognized: "A state university must accept happily the conclusion that it is destined to be large. If the state grows and prospers, it will naturally reflect these conditions."<sup>26</sup> Propelled by the prosperous economy of the Roaring Twenties, construction on the campus boomed, and enrollments increased. Burton was also an aca-

democratic innovator. He restructured the board of regents to give the deans more authority; created faculty executive committees as a form of shared governance at the school and department level; instituted faculty sabbaticals; and attracted visiting faculty in the arts, such as Robert Frost. Unfortunately, Burton suffered a serious heart attack in 1924, and he died at the age of 49, after only five years as president.

#### Clarence Cook Little (1925–29)



In the aftermath of Marion Burton's tragic death, the regents searched for a young man in vigorous health. They turned to the 36-year-old president of the University of Maine, Clarence Cook "Pete" Little, as Michigan's next president. A cancer researcher with all of his degrees from Harvard, C. C. Little favored the Michigan focus on research, but he clung to the New England collegiate ideal of a selective student body, with an

emphasis on character development rather than preparation for a career. In effect, he pushed the Harvard educational model (complete with the Harvard "houses," instead of students living independently in boarding houses and fraternities), along with a common curriculum for the first two years through a "university college"—much to the dismay and determined resistance of the Michigan faculty. These educational objectives, coupled with his controversial stand on such social issues as Prohibition and birth control, soon created strained relations both on the campus and across the state. Although Fielding Yost, now athletic director, managed to build Michigan Stadium during Little's tenure, other accomplishments were modest, and after only four years, Little submitted his resignation in 1929, to become director of the Jackson Memorial Laboratory in Maine. The regents were faced once again with finding a new president, for the third time in a decade.

Alexander Grant Ruthven (1929–51)



Alexander Ruthven received his PhD in zoology from Michigan in 1906 and served as a faculty member and later as director of the University Museum. He became the dean of administration, the university's second-ranking administrator under C. C. Little, and was selected as president by the regents after a perfunctory search just weeks before the stock market crash of 1929. He was already very experienced in both university administration and

state relations, and he understood well that it is "absurd to think that a lay board can handle the details of the modern university, or that the president is a headmaster, capable of directing all financial, academic, and public relations activities." Instead, he created a corporate administration, in which the regents served as "guardians of the public trust and . . . functioned as custodians of the property and income of the university," while the president was viewed as the chairman of the faculties, just as the deans were chairmen of their faculties and administrative heads of their schools.<sup>27</sup>

Ruthven led the university for two decades, through the traumas of the Great Depression and World War II. He managed to protect the university from serious cuts in state appropriations during the Depression, although the mill tax was eventually replaced by the process of annual appropriations from general state revenues in 1935. He understood well the dangers of wartime priorities, and he was skillful in protecting the core education and research missions of the university, even as it served the nation in exemplary fashion during World War II. In 1951, when Ruthven finally retired, the university had grown to over 21,000 students, including 7,700 veterans enrolled under the GI Bill.

## Harlan Henthorne Hatcher (1951–67)



For Alexander Ruthven's successor, the regents selected Harlan Hatcher, former vice president for faculty and curriculum, dean, English professor, and student (BA, MA, and PhD) all at Ohio State University. Hatcher was noted for his teaching, writing, and administrative talents. He moved rapidly to restructure the university's administration to take advantage of the postwar economic boom. Hatcher's 17-year tenure saw dramatic expansion in enrollment and the

physical campus, including the acquisition and development of the North Campus in Ann Arbor and establishment of regional campuses in Flint and Dearborn to accommodate the doubling of student enrollments from 21,000 to 41,000. Under Hatcher's leadership, Michigan continued its reputation as one of the world's leading research universities, with major activities in nuclear energy (the Michigan Memorial Phoenix Project), the space program (including the nation's leading programs for astronaut training), biomedical research (the clinical trials of the Salk vaccine), and the physical sciences (Donald Glaser's invention of the bubble chamber), as well as the development of the quantitative social sciences (the establishment of the Institute for Social Research and the Survey Research Center). During Hatcher's tenure, student high jinks (the first panty raids occurred in 1952) were balanced by serious social issues: for example, during the Red Scare years, two faculty members were dismissed for refusing to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The university benefited from generous state support during this era, enabling such important educational innovations as the Residential College, the Pilot Program, and the Inteflex Program (a novel combined BS/MD program).

Although Hatcher's skillful approach as a gentleman scholar provided effective leadership during the 1950s, it was challenged by the



emerging student activism of the 1960s: the formation of the Students for a Democratic Society by Michigan students, such as Tom Hayden, in the 1960s, as well as growing student protests over such issues as civil rights and the Vietnam War. It was clear that times were changing, and a new style of leadership would be necessary as student activism against “the establishment” escalated during the 1960s. Hatcher retired in 1967, at the age of 70.

Robben Wright Fleming (1968–79)



The regents turned to Robben Fleming, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, to lead the University of Michigan during a time of protest and disruption. Fleming’s background as a professor of labor relations specializing in arbitration and mediation served him well during the tumultuous years when Ann Arbor was a center of student activism. His patience, negotiating skills, and genuine sympathy for the concerns of students and faculty helped Michigan weather the decade

without the destructive confrontations that struck some other universities. Despite pressure from conservative groups, Fleming was careful both to respect the freedom to protest and to avoid inflexible stands on nonessential matters, believing that most protesters would soon wear themselves out if not provoked. Fleming’s background as a labor negotiator also served him in good stead with the increasing unionization of the university; as numerous employee groups unionized, strikes became a familiar routine in campus life. In 1971, even student groups (e.g., the University Hospital interns and residents and then the graduate teaching assistants) successfully unionized.

Fleming believed that the most important role of the president in a successful university was to keep things running smoothly and that this could best be done by recruiting a team of outstanding administrators. He once noted, “If you start out as president with a provost

and a chief financial officer who are superb people, you are about three-quarters of the way down the path of success, because these are your critical areas.”<sup>28</sup> Fleming had an abundance of such administrative talent in the provosts Allan Smith, Frank Rhodes, and Harold Shapiro and in the chief financial officers Wilbur Pierpont and James Brinkerhoff.

The cutback in federal research funding associated with the burden of the Vietnam War and with a state economy weakened by the OPEC oil embargo and the energy crisis limited both campus expansion and new initiatives, although Fleming did manage to launch the planning for the most ambitious project in university history, the Replacement Hospital Project. Student activism continued over such issues as minority enrollments (the Black Action Movement demanded in 1970 that the university commit itself to the achievement of 10 percent enrollment of African American students); the debate over recombinant DNA research in 1974; the university’s continued involvement in classified research (which eventually led to the severing of its relationship with the Willow Run Laboratories in 1972); and the growth of the environmental movement, culminating in Earth Day in 1970 (when the students hacked a Ford vehicle to death on the Diag). Fleming handled each of these issues with skill and effectiveness. Yet it became clear that the continuing erosion of state support was not likely to recover and that a new financial strategy involving significant private fund-raising and tuition revenue would be necessary. Hence, after a decade of leadership, Fleming stepped down in 1977 and was succeeded by Allan Smith, the former provost, as interim president for a year.

#### Harold Tafler Shapiro (1980–87)

After an extensive nationwide search, the regents turned inside to select the university’s provost, Harold Shapiro, as the next president. A Canadian by birth and educated at McGill and Princeton universities, Shapiro had served as chair of the University of Michigan’s Department of Economics and led the economic forecasting project that analyzed the Michigan economy. He understood well that the state’s economy would likely drop in prosperity to the national aver-



age and below in the years ahead. As it happened, during the 1970s and 1980s, state support would fall from 60 percent of the university's general and education budget to 30 percent (and it declined still further, to 15 percent, during the 1990s). Together with his provost, Billy Frye, Shapiro started the university down the long road toward becoming a privately supported public university, since he had little faith that generous state support would ever return. Despite

the weak state economy, the university moved ahead on such important projects as the completion of the Replacement Hospital Project, the successful move of the College of Engineering to a new North Campus complex, a major private fund-raising campaign for \$180 million, and a rebuilding of the quality of the physical sciences at Michigan.

Yet Shapiro's most important impact as president lay not in his financial acumen but, rather, in the high standards he set for the quality of the university's academic programs. Both as provost and as president, he raised the bar of expectations for faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure. He understood well that the reputation of a research university is determined by the quality of its research, graduate, and professional programs and that quality in these programs is in turn determined by faculty achievement and reputation. He realized that only by being recognized as a leader among its peers would the university acquire the financial strength and independence to afford and achieve excellence in undergraduate education.

#### MICHIGAN'S CHARACTER AS A TRAILBLAZER

What might be suggested for the Michigan institutional saga in view of the university's history, its traditions and roles, and its leadership over the years? Among the possible candidates from Michigan's history are the following characteristics:

1. The Catholepistemead or University of Michigania (the capstone of a system of public education)
2. The flagship of public universities or “mother of state universities”
3. A commitment to providing “an uncommon education for the common man”
4. The “broad and liberal spirit” of its students and faculty
5. The university’s control of its own destiny, due to its constitutional autonomy providing political independence as a state university and to an unusually well-balanced portfolio of assets providing independence from the usual financial constraints on a public university
6. An institution diverse in character yet unified in values
7. A relish for innovation and excitement
8. A center of critical inquiry and learning
9. A tradition of student and faculty activism
10. A heritage of leadership
11. “The leaders and best” (to borrow a phrase from Michigan’s fight song, *The Victors*)

But one more element of the Michigan saga seems particularly appropriate during these times of challenge and change in higher education.

Shortly after my appointment as provost of the university, Harold Shapiro arranged several visits to the campuses of peer institutions to help me learn more about their practices and perceptions. During a visit to Harvard, I had the opportunity to spend some time with its president, Derek Bok. As it happened, Bok knew a good deal about Michigan, since, in a sense, Michigan and Harvard have long provided a key communication channel between public and private higher education in America.

Bok acknowledged that Harvard’s vast wealth allowed it to focus investments in particular academic areas far beyond anything that Michigan—or almost any other university in the nation—could achieve. But he added that Michigan had one asset that Harvard would never be able to match: its unique combination of quality,

breadth, and capacity. He suggested that this combination enabled Michigan to take risks far beyond anything that could be matched by a private university. Because of its relatively modest size, Harvard tended to take a rather conservative approach to academic programs and appointments, since a mistake could seriously damage an academic unit. Michigan's vast size and breadth allowed it to experiment and innovate on a scale far beyond that tolerated by most institutions, as evidenced by its long history of leadership in higher education. It could easily recover from any failures it encountered on its journeys along high-risk paths. Bok suggested that this ability to take risks, to experiment and innovate, to explore various new directions in teaching, research, and service, might be Michigan's unique role in American higher education. He persuaded me that during a time of great change in society, Michigan's most important saga might be that of a pathfinder, a trailblazer, building on its tradition of leadership and relying on its unusual combination of quality, capacity, and breadth, to reinvent the university, again and again, for new times, new needs, and new worlds.<sup>29</sup>

This perception of Michigan as a trailblazer appears again and again in its history, as the university explored possible paths into new territory and blazed a trail for others to follow. Actually, Michigan has been both a trailblazer, exploring possible new paths, and a pioneer, building roads that others could follow. Whether in academic innovation (e.g., the quantitative social sciences), social responsiveness (e.g., its early admission of women, minorities, and international students), or its willingness to challenge the status quo (e.g., teach-ins, Earth Day, and the Michigan Mandate), Michigan's history reveals this trailblazing character time and time again. Recently, when Michigan won the 2003 Supreme Court case concerning the use of race in college admissions, the general reaction of other colleges and universities was "Well, that's what we expect of Michigan. They carry the water for us on these issues." When Michigan, together with IBM and MCI, built NSFnet during the 1980s and expanded it into the Internet, again that was the type of leadership the nation expected from the university.

Continuing with the frontier analogy, while Michigan has a long

history of success as a trailblazer and pioneer, it has usually stumbled as a “settler,” that is, in attempting to follow the paths blazed by others.<sup>30</sup> All too often this leads to complacency and even stagnation at an institution like Michigan. The university almost never makes progress by simply trying to catch up with others.

My travels in Europe and Asia always encounter great interest in what is happening in Ann Arbor, in part because universities around the world see the University of Michigan as a possible model for their own future. Certainly they respect—indeed, envy—distinguished private universities, such as Harvard and Stanford. But as public institutions themselves, they realize that they will never be able to amass the wealth of these elite private institutions. Instead, they see Michigan as the model of an innovative university, straddling the characteristics of leading public and private universities.

Time and time again I get asked questions about the “Michigan model” or the “Michigan mystique.” Of course, people mean many different things by these phrases: the university’s unusually strong and successful commitment to diversity; its hybrid funding model combining the best of both public and private universities; its strong autonomy from government interference; or perhaps the unusual combination of quality, breadth, and capacity that gives Michigan the capacity to be innovative, to take risks. Of course, all these multiple perspectives illustrate particular facets of what it means to be “the leaders and best.”

I believe that the institutional saga of the University of Michigan involves a combination of quality, size, breadth, innovation, and pioneering spirit. The university has never aspired to be Harvard or the University of California, although it greatly admires these institutions. Rather, Michigan possesses a unique combination of characteristics, particularly well suited to exploring and charting the course for higher education as it evolves to serve a changing world.

#### THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL SAGA IN PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

University presidents can play important roles in creating and defining institutional sagas. Clearly, early Michigan presidents, such

as Henry Tappan, James Angell, and Marion Burton, were important in this regard. Other Michigan presidents have been successful in defining, shaping, and strengthening the trailblazing character of the university. Most Michigan presidents were sufficiently aware of the institution's history and accomplishments that they were able to utilize its saga to address the challenges and opportunities of their era.

History also suggests that the tenure of those who chose to ignore the Michigan saga was brief and inconsequential. This is an important point. Although university presidents can influence the saga of their university, they also must recognize that these characteristics provide the framework for their role, capable both of enhancing and constraining their actions. Successful presidents are attentive to an institution's saga, respecting its power and influence over the long term and carefully aligning their own tenure of leadership with its elements. Presidents who are either ignorant or dismissive of the institutional saga of their university have little impact and rarely last more than a few short years.

Leading a university involves much more than raising money, building the campus, recruiting faculty, and designing academic programs. Universities are social institutions based on ideas, values, and traditions. While they function in the present, they draw strength from the past as they prepare to invent the future. Only by embracing, building on, and perhaps helping to shape the institutional saga of a university can a president span successfully the full range of presidential roles.

So how did a perspective of Michigan's institutional saga—at least as I understood and interpreted it—shape my own presidency? At the outset, let me caution that a president should not become overfocused on the ethereal tasks of developing and achieving visions for the future based on the institutional saga from the past, so that the realities of the present are ignored. This was certainly true in the mid-1980s, when I began my assignments first as provost and then as president of the University of Michigan, which had been through a very difficult decade. State support had deteriorated to the point where it provided less than 20 percent of the university's resource base. The Ann Arbor campus, ranking as the nation's largest (with over 26 million square feet of space), was in desperate need of extensive renova-

tion or replacement of inadequate facilities. Although the fund-raising efforts of the 1980s had been impressive, the university still lagged far behind most of its peers, with an endowment of only \$250 million, clearly inadequate for the size and scope of the institution. There were other concerns, including the representation and role of minorities and women in the university community, campus safety, and student disciplinary policies. So, too, the relationships between the university and its various external constituencies—state government, federal government, the Ann Arbor community, the media, and the public at large—needed strengthening. Moreover, all of these challenges would have to be met while addressing an unusually broad and deep turnover in university leadership. Yet I refused to let these challenges of the moment dictate the university's agenda. Instead, I was determined to build on the Michigan saga—at least as I understood it.

At the top of my list was sustaining Michigan's long tradition of leadership by enhancing the academic quality of the institution. This was a natural priority for a former dean and provost, with extensive experience in raising expectations for faculty quality through recruiting, promotion, and tenure review; in using regular reviews to assess and strengthen academic program quality; and in recruiting and admitting students of the highest quality. To be sure, building the environment necessary for excellence would require both creativity and persistent determination (not to mention a good deal of luck), since it would require restructuring the financing of the university to become essentially a privately supported public university. Private support would have to be increased substantially, resources managed far more effectively; cost cutting and productivity enhancement would have to become priorities if we were to be successful. The challenge would also require a leadership team of great talent—executive officers, deans, chairs, and administrative managers.

But leadership required something more. As president, it was my task to raise the bar, to encourage aspirations to become the very best, rather than to settle for what some of our faculty termed "the complacency of fifth-ism," the tendency to be satisfied with a national ranking always somewhere in the top 10 but rarely first. We needed to challenge the institution to pick up the pace, to be more demanding in our expectations for student and faculty achievement. This, in



turn, would require outstanding facilities for instruction and research; highly competitive salary programs to attract and retain the best faculty; and strong student financial aid programs to attract the best and brightest, regardless of socioeconomic circumstances.

Equally important, however, was honoring the university's long-standing commitment to provide, in Angell's words, "an uncommon education for the common man," to embrace diversity as a critical element of our institutional saga. The key here was to realize that in an increasingly diverse nation and world, diversity and academic excellence were no longer trade-offs. They were intimately connected and mutually reinforcing. To this end, it was essential to launch a far more strategic effort to strengthen the representation of people of color and women among our students, faculty, staff, and leadership, if we were to retain the university's reputation for national leadership in equal opportunity and diversity.

Michigan's long-standing tradition of student and faculty activism was a characteristic to be both respected and embraced. There might even be times when we might intentionally stimulate such activism. Yet, at the same time, we needed to transform our all-too-frequently adversarial relationship with the student body with a new spirit of mutual respect and cooperation, by stimulating a generation of student leaders who would infuse their challenges to the institution with a sense of loyalty and responsibility.

A sense of history and purpose also determined my external agenda. Top priority was given to actions that would enable the university to protect its traditional autonomy, its capacity to control its own destiny. Although we would try to work through persuasion and building political alliances, there would be times when reason and influence were simply not sufficient. I realized from the experience of my predecessors that it would occasionally be necessary for me, in my role as president, to take a stand—against the governor, the state legislature, Congress, even our own board of regents—on issues I believed to be essential to the university's future.

Finally, and perhaps most important, I embraced Michigan's history as a trailblazer by attempting to encourage a greater sense of excitement and adventure, risk taking and commitment, throughout the institution. To some degree, this required breaking down barriers

and bureaucracy, decentralizing authority and resources. But it also involved recruiting both faculty and academic and administrative leaders who relished Michigan's go-for-it culture. I was determined to launch initiatives that were driven by the grass-roots interests, abilities, and enthusiasm of faculty and students. While such a high-risk approach was disconcerting to some and frustrating to others, there were fortunately many on our campus and beyond who viewed this environment as an exciting adventure.

My approach as president of the university was to encourage strongly the philosophy to "let every flower bloom," to respond to faculty and student proposals with "Wow! That sounds great! Let's see if we can work together to make it happen! And don't worry about the risk. If you don't fail from time to time, it is because you aren't aiming high enough!" We tried to ban the word *no* from our administrators—with one notable exception. I made it a cardinal rule never to accept an argument that Michigan had to do something simply because everybody else was doing it. Such an approach was about the only way a faculty or staff member was almost certain to receive an immediate "No!" (if not a serious reappraisal of the proposer's competency). My understanding of our institutional saga had convinced me that while Michigan was a great pathfinder, a leader, it was usually a lousy follower. As I mentioned in the preceding section of this chapter, the university almost never made progress by simply trying to catch up with others.

In assessing the decade of leadership from 1986 to 1996, it is clear that this approach to leadership—building on Michigan's institutional saga—enabled the university to make remarkable progress. But I sought something beyond excellence. I embraced the university's heritage as a pathfinder, first as Michigan defined the nature of the public university in the late nineteenth century, then again as it evolved into a comprehensive research university to serve the latter twentieth century. I had become convinced that to pursue a destiny of leadership for the twenty-first century, academic excellence in traditional terms, while necessary, was not sufficient. True leadership would demand that the university transform itself once again, to serve a rapidly changing society and a dramatically changed world. It was

this combination of leadership and excellence that I placed as a vision and challenge to the university.

In countless talks before the university's extended family (students and faculty on campus, alumni, legislators in Lansing, and the citizens of Michigan), I described a future in which three crucial elements—knowledge, globalization, and diversity—would dominate. Knowledge was becoming increasingly important as the key to prosperity and social well-being. Rapidly evolving computing and communication technologies were quickly breaking down barriers between nations and economies, producing an increasingly interdependent global community where people had to live, work, and learn together. As barriers disappeared and new groups entered the mainstream of life (particularly in America), isolation, intolerance, and separation had to give way to diversity and community. A new, dynamic world was emerging. If the university wanted to maintain the leadership position it had enjoyed for two centuries, it not only had to adapt to life in that world; it had to lead the effort to redefine the very nature of the university for the century ahead.

THE “WHAT,” “HOW,” AND “WHO”  
OF THE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENCY

This chapter has drawn on the experience of the University of Michigan to illustrate how a university president needs to discover, respect, and build on the saga of an institution—its history, traditions, and values—both in developing a vision for the future of the university and in leading it toward these goals. In this sense, the institutional saga of the university is key in shaping the “what” of presidential leadership. Unless one understands the saga that shapes the values, cultures, and achievements of an institution over the years, effective leadership is well-nigh impossible—although history certainly provides many examples of the devastation that can occur when a leader tramples over the saga of an institution.

The next challenge is the “how,” that is, how university presidents provide the leadership necessary to guide their institution in the direction of their vision. For a university, the “how” is comprised of many

elements: executive leadership and management, academic leadership, political leadership, moral leadership, and strategic leadership (the “vision thing”). Since no leader has a range of attributes and skills to span the full range of leadership needed for a university, team building becomes key to success. The first line on the president’s to-do list should be to recruit talented individuals into the key academic and administrative leadership roles of the university (e.g., executive officers, deans, key directors) and to form them into effective teams dedicated to the welfare of the institution.

However, before tackling the many aspects of university leadership, it first seems appropriate to address the “who” of the presidency. How are university presidents selected? What is their background? How do they prepare for this leadership role? In chapter 2, I illustrate the process by again using my personal experience as a case study, since my own progress through the academic ranks as professor, dean, and provost was quite typical of the experience of many university presidents—although both my opportunity to lead the institution where I had served as a faculty member and my decision to return later to a faculty role in that same institution, after serving as president, were highly unusual.