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From D. Leathers

*V
1981*

The world of business and the academic world have often seemed incompatible with one another. During the great depression of the 1930's, hostility between the two was common, and though the nation looked increasingly to the universities for research in the national interest, the aftermath of that hostility continued into the 1980's. To the university, business appeared preoccupied with short term profit to the detriment of longer term socio-cultural community interests. To business, the universities were excessively preoccupied with intellectual abstractions, political heresy, and almost disdainful of life's demanding, practical considerations. Though this was not universally true, it is not unrepresentative of the feelings business and academia had toward one another.

In Michigan, the recession of the early 1980's had the opposite effect on the relationship between business and higher education than that which emanated from the Great Depression. After years of relative financial security, a period when the state's universities could take the state financial undergirding for granted, the near financial collapse frightened faculties and staff, and forced cuts in personnel, programs, and equipment.

The predominant reaction in the academy was not primarily anger, but the realization that the universities depended on the state of the economy, and that they should adopt as one of their objectives promotion through education and research of a strong economic base for the state. The legislature provided the universities special funding through an Economic Excellence Fund. With that fund they could undertake projects and research to assist business and improve the economy of the state. A stronger, more

positive bond between business and academia was forged.

Businesses dealing with the recession, and Michigan's largest manufacturing industry, automobiles, facing a competition with Japan that dangerously threatened its share of market, understood how important well educated graduates of the universities were to their future success. A weakened university system could present problems for business, and their leaders knew it. A council of those leaders urged the citizens of the state and their elected representatives to maintain what had become one of the nation's best higher education systems.

Out of the recession of the early 1980's, the universities and the business community began to see more clearly their interdependence. This realization which carries with it greater cooperation and the desire of each to see the other succeed is one of the brighter prospects in Michigan's economic future. Governor John Engler and the Legislature apparently have the same view. As they were forced to make cuts in the state budget to keep spending balanced with revenues, they did not take money away from higher education operating funds. There is a growing understanding that able graduates from our state universities, community colleges and private universities and colleges will be major players in Michigan's economy. The future of Michigan will depend more than ever before on the effectiveness of its college educated population. Our universities and colleges must provide a high quality of education and research. That depends on their determination to be excellent, the support from the state and

private sources.

Though a symbiotic relationship between business and academia will help to make Michigan healthy, it is not the only, or even the primary, mission of a university. A democracy survives if its citizens understand their responsibilities to make it survive. Commitment to freedom, to equality of opportunity, to rule by law, to personal honesty, are values that must be understood, and they must be understood in the context of a changing society. Universities are a part of a chain of institutions that examine and advocate values. Universities and colleges are the intellectual home for our democracy. How they perform will influence the direction of our state and nation. The citizens that come from their halls will ultimately determine whether or not we can overcome debilitating forces within and unfriendly ones without.

One of the most debilitating of those inside forces is a prolonged economic disaster. So we come full circle. A strong economy sustains a strong university system. A strong university system contributes to the strength of our democracy. The democracy too is sustained by a sound economy. It becomes clear that the state's universities should obligate themselves to the teaching and fostering of good citizenship and assistance in a myriad of ways to keeping a good economic base. The growing awareness of this second obligation since 1982 brings Michigan closer to an economic reality that will serve the state positively so long as the awareness lasts.

Since the 19th century, Michigan has been a leader in higher

education. Our universities are like crown jewels except they are worth more because they serve and belong to the people. In good times and bad the citizens should advocate their protection and preservation. Universities should not be pampered, and they should be expected to produce a good return on the people's investment, a return in good citizenship and concern and help for the work place.