April 3, 2001

Dear Alum:

I'm writing to let you know about recent *U.S .News and World Report* rankings of schools of public affairs. The short story is that the Ford School placed about the same as it did two years ago. The medium-length story is that we remain in the top 10, tied for 7th with several other schools, and ranked highly in a number of specialties (policy analysis, health policy and management, environmental policy and management, information and technology management, and social policy.) The long version of the story addresses questions of methodology and that's what follows in this letter. You may want to look first at the actual list and then come back to read the explanation and qualification that any social scientist can't help but make.

First, let me say that overall we are pleased with the ranking. The Ford School is clearly in the top ten among policy and public administration schools and has remained there even in this period of significant growth for many schools. While the Ford School is also in an expansion mode, we began this a bit later than some of our peers. Next, in looking at the specialty rankings, there are a few points to note.

- Our high ranking (#3) in policy analysis is a reflection of our strength in our core mission. The group of schools listed in this ranking are the ones we judge most closely to be our peers and we are delighted to be in the top five.
- The #3 ranking in social policy is indicative of the faculty strength in the field.
- The strong showings in health policy and management (3rd), environmental policy and management (four-way tie for 6th), and information and technology management (tie for 9th) reflect the interdisciplinary nature of our program and the strength of other professional schools (Public Health, Natural Resources and Environment, and Information) at the University of Michigan.

Finally, I think it is important to acknowledge that while we did well in five of the ten specialty rankings, we hope to improve our placement in other subfields. We are working to build the faculty in areas such as public management, public finance, and non-profit management.

Now, on to methodology. The rankings are based on a survey of 259 programs nationwide that offer the M.P.A., M.P.P., or M.P.M. degrees. This includes the 60 schools of the Association for Public Policy and Management (APPAM) as well as many of the 245 schools in the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). An ongoing problem with this survey is the extent to which it mixes apples and oranges. Ranked above us are several schools with strong public administration programs with whom we largely do not compete – few students apply jointly to them and us and we lose virtually no students to them. Typically, two individuals from each program rated the academic quality of all programs on a scale of 5 (distinguished) to 1(marginal). Scores for each program were averaged across all

respondents who rated the program. The response rate to the survey was 46%. How well a school ranks in this system is clearly a mix of academic reputation and national visibility. The scores range from highs of 4.5 to lows of 3.0, with all the top ten schools at 3.9 or higher. So, while there are differences, they are not as big as headlines might lead one to expect. (More information about rankings and methodology is available from the *U.S .News and World Report* website: http://www.usnews.com.)

The rankings do provide an opportunity to pause and reflect about what we are doing and how others perceive it. The fact that the Ford School has been ranked well overall and in several specialties indicates that we have a very strong foundation. But the competition is stiff and it suggests that the efforts we are making to expand programs and improve our financial position are critical to the long-term strength of the school. I am grateful to alumni for the many ways in which you reflect credit on the school and welcome your continuing involvement as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Rebecca M. Blank