July 16, 2014

Dear Friend of Michigan State University:

We’ve marked the beginning of summer, and the Michigan State campus is truly at its most verdant. Its beauty is timeless, yet full of life—a reminder that MSU’s bold work and its even bolder future are rooted in values that continue to serve both us and others well.

Today, MSU is meeting the needs of students from across Michigan and around the world through high-impact learning experiences enriched by technology and innovative methods that help students succeed. We are leading the way in facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, tackling complex local and global challenges that require multiple perspectives, and putting knowledge gained through research to work for the common good.

This excellence with purpose is reflected in our standing among the top universities in the world, by our 29 programs in the nation’s top 20 (U.S. News & World Report), and by additional rankings and recognitions (msu.edu/about/rankings-and-recognitions).

But the world needs more from us than ever. The problems are bigger and more complex. The pace is accelerated. The landscape is shifting in ways that affect the needs of our students and partners. And the competition for talent at this level of excellence is global.

That’s why Bolder by Design (bolderbydesign.msu.edu), MSU’s strategic framework, is a critical element in moving us forward. This framework ensures that our efforts across the university and around the world are aligned to create better outcomes and growing value.

Among the six key imperatives that focus our efforts is **enhancing the student experience**. We continually work to improve the quality of teaching and learning, enrich the MSU experience, and increase the value of degrees granted.

I want to highlight one set of initiatives focused on science, technology, engineering, and math—the STEM disciplines—which are especially important to U.S. economic competitiveness.

About a year ago, Michigan State was one of eight sites chosen by the Association of American Universities to improve the quality of STEM undergraduate education. MSU is working on reforming “gateway” courses, typically large lecture courses that are prerequisites for STEM majors. Nine inaugural STEM Gateway Teaching Fellows from the College of Natural Science and Lyman Briggs College have been selected to transform their STEM teaching and help colleagues do the same. An interdisciplinary STEM Alliance, including dozens of faculty and staff members, now is coalescing around this promising endeavor.

Michigan State’s efforts will be assisted by a $1.5 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which will support revision of chemistry and physics laboratory courses, creation of digital evolution education software modules in biology, and development of a new modeling-based calculus curriculum. It also will direct academic support to students belonging to groups underrepresented in science.
Providing a safe campus environment is essential to the quality of the student experience. You may have noted recent increased public dialogue regarding sexual assault on American college campuses. New reporting requirements proposed in June followed the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights’ May release of the names of colleges and universities with open Title IX sexual violence investigations. More than 60 universities, including MSU, were on the list.

Additionally, last week U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill released a report on campus sexual violence highlighting many aspects universities need to improve. MSU already is doing most of the things Senator McCaskill stresses in the report. We have worked continually to educate the campus community about sexual violence and to make victim support readily available. But we can do more, and MSU will continue to work diligently to make progress in this area. To learn more about our ongoing efforts to address this issue, please visit cabs.msu.edu/news/key-issues/issue-docs/McCaskill-response.html.

Another Bolder by Design imperative—increasing research opportunities—reached a major milestone in March when a groundbreaking ceremony marked the official start of construction on the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams. The national user facility will be at the core of our country’s nuclear science research infrastructure, advancing knowledge that leads to applications in areas such as medicine and homeland security. Scheduled for completion in 2022, the facility also will serve scientists from around the world.

Off campus, our engagement with communities across Michigan continues to deepen. Plans for expanding the presence of the College of Human Medicine (CHM) in Grand Rapids are advancing through redevelopment of a downtown property into a new research center. The facility, expected to open in 2017, is slated to house laboratories for about 24 principal investigators.

CHM also continues its expansion in Flint, supported by a $9 million grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. This includes growing the college's third- and fourth-year classes this summer and expanding its Program in Public Health. Recruitment of a half-dozen top public health researchers is under way, and CHM will move the team to a renovated downtown building this fall.

In the last two years, MSU medical students in Flint have raised more than $25,000 for Flint Community Schools to support special projects. This kind of community involvement has been a university priority for many years and helps illustrate why MSU recently was named Engaged Campus of the Year by the Michigan Campus Compact.

This year, as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Smith-Lever Act, which established the federally funded Cooperative Extension nationwide in 1914, I am reminded again of MSU’s pioneering heritage of outreach. By 1914, we had employed our own Extension agents for several years, and our amazing legacy of impact in Michigan and beyond continues today.

MSU is able to make such an impact because it is a world-class research university dedicated to the common good, in Michigan and around the world. Continuing to provide exceptional opportunities for students, the capacity for life-changing research, and the ability to establish partnerships that make a real difference requires support from those who believe in empowering the extraordinary for the future.

On behalf of Spartans today and tomorrow, thank you for your continued interest in and support of Michigan State University.

Sincerely,

Lou Anna K. Simon, PhD
President, Michigan State University