November 26, 2012

Dear Friend of MSU:

After a busy start to another academic year, I want to pause to update you on campus developments.

In a year that saw the opening of several important facilities on campus, certainly the most visually striking is the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, which opened November 10. Zaha Hadid’s innovative design of the pleated stainless steel and glass structure signals MSU’s bold and spirited approach. The Broad MSU will be a premier venue for international contemporary art and a hub for the cultural life of the campus and the community. It will provide opportunities for students and faculty across disciplines to explore contemporary issues through art and for the university to engage with local, regional, national, and international communities. We are grateful to Eli and Edythe Broad and our other supporters for sharing the vision and making it a reality.

The Molecular Plant Sciences Building, which opened last spring, offers another visual treat as well as world-class science. It connects MSU’s two plant-research buildings and brings together top scientists from a variety of disciplines. Under our Plant Science Excellence initiative, MSU has recruited several dozen eminent plant scientists, shared among two colleges, AgBioResearch, and ten departments. In a similarly interdisciplinary fashion, we recently established the MSU Global Water Initiative to advance innovative science that addresses such challenges as providing access to clean, affordable water while maintaining healthy, sustainable aquatic ecosystems. MSU will hire a cluster of 16 new faculty members over the next three years as part of this initiative.

On September 6, we opened the new addition to Wells Hall, which serves as the university’s language education hub. Wells is now home to a number of academic units, most from the College of Arts and Letters. The new hub will help advance students’ understanding of languages and cultures—a prerequisite to addressing complex global problems and to successful engagement in business, government, diplomacy, research, and the arts.

More recently, we dedicated the 50,000-square-foot Bott Building for Nursing Education and Research, a facility that will help the College of Nursing address the nation’s critical nursing shortage. Expected to earn LEED certification, it is the first building on campus to use ground-source geothermal energy for heating and cooling.

In September, the Board of Trustees approved the next steps in the development of the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, a world-class nuclear research facility that will attract scientists from around the world. The board established a budget of $55 million for building the exterior structures of the target high bay, linear accelerator support building, cryoplant building, and the electron cyclotron resonance area. Authorization of the $15.5 million high bay component, which will house superconducting radio frequency equipment, followed in October.

Helping drive our facility construction is the strong demand for an MSU degree. This year we have record enrollment of 48,906, almost 2 percent higher than last year. Applications totaled 30,300, with 8,154 students in the fall first-time class. Our entering students have an average high school GPA of about 3.6 and average ACT scores of 25.6, both showing a steady upward trajectory. Honors College enrollment accounts for 6.5 percent of the incoming class.
We've paid tribute throughout the year to our land-grant legacy in this sesquicentennial year of the signing of the Morrill Act, which put the force of federal resources behind higher education. On-campus events included a spring celebration, and in July I joined some 70 of my fellow land-grant university presidents in Washington, D.C., for discussions about our amazing land-grant system, its history, and its future. MSU also helped produce the Smithsonian Folklife Festival’s Morrill salute on the National Mall.

Michigan State is at the forefront of defining the land-grant approach for a new age, and in June we unveiled an exciting project in Detroit focused on innovating food production and distribution systems for an increasingly hungry, thirsty, and urban world. The MetroFoodPlus Innovation Cluster @ Detroit will tap the university’s interdisciplinary ability not just to apply cutting-edge technologies to urban areas in economically and environmentally sustainable ways, but also to help create social conditions for success in places where racial, cultural, and political issues create formidable barriers.

Also, in the last year MSU passed a milestone by exceeding $500 million in external research funding. In addition, we put the finishing touches on the MSU Innovation Center, the umbrella organization for offices devoted to MSU technology transfer, corporate liaison, and support of new business start-ups.

Michigan State’s value continues to be recognized in national and international rankings:

• MSU is now ranked in the top 100 global universities by two annual world rankings—Times Higher Education of London and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking. This is the 10th consecutive year MSU has been recognized in the top 100 by the Shanghai ranking. The 2012 rankings also place MSU among the top 100 in five fields: economics/business, social sciences, life and agricultural sciences, physics, and engineering/technology and computer sciences.

• U.S. News & World Report ranks MSU 28th among public universities and consistently ranks MSU among the top 100 national universities in its annual rankings. For the second year in a row, MSU’s supply chain specialty for undergraduate students ranked number one in the nation. Our graduate programs in elementary and secondary education also rank first for the 18th year in a row. MSU’s graduate program in nuclear physics ranks first in the nation, too, as does the graduate program in industrial and organizational psychology.

• MSU is one of only four higher education institutions in the nation to rank in the top 10 for study abroad participation and international student enrollment, according to Open Doors 2012, the Institute of International Education’s annual report on international education. It is the only Big Ten university to hold the distinction. In addition, for the eighth year in a row MSU sent more students abroad than any other public university.

• A study published in the Journal of Product Innovation Management ranks MSU among the world’s top three universities for peer-reviewed innovation management research. Managing innovation, the authors noted, is a burgeoning field of study considered key to converting innovative ideas into products and services. MSU was the only Big Ten university ranked in the top 10.

• MSU’s contribution to the public good was recognized by Washington Monthly, which ranked MSU 34th among 281 research universities on its 2012 list.

These accolades and all of the progress on campus are a reflection of the hard work that goes on in our classrooms, our labs, and in the field, day after day. They reflect the Spartan commitment to create opportunity and to work for the common global good with uncommon determination.

As a Spartan, you are part of a network of positive impact, and I invite you to tell your story at SpartanSagas.msu.edu. But I also ask that you take an active role in telling the larger MSU story. So pick one or two of the high points from this letter and tell someone—perhaps a fellow Spartan who isn’t as up to date as you, or maybe the person sitting next to you on your next plane trip or the parent of a student considering college. Whoever you tell, I thank you for being an ambassador for Michigan State and our collective achievements.

Sincerely,

Lou Anna K. Simon, PhD
President