Optimal Scope and Scale of MSU Inquiry Group
FINAL REPORT
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Background

In June 2020, the MSU Strategic Planning Steering Committee charged this Inquiry Group *to develop recommendations to shape a model and process that optimize MSU's use and allocation of institutional resources.* The Committee asked the Inquiry Group to consider the following questions during our deliberations, some of which we modified slightly:

- What would we desire to see in terms of the size and reach of the mission of the University?
- What is the relationship between mission, organizational identity and scale of the institution?
- What should be the number of undergraduate and/or graduate students in East Lansing and/or virtually?
- What size can we be and deliver on the promise of access yet still sustain quality of education and research?
- What are the benefits and costs of maintaining or enhancing MSU's national and international stature?
- How proactive should MSU be in establishing partnerships with regional universities and other academic institutions?
- In what areas do we leverage our physical presence or extend it?
- Should we consider private partnerships to provide continuing education and specialized graduate programs to meet specific industry needs?
- What are the strategic benefits to distinguishing undergraduate learning communities from graduate learning communities?

In order to address these questions, the Inquiry Group reviewed background materials pertaining to the

- land-grant university of the 21st century;
- the future of higher education especially in the aftermath of COVID-19;
- the notion of rightsizing universities;
- the relationship between university size, scale and quality of education;
- university ratings and rankings;

- higher education organizational and budget models; and
- stakeholder (primarily employer) analyses of essential skill areas in the transition from the academy to the workforce.

We obtained MSU-specific information from the following sources:
- Office of the Provost (Academic Services, Enrollment Management and Academic Initiatives),
- Office of Planning and Budgets,
- Office for Research and Innovation,
- MSU HUB for Innovation in Learning and Technology,
- Career Services Network,
- Collegiate Employment Research Institute, and
- Cognitive Open Tech at IBM.

Additionally, the Inquiry Group expanded some of the questions posed by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee and grouped others together to capture a robust and coherent set of recommendations.

This report is organized as follows. We begin by articulating the foundational principles that guide our process for assessing the optimal scope and scale of the University. Next, we provide recommendations for a process and prioritization for assessing the optimal scope and scale of the University during the next five to ten years. We follow with a discussion of the secondary and tertiary implications of decisions about optimization, identifying both potential benefits as well as costs. Then, we examine the role of public and private partnerships with academic consortia, industry, government entities and nonprofit organizations. This includes a discussion of potential criteria for developing or expanding external collaborative relationships with other higher educational institutions. We conclude the report with our recommendations of organizational models.

I.   Foundational Principles and Values

As the University engages in the work of optimizing the use of institutional resources to meet our core domains of teaching, research and service, this work is guided by the following foundational principles and values that undergird our land-grant mission.

<u>Foundational Principles</u>

- As the founding land-grant university in the nation, we reaffirm our responsibility to provide accessible high-quality education, research and service to address the needs and concerns of communities in the state of Michigan.

- As a world-grant university in the 21st century, we commit to a decision-making process that is evaluated in terms of providing the maximum value to the citizens of Michigan, the nation, and the world.

- We affirm our responsibility to utilize business practices that reflect sound stewardship, transparency, efficiency, and sustainability. Improvements in efficiency should not compromise the quality, safety or accessibility of operations, nor fair labor practices and conditions.

- Future success is tied to the innovative use of technology in all domains of the University. Technology encourages and supports learning operations at scale and scope, enables consistency and improves of academic quality while serving many more people across the state, nation, and globe. Technology is also key to operational efficiency, particularly at scale. Its use and enhancement must be prioritized in strategic planning efforts.

- MSU must identify programs and activities that reflect mission obsolescence or divergence. We cannot do everything equally well. What do we want to keep; what do we want to give up?

Values

- We will engage in a continuous, inclusive, and transparent process to assess priorities, practices, and activities to ensure alignment with the University's values and land-grant mission and our commitment to providing the maximum benefit to the communities we serve.

- We commit to centering diversity, equity and inclusion in planning and decision-making. We will frame future decisions and realign current decisions and practices using the lens of diversity, equity and inclusion.

- We will employ the land-grant values of integrity, mutual respect, humility, common sense, and a "can-do" attitude to make decisions about the University's future directions.

- We commit to using a data-driven and inclusive process to assess the optimal scope, scale and size of the University, and to ensure that all activities tie to the University's mission.

- We will engage with our stakeholders and partners in a manner that is intentional, meaningful and demonstrates respect, responsiveness, inclusiveness and partnership, ensuring a mutually beneficial exchange of information and dialogue as well as better alignment between university activities and the needs of our stakeholder groups.

- We will place priority on the well-being of students, faculty, staff and visitors who comprise our campus community.

- We support the development of learning activities that foster the professional growth of students who possess the depth and breadth of subject matter knowledge and the soft skills such as teamwork and collaboration, time management, oral/written communication and critical thinking/problem solving necessary to productive engagement in the workforce.

- We value diverse partnerships across different settings and communities to advance our mission. Moving forward, we seek value in partnerships to advance our mission.

- We will seek opportunities to learn from higher-education institutions across Michigan, within the Big 10, nationally and globally, incorporating lessons learned into MSU's strategic planning.

- We will continually assess and modify decision-making processes, governance models, and entrenched ways of doing and being within the institution in order to support more transparent, timely, and nimble decisions and innovation.

II.   Recommended Process and Approach to Addressing the Optimal Scope and Scale of MSU

As MSU anticipates the future, the University needs to consider strategically not only the size of the institution but also the scope, scale, and nature of its educational, research and service activities. This broader view allows for the consideration of new populations, geographic locations, opportunities for community engagement, and activities that meet the educational, workforce and professional development needs of the communities we serve as part of our land-grant mission and our commitment to the people of Michigan, the nation, and the world.

As there are multiple points of optimization (e.g., enrollment, disciplinary mix, activity mix, instructional models, organizational models, and budget/cost models), strategic planning should assess an array of options, execute a careful benefit-cost analysis associated with the options, as well as complete a thorough assessment of how these options align with the University's core values and land-grant mission, including the near-term and longer-term consequences of each option.

Work groups comprised of internal and external stakeholders with pertinent expertise should be formed to conduct these rapid response assessments and provide their recommendations within 90-120 days of formation.

As we examine potential areas for innovation in our teaching, research, service, and operations, MSU should prioritize soliciting new ideas and developing criteria for investments in areas of excellence, whether they are thematic, organizational, or encompass varying modalities of instruction and research. This assessment may entail contraction, realignment, and/or consolidation of activities.

As we attempt to meet the emerging and future needs of the state, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, MSU needs to work with other Michigan higher education institutions and legislators to develop the legislative mechanisms and outcomes that will facilitate greater cooperation across colleges and universities, create efficiencies in instructional delivery, and expand interdisciplinary and trans-institutional educational opportunities accessible to our constituents.

At the same time, MSU's role as a world-grant university addressing national and global needs must be considered in any discussions about areas of excellence.

Further, the strategic planning process must appreciate the evolving local, national, and global contexts shaping the role of higher educational institutions, the challenging funding environment and waning public support for public institutions, and the pressing global problems requiring immediate and interdisciplinary attention.

III. Secondary and Tertiary Implications of Optimal Use of University Resources

In this section of the report, we comment on the potential implications and unintended consequences that decisions regarding optimization might have on institutional/academic resources, infrastructure resources, human resources, and financial resources.

Refocusing Academic Resources

> **Benefits:** Increased access and opportunity to some level of higher education for more individuals, especially under-served Michigan students (high school graduates, adult learners, veterans, college returnees). Change and expand expectations from four-year on-site degree to instructional options (certificates, licensure, short-term training, internship intensive, research intensive).

> **Costs:** Loss of revenue with declining enrollments of out-of-state and international students. Potential reputational loss with access vs. selective admissions.

We cannot do everything equally well. What do we want to keep? What do we want to give up?

> **Benefits:** Ability to focus on areas of excellence in teaching, research, and service. Opens up opportunities to deepen learning experiences for students. Makes room to try new things.

> **Costs:** We will have to make difficult choices, including choices to sunset programs and activities. May need to restructure how we align colleges and units, offer courses, and grant certificates and/or degree programs.

Moving forward, we seek value in partnerships to advance our mission.

> **Benefits:** MSU does not have to assume full responsibility for development and operating costs for various types of infrastructure and services. Changing use of infrastructure; bringing in community partners or private enterprises to utilize space (e.g., rent space for startup companies; open cafeterias to the public). Ability to generate revenue and provide community value by partnering with others and their use of MSU facilities and equipment. Ability to recruit talented

faculty and students; create pipelines. Competitive advantage over other universities lacking strong connections with operations; for example, MSU's mobility activities have often benefited from collaboration between researchers and operations.

Costs: Full or partial privatization of services is not cost-free. Need to assess the feasibility and costs of repurposing existing MSU infrastructure. Privatization of services impacts the employment of individuals in these service areas. Privatization can also incur opportunity costs where it becomes more difficult to integrate research and operations activities.

Meaningful Engagement of Stakeholders

Benefits: Being more intentional in our interactions and partnerships with all relevant stakeholder groups. Better alignment between university activities and the needs of our stakeholder groups.

Costs: The University will need to expand community engagement efforts. Community work that reflects a true partnership involves reciprocity, takes additional time, and increases the likelihood of disagreements and criticisms. Entrenched interests may see some current activities as entitlements, regardless of the level of return on investment (ROI) for the University.

Innovative Use of Technology in All Domains of the University

Benefits: Expands the reach of the university in all core domains: teaching, research and service. Allows for increased creativity in instructional delivery. Enables the expansion of virtual education and training. Improved efficiency in critical business functions across the university.

Costs: Significant infrastructure (hardware and software) investments; significant investment in training faculty, staff and students in use of technology.

Frequent resistance to changes in entrenched methods and tools, especially when benefits are not universally recognized or are recognized with significant time delay. Need to train faculty to offer high quality virtual courses. Students may have differential access to technology depending on where they live (e.g., rural areas), and their or their families' resources (e.g., low-income, first generation, and/or underrepresented in higher education.

Utilization of business practices that reflect sound stewardship, transparency, efficiency, and sustainability

Benefits: Decrease inefficiencies of work processes. Honors our commitment to the people of Michigan to be careful stewards of legislative appropriations.

Costs: Likely change in staffing needs – fewer people doing daily work. Variability across campus with units having too few vs. too many staff. Lack of redundancy in skills so training/professional development is going to be critical. May create more concentrated colleges and areas of study (e.g., fewer colleges instead of the 18 at MSU).

Shrinking Enrollments of Traditional College Students

Benefits: Opportunity to engage more students in research, smaller communities, and real world application of skills. Tap into other potential student pools (e.g., adult learners, veterans, and college returnees). Ability to look at new offerings: stackable certificates, continuing education, professional development, and emerging specializations such as AgTech and Data Science across multiple disciplines. . Consider collaborative efforts with other universities where students could take courses at MSU but be enrolled in other institutions. Consider collaborative efforts to development students in funded

areas of national need, such as areas relevant to DOD and DOE labs. May want to consider the development of consortia of institutions that have in-state, regional, and out-of-state tuition rates or different tuition structures for employers.

Costs: Decreasing tuition revenues. Infrastructure costs to repurpose existing campus spaces. What does MSU need to do to expand its virtual footprint? Infrastructure, development, marketing, curriculum changes, and what areas to select for such instruction.

IV.   The Role of Public-Private Partnerships

Our Inquiry Group defined public-private partnerships to include both academic-corporate/government partnerships and partnerships among academic consortia (may be public and private universities). In this section, we begin by identifying key questions to consider prior to the development of any partnership. We then specifically examine potential partnerships among academic consortia before turning to academic-industry/government/nonprofit partnerships. We conclude with some recommendations for evaluating partnerships.

Key Questions to Consider and Develop around Partnerships

As the University contemplates the development of any partnership, we recommend that the following questions serve as a guide in the decision-making process:
- o   Whether to formalize a partnership?
- o   How aggressively/widely to engage?
- o   What are the criteria for prioritizing partners (reputation/rankings, curriculum complementarity, grad student pipeline, undergrad student pipeline or matriculation, research collaboration, financial resources to

leverage, comprehensive institutional commitment, external funding pipeline, regional/national/global impact)?
- o In what areas does it make sense to partner with others?
- o What about educational partnerships with those who deliver instructional technology?
- o Who in the institution will be the champion for the partnership?
- o Is the partnership scalable?
- o What does benchmarking analysis of the experiences of others around the state, region, country tell us about the viability of the partnership?
- o What does a cost/benefit analysis of the near-term, short-term, and long-term scenarios tell us about the leveraging potential associated with the partnership?
- o Does the partnership align with MSU's strategic goals? With MSU's land-grant mission? With MSU's world-grant mission?

Partnerships with Academic Consortia

We encourage the University to expand more fully opportunities for domestic partnerships with academic institutions across the state of Michigan (high schools, community colleges, technical institutes, and four-year colleges) and in the region in order to create efficiencies in instructional delivery as well as expand cross-institutional programs. Such collaborations would increase access and educational opportunities available to students in the state and the region as well as leverage fiscal efficiencies. As these opportunities are explored, the following considerations should be addressed:

Considerations for the Formation of Regional and National Partnerships
- Perspectives on the level and focus of potential partnerships should consider Greater Lansing versus Michigan versus regional versus national
- Explore models for new and expanded MSU partnerships such as:
  - o Badges, credentials, certificates, and/or specializations
  - o Stackable certificates that could lead to degrees
  - o Dual degrees

- o Academic exchanges
- o Internships
- o Professional development and continuing education programs for the community
- o System approach – constitutional amendment required for this to be adopted in Michigan
- o Deeper/more expansive partnership agreements with local, state, regional, and national institutions for learning (majors, curricula), research (expertise, space, equipment), and/or internships. Healthcare system partnerships might be one example.
- o Michigan Pathways or similar partnerships with community colleges to facilitate the transfer of students into the University
- o Explore expansion of a Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (GPIDEA) type alliance model for learning and coursework
    - Allow students to enroll in more than one class
    - Expand beyond graduate students to include undergrad and professional students
- o Research collaborations
- o Satellite campuses

Consider the possibility that rather than becoming smaller in terms of enrollment, there may be opportunities for MSU to align seamlessly with 2- and 4-year colleges and universities throughout the state. Given the fiscal stress all institutions are facing, and the declining traditional high school population entering higher education in Michigan, collaboration with other institutions may open access and opportunity to groups of currently underserved learners. A viable and efficient path forward for providing important local higher education capacity statewide might involve developing satellite relationships with other public colleges and universities. This could provide:

- ● Opportunities to better align 2- and 4-year curricula reducing the overall cost of a baccalaureate education while improving the student experience. Will need to assess the potential benefits (e.g., increased enrollment of

upper-division undergraduates, increased diversity) relative to costs (e.g., fiscal implications of decreased enrollment of lower-division undergraduates).

- Enabling the discovery and promotion of diverse groups of students drawn from all over the State who are capable of moving to the next level of higher education.
- A lower cost administrative model with some functions centralized and others localized.
- Ability to reach communities that otherwise would lack higher educational opportunities as well as continuing education.

Considerations for the Development of New and Expanded International Partnerships

Similarly, we encourage the University to explore more fully opportunities for expanding current or initiating new partnerships with academic institutions across the globe. As these opportunities are explored, the following considerations should be addressed:

- Explore academic program models such as:
  - Badges, credentials, certificates, or specializations
  - Stackable certificates that could lead to degrees
  - Dual degrees
  - Professional development and continuing education programs for international communities/partners
  - Academic exchanges
  - Per course equivalencies
  - International experiences and/or internships
  - Research collaborations
  - Satellite/affiliate campuses

Academic, Industry, Government, and Nonprofit Partnerships

Additionally, MSU should consider expanding its partnerships with corporations, industry, government entities and nonprofit organizations as it fulfills its mission as a land-grant institution of the 21st century. Some of the emerging types of partnerships and activities that might be offered include:

- Partnerships with industry, government entities, and nonprofit organizations for the creation of structured internships, apprenticeships, and/or co-ops that provide practical work experience at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

- Partnerships to accelerate research and adoption of innovations to solve problems in areas ranging from improved healthcare delivery to environmental justice to climate change mitigation.

- Partnerships with industry, government entities, and nonprofit organizations for ongoing reskilling and upskilling of workers.

- Partnerships with for-profit entities that provide online platforms, marketing, and relationship management to deliver master's and similar professional online or hybrid degree programs (e.g., Broad, Demmer Center; School of Criminal Justice and Wiley).

- Partnerships with high tech corporations that lead to the creation of for-profit institutions for online instructional delivery (e.g., Purdue University Global).

- Partnerships with industry, government, nonprofit and/or academic institutions to deliver workforce development courses/workshops/activities for non-degree workers funded by federal, state, county, and/or municipal agencies.

- Real estate partnerships to engage the broader community, reduce capital costs, extend reach and bring private resources into MSU to assist in public challenges.

- Consider and assess the potential academic, research, and value implications of developing partnerships with private entities to deliver operational activities, including campus housing, food services, facilities maintenance, repair, and custodial, groundskeeping, snow clearing, and roadway maintenance.

- Consider the creation of a functional unit on campus to serve as the "agency/broker" to support the internal development of all online/virtual learning academic program offerings, instructional design consultation, faculty professional development, marketing, relationship management, and a central one-stop student services hub or serve as the point of contact for external public and private partnership agreements.

Finally, any collaboration or partnership developed between the University and academic or non-academic partners will require continual monitoring and assessment. Benefit-cost analyses and regular programmatic assessments should be incorporated from the beginning of the partnership. Clear terms and expectations of the partnership need to be conveyed to all partners. In addition to program assessments, memoranda of understanding need to document the ways in which the partnership might evolve, or conversely, how partnerships might dissolve.

V.   Recommendations of Organizational Model(s)

Inherent to a conversation about optimal scope and scale of the University is the notion of *rightsizing* (see Hitt, Keats, Harback, & Nixon, 1994; Zeig, 2016). According to Hitt, Keats, Harback, and Nixon (1994, p.18) rightsizing is defined as the "integrated, internally consistent and externally legitimated configuration of organizational processes, products, and people based on: (1) a shared vision of the future of the organization, and (2) a clearly articulated mission and strategy supported by management, well understood by members of the organization, and in which members have a sense of ownership." Rightsizing is also based on the premise that "it is not enough to survive, institutions need to thrive" (Gross, 2020, p. 2). Rather, Zeig (2016, p. 52) suggests that rightsizing involves finding the "best size for the institution that is

sustainable" as well as developing the focused strategies necessary to ensure long-term viability.

Gross (2020) underscores the need for rethinking how an organization can be structured to meet current and future needs. She then articulates seven strategies that might be employed in this restructuring process in higher education (see pp. 2-3). We reviewed each of these strategies below in the context of Michigan State University.

1. **Align faculty in high-demand areas which may reflect current strength and/or high need.**

   Comments: Add emerging areas. Potential for an interdisciplinary approach to address these high-demand/emerging areas. These should be focused, build upon University strengths, and capitalize on emerging areas. These need to be examined within the context of points of the college career during which high needs occur – e.g., what is high need for incoming students vs. high need for upper undergraduates; messaging to undergraduate students.

2. **Think creatively about the use of the physical infrastructure and land including the leasing of buildings and land to other tenants, and partnerships with private developers to build things like intergenerational housing.**

   Comments: Look creatively at the entirety of MSU's footprint – local, statewide, and globally when thinking of alternative uses.

3. **Need to deploy administrative personnel in a purposeful way that enhances effectiveness and efficiency and at the appropriate calibration to execute the work.**

   Comments: Requires an assessment of unit needs and impact of any potential reductions. Should consider what personnel is needed to complete

the work effectively and efficiently instead of using arbitrary, across the board decisions.

4. **Create partnerships with other colleges, businesses, and other entities to meet student and workforce needs. Partner with local businesses who are employing students consistently so students can learn and work.**

   Comments: We have made these opportunities available to many undergraduates in some colleges, but these need to be expanded across colleges at MSU. The University does not have many large-scale research collaborations with external partners or across colleges right now.

5. **Be honest about your institution's strengths and weaknesses. Reassess assets and use them wisely. Reassess the market. University responses need to be realistic, creative, and open to some risk.**

   Comments: This is fundamental for MSU. For the Inquiry Group, this would be at the top of the list.

6. **Create a "change now" mentality that enables brief periods of reflection (~3 months) and then act.**

   Comments: Agile or rapid responses cannot happen if values, like those supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion, are sacrificed. A change now mentality may not provide sufficient time to consider unintended consequences. This suggests the need to articulate key consequences from the onset of the decision-making process and ensure that they have been examined.

7. **Ensure that outside counsel is not married to liquidation or fearful of lawsuits.**

Comments: The job of decision-makers within the University is to make decisions and articulate when it is time to be cautious and when it is time to take risks.

Potential Organizational Models

Recent work by the Education Design Lab (de Laski, 2019) reports on five emerging models of college reinvention that respond to the changing priorities of learners and employers in the higher educational market. Responding to what de Laski calls the "Learner Revolution," universities or colleges within them may adopt one of these five models:

- **Platform facilitator**: institutions that serve as distribution curators who license courses, credentials, experiences, certificates, and other services from content providers. Providers like edX or Coursera partner with brand university partners to offer micro-macro master's as either standalone programs or ones that can stack into graduate degrees. An example of this is Purdue University Global.

- **Experiential curator:** institutions that bundle traditional coursework with learning experiences that exist outside the boundaries of campus. An example of this is the Semester at Sea Program that partners with Colorado State University.

- **Total learning certifier:** institutions that capture learning in its many forms from coursework, jobs, internships, co-ops, and co-curricular experiences into a self-authored integrated learning system. This may include the use of micro-credentialing or badges. Northeastern University has adopted a Self-Authored Integrated Learning (SAIL) system that tracks all of these different sources of learning.

- **Workforce integrator:** institutions utilize employers to identify competencies and allow faculty to integrate "in-demand workforce competencies" into their

courses and programs of study. Characteristic of approaches used in some colleges at MSU but is not universal.

- **Specializer:** institutions that deliver their niche areas of focus to specific learner audiences within the higher education market. Some colleges and units at MSU might utilize this approach.

While the Inquiry Group felt that MSU could potentially adopt one or more of these models, we also felt that it was unlikely that it would assume just one of these models given the complexity of the University as a R01 institution.

Additionally, the Inquiry Group notes that the State of Michigan is unique in the Big10 as the only state without a statewide public university system. Instead, each university in the state has an autonomous charter, which hampers collaborative efforts and leads to duplication of programs, facilities and activities across universities. The University of Michigan has a three-university system with campuses in Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint. Michigan State University and Wayne State University both have several satellite campuses. Looking into the future, MSU needs to work with other public colleges and universities as well as the State legislature to be poised to respond to calls for the creation of a statewide system of public higher education. Future opportunities around developing more comprehensive partnerships may provide both pedagogical alignment and fiscal benefits. In turn, this may lead toward a statewide higher education system similar to Cal State or SUNY, with attendant fiscal and curricular benefits as well as improved seamless student mobility. Such configurations also provide the opportunity to share unique facilities across the portfolio seamlessly and provide net gains in the system.

As Elliott (2019) notes, "organizational designs of higher educational institutions have not kept up with changes in demographics, technology, culture and the future of work." To optimize the use of institutional resources, MSU needs to develop more efficient internal organizational structures that enable the institution to align internally and adapt externally as well as embrace constant change. A lingering question,

however, is how can change be precipitated within a system with such inertia. We suggest that it may be spurred by societal and global changes, like the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn, because these extreme shocks cannot be ignored.

However, the institution will be less able to implement optimizing strategies without revisiting the University's current budget model and distributional processes. Additionally, the institution must acknowledge that significant changes and/or opportunities to innovate will require time to take root and flourish. As a result, the processes underlying organizational change or investments in innovation need commitments to survive the uncertainties of funding and personnel that are inherent in various budget models, including the current one utilized at MSU.

In conclusion, the Inquiry Group identified multiple ways in which MSU could optimize the use and allocation of institutional resources. The selection of the specific model(s) and process(es) need to be deeply rooted in the values and land-grant mission of the institution and the collective vision that we hold of our future.

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