

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear Colleagues,

In the years that I've been in the Dean's office in the College of Arts & Letters, there are two common themes that have emerged as I talk with graduate students, graduate program directors, and faculty. One is that a key purpose of graduate education is to build collegial relationships that will nurture and sustain our professional lives and the scholarly lives of the students we work with. Another is that a graduate program is, in its own right, an important intellectual project—as important as any book, research study, exhibition, or performance.

Graduate programs transform our disciplines, our institutions, and all of higher education. They do so by preparing artists and scholars to be the next generation of leaders and stewards of their programs, departments, and colleges.

Often when we talk about such moments of leadership, they seem far off in the distance. But not today. Today, we are called to lead and to help, to listen and attend to others as we put our values and knowledge to work and build a culture of care at Michigan State University. I write to you today and ask for your help. And to say that what you do, what you know, and what you value are very important right now to this University.



Justice, equity, and transparency are not just things we believe in. They are our way of life. As leaders, it is on us to build safe learning spaces where students can engage challenging ideas in an atmosphere of trust each and every day. As scholars and artists, we call out structural discrimination. We decry disenfranchisement. We lift up voices that have no voice or are unfairly silenced. And we hold those with power who exploit the less powerful to account. This is our work. It builds community and transforms lives for the better.

## College of Arts & Letters

Today, our community needs us more than ever.

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The survivors who so bravely shared their stories with the world did so after suffering two grave injustices, both violations of trust. One was by Larry Nassar, who, in violating his Hippocratic oath, betrayed the trust of patients who came to him for care. The other violation of trust came when those same survivors called for help. It was then that the University, USA Gymnastics, and the people charged with their care failed to listen, believe, and act with urgency. In the face of this pattern of failure, the fortitude it took for those survivors to once again come forward is truly inspiring. They did it because they thought maybe this time, someone would listen. And maybe, someone would believe. Maybe, someone would act. And maybe, things will change for the better.

As leaders, we need to listen. We need to believe. We need to act. Together we can change the culture that that too often sought to protect structures instead of people, to shield the powerful at the expense of the vulnerable.

Of course, the culture that enabled these violations of trust goes far beyond the College of Arts & Letters. If our University community is to change for the better, the vision, the skills of listening and communicating with empathy, and the critical insight needed to build a better institution will not come from the athletic office or the administration building. It will need to come from people like you.

In the days and weeks ahead, I ask you to use what you know to help those in our community who need care. Listen to each other with empathy. Foster the relationships that create support and trust. Discuss with your colleagues who feel called to act. Read, write, and speak out. Talk to your mentors and be a mentor. Know that my door is open and that we here in the Dean's office are a resource to listen and offer our support. Together, we must rebuild the trust that is required of us to move Michigan State University forward.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed within a hand-drawn oval border. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'Bill Hart-Davidson'.

Bill Hart-Davidson

Associate Dean for Research & Graduate Education

College of Arts & Letters