

DRAFT

A case and rationale for an:

***ENDOWED CHAIR OF SPIRITUALITY
AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY***

At its beginning, Michigan State University was not only at the forefront of a transformation, indeed a revolution, in American higher education, it was the pioneering institution dedicated to the practical application of existing knowledge, of knowledge in development, and of knowledge yet to be discovered. No longer would promotion of knowledge for its own sake be sufficient; knowledge, it was determined, must be activated and distributed democratically and in service to citizens.

This revolution culminated in the passage of the Morrill Act in 1855, but the transformation was born "in the mucklands just to the east of the state capital in Michigan." The land-grant saga is MSU's creation and legacy. Even more so, it is our mandate.

The early Michigan State commitment today is globally known and secure: knowledge—and wisdom—must be applied to predict, anticipate, and solve problems and challenges. The scholars and the rigors involved with attaining knowledge and wisdom must be elite, but knowledge must never be elitist in its creation, dissemination, or application and distribution.

Michigan State University, "the Pioneering Institution in American Higher Education dedicated to the practical application of existing knowledge," continues to accept and actively pioneer another new responsibility for educating citizens who will bring sound knowledge and WISDOM to bear on challenges, opportunities and problems in a wise, humane and caring way through the creation of a Michigan State University Endowed Chair of Spirituality.

Spirituality is best defined as the pursuit and practice of EXCELLENCE in human living. Spirituality involves a search for meaning, depth, and purpose. It raises the most fundamental questions about our humanity. We are, most essentially, human beings whose function it is to be fully, excellently, human. To be people of virtue.

Spirituality refers to the quest for excellence in human living. Spirituality is holistic, referring to the integration of life as a whole, and to developing a deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose of human life. As Philip Sheldrake details in his many books on the subject, spirituality concerns the ultimate values by which we live, beyond merely pragmatic aspects of life, and so spirituality increasingly plays a role in a wide range of fields, including medicine, psychology, athletics, and business. As such, spirituality is inseparably linked to virtue, and to the development of the virtuous professional.

Aristotle observed “virtue is excellence in function.” A virtuous professional functions with dual excellences: excellence in art, skill, and knowledge of his or her subject, and art, skill, and knowledge of the deeper dimensions of human life. Michigan State University is committed to the education and formation of virtuous professionals, persons of character.

What we do as professionals is important, But so is who we are. This is where character and virtue come in.

“THE PERSON OF CHARACTER WILL GOVERN HIS BEHAVIOR WITH (I) WISDOM AND (II) COMMON SENSE” (Aristotle)... THROUGH (III) LOVE AND (IV) CONSCIENCE.

(I) WISDOM – The Utilization of Knowledge

Knowledge (esoteric) by itself, without Application is not enough in the Arsenal of the Virtuous Professional.

“Knowledge must be Utilized and Applied.

“Knowledge comes by taking things apart: Analysis.

But WISDOM comes by putting things together.” (John A. Morrison)

“Wisdom is the proper use of knowledge.”

(II) COMMON SENSE

“A part of wisdom Applying knowledge to solve the everyday problems common to people in a way that is better than that which might have come naturally.”

“Common Sense is the knack of seeing things as they are and doing things as they ought to be done.”

“It is a thousand times better (Stowe) to have common sense without education than to have education without common sense.” (Robert Ingersoll)

(III) LOVE

Love is a many-splendored thing, but the essence of Love is Unconditionality. The Greeks called this unconditional love, Agape. This kind of love is closely related to the will. “Will without love can become manipulation; love without will can become mere sentimentality.”

When we humans Love without condition or unconditionally, we act with the fullness of our humanity and since this “exceeds the limits” we act Virtuously.

Virtue, again, is that which enables one to become what he/she most essentially is. We are most essentially volitional human persons. At the heart of being virtuous, then, is to Will to Love, which is to Act Humanly.

Love is about the transcendent power by which we exceed the limits of our nature.

(IV) CONSCIENCE

Conscience is the Ultimate Subjective Norm of Morality.

“Formation of an alert conscience has to be with existential knowledge, a knowledge of true freedom.” (Bernard Haring)

The virtuous professional needs to act having “prudential certitude” (not absolute certitude) when confronted to choose between conflicting but truthful alternatives. This is the freedom of conscience, for which one is not often rewarded.

The word EPIKEIA comes from Greek philosophy. Aristotle: Epikeia is the rational treatment of laws and regulations so as not to endanger higher values through literal observance. The concept of Epikeia is usually applied to difficult situations. One should never sacrifice love . . . the welfare of one’s neighbor to zeal for the law. (Bernard Haring)

The Virtuous Professional exercises Epikeia or Just Kindness in use of Conscience – “the Ultimate Norm of Morality.”

We seek to establish a Michigan State University Endowed Chair of Spirituality that serves as a seat of reflection and of generation, that aspires and inspires, that presents and debates, that instructs and assimilates, all in ways that honor the knowledge of virtue and the virtue of knowledge.

The holder of the endowed chair will bring together viewpoints, research, literature, experts, and lectures focusing on asking, for example:

“What are the negotiable and non-negotiable criteria for a ‘virtuous’ professional, educator, and learner?”

"Is the uniting of wisdom and common sense through love and conscience a generally accepted or even a generally understood tenet of virtue in the academy?"

"Are knowledge and wisdom individually and collectively understood as intrinsic contributors to virtue?"

"What are the curricular and other interdisciplinary opportunities for understanding the beauty and power of both religious spirituality and secular spirituality in contributing to virtue?"

"Is the role of 'love' neglected and even challenged at a time when inside the academy the essential components of love and loving—courage, humility, compassion, excellence in humane living, caring—can enhance the mission?"

"What are the personal and systemic inhibitors to the spirituality-grounded concept of *dual excellence* (excellence as professionals, excellence as human beings)?"

"Are there metric and measurement possibilities for evaluating learning of and appreciation for spirituality and virtuous education in the academy and in society?"

Through the Endowed Chair of Spirituality, Michigan State University will boldly build upon and enhance its global reputation for pioneering innovation, creativity, rigor, and courage in the application of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom in direct, pragmatic, and humane service to people.

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