

**SACUA Address to the Regents of the University of Michigan**

Good afternoon. My name is Silke Weineck, and it is a pleasure having the chance to address you today. I am a professor of German and Comparative Literature, the Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature, and the Chair of the Faculty Senate. I joined the faculty of the University at Michigan eighteen years ago. I sent both my children here. I turned down two outside offers. And I mention all this only to tell you why I think of this remarkable institution as my home, and why I care about it as deeply as all of you.

I could tell you today of SACUA's work over the year, the discussions we've had, the resolutions we passed, the concerns we harbor, and if you have questions about that, I will be happy to answer them. But I have decided to take a different path today and address the broader picture.

As the chair of the faculty senate, I start out every weekday reading the Chronicle of Higher Education. It's a grim read. You all have followed the news, you all know what happened or is happening at the University of North Carolina, the University of Iowa, the University of Illinois, the University of Wisconsin, the University of California at

Berkeley, and so on. But immersing myself in this onslaught of troubling news has also meant that I got to start every day being glad and proud to be here, at the University of Michigan.

There are, of course, many reasons why we stand out. But here is what I believe to be the central one. At all those other institutions I mentioned, faculty, administration, trustees and sometimes students are at odds with each other, and in each of those cases, the voice of the faculty was disregarded or dismissed. And what we are seeing is this: when the voice of the faculty loses out, the university as a whole loses out. Because it is the faculty that carry forward the core mission of the university, the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and any university's reputation stands and falls with the reputation of its faculty. Here at Michigan, we understand that. President Schlissel and Provost Pollack may no longer be on active faculty duty, as it were, but they have, as I like to call it, faculty hearts. And so do all the wonderful men and women in Fleming I have had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know a little, who work so hard and so well to support that core mission. So here at Michigan faculty and students, administrators and regents, we all want the same thing, and we are all on the same side and almost always even on the same page. To be sure, at times, we disagree

on the details, and once or twice, things might even have gotten a touch testy, but we are overwhelmingly fortunate to work at a university that has never lost sight of its mission and that has never lost sight of what a university is and must remain.

There is a reason why the world's great universities, of which we are surely one, are so often older than the states they serve. When it comes to longevity, we really have only one competition, and that is the Catholic Church. I believe the reason for this really stunning fact is the long and proud history of faculty governance. We faculty are employees, to be sure, but we think of ourselves as *citizens*. As citizens, we pay for our considerable privileges by bearing and accepting the responsibility to do our part in governing this remarkable institution, and we are in it for the long haul. Doing our part, first of all, means lending our expertise in the most constructive way possible – expertise, I might add, that may be quite a bit more valuable than the expertise of Accenture, and quite a bit less expensive. At other times, and these times are fortunately rare here, we raise our voice in alarm. As John Dewey, one of UM's greatest sons, said: "the teacher .... is not like a private soldier in an army, expected merely to obey, or like a cog in a wheel, expected merely to

respond to and transmit external energy; he must be an intelligent medium of action.”

This, to be an intelligent medium of action, is the task of faculty governance in all its varied forms. As you know, the central faculty governance system at the University of Michigan has very little formal power. This worries me. It does not worry me in the short run, because, as I said, our tremendous current leadership has faculty hearts and faculty minds. But it worries me in the long run, because we may not always be this lucky. I do not have to tell you that the very project of public education is under attack, from both the right and the left. If you read a certain kind of news, you will learn that the faculty works six hours a week, bathes in champagne, researches the number of angels dancing on a pin, dreams of ways to undermine the Republic and lives to bend student minds to its sinister will. Attacks on public universities such as ours overwhelmingly take the form of attacks on the faculty. In more and more places, the very project of the liberal arts – which I take to be the most successful continuous project in the history of mankind – seems to teeter on the edge.

Here at Michigan, we have proudly rejected and withstood these attacks. There is no task more urgent than to keep doing so. If we are to

succeed, we must continue to empower the faculty, to listen to their voices, and to heed their advice. And we must work together more closely. In this spirit, I call upon you, the Regents of the University of Michigan, to strengthen the ties between you and the faculty which have become a bit tenuous over the years. Come visit us at SACUA. Let us take you out for dinner or drinks. Let's not talk once a year, but more often and more deeply -- perhaps even about the Bylaws. But most importantly, let's stand together against the gathering forces of darkness so we can remain what we are, the one and only University of Michigan.