A fter seven years of deeply personal leadership, Dean Lee C. Bollinger has announced to the faculty that he will step down as dean next year. He has accepted the position of provost at Dartmouth College.

Dartmouth’s president, James O. Freedman, announced Bollinger’s selection in May. However, because Bollinger is committed to his responsibilities and a smooth leadership transition at Michigan, he will not leave to assume his new post in Hanover, N.H., until July 1, 1994.

In his announcement to faculty, Bollinger wrote, “I will not try to say in a letter what it has meant to me to be on this faculty for 21 years, seven of them as dean.”

Intent on making the most of the coming year, he isn’t ready to focus on his departure now. “Since I have a year to go, I’m committed to accomplishing as much as I possibly can, and at this point, I’m resistant to summing up my career here.”

He’ll spend the year assisting the faculty in the search for his successor and tending to the diverse needs of the “heart and soul of the school” — the students and faculty. In addition, he said, “I’ll continue to focus on our capital campaign. It’s vital to the well-being of the school. We’re up to $32 million now. I’ll work as hard as I can to bring it up to $40 million.”

Dartmouth’s Freedman said, “Dean Bollinger has a distinguished record of achievement as teacher, scholar and academic administrator. Most of all, he is an intellectual who cares deeply about ideas and liberal education. I am confident that he will bring outstanding qualities of leadership and character to his new position.”

Dartmouth’s gain is a major loss for Michigan, where Bollinger has impressed and inspired everyone with his rare combination of scholarship, integrity and personal warmth.

Shining through all his professional relationships was a caring, human touch that faculty, students and alumni appreciated and will sorely miss. “Often you can find a genuine scholar who can express creative ideas, but that person may lack a warm human touch. Lee has both in abundance,” said Theodore St. Antoine, a professor and former dean. “He has a 24-karat quality; it’s clear to everyone that he has no artificial aspects.”

“I think of Lee as one of the more important moral anchors of the Law School, and that’s the quality I’m most concerned about losing,” said Richard Pildes, a recently tenured assistant professor. “His strength is an ability to champion commitment to the traditional values of tolerance, discussion and decency while still maintaining strong convictions about the values that ought to define a great law school.”

Long-time faculty member James J. White noted, “The most important thing he has done as dean is to establish high standards of achievement as teacher, scholar and academic administrator. Most of all, he is an intellectual who cares deeply about ideas and liberal education. I am confident that he will bring outstanding qualities of leadership and character to his new position.”

“He was very successful at bringing in a critical mass of young faculty with diverse strengths and doing everything a dean can do to help them grow,” added Pildes. That was true even if Bollinger’s own work and viewpoint was very
different, noted Suellyn Scarnecchia, a clinical assistant professor of law hired to teach in the Child Advocacy Law Clinic the same year Bollinger became dean. “I’m very sad he’s leaving because he’s been a very positive leader,” Scarnecchia said. “He always made me feel like my work was extremely valuable and never passed up an opportunity to give me positive reinforcement, even though my clinical work was very different than his academic focus.”

Bollinger has strengthened the Law School in many ways. “Even outsiders can see how successful he has been,” says Jeffrey Lehman, a professor of law and public policy. “During his deanship, the Law School renovated its buildings, enhanced its international connections, hired exciting new faculty with diverse intellectual styles, and experimented with innovative academic programs. Remarkably, Lee was able to pursue that kind of agenda during a time when some of our traditional sources of financial support were shrinking.”

Bollinger has addressed that challenge, too. “He’s been tremendously successful at the terribly important task of raising money,” St. Antoine said. He played a major role in launching the Law School’s five-year, $75 million capital campaign that will end in 1997. The same warmth that impressed faculty made a big impression on alumni, who generously invested in the school’s future by endowing chairs and contributing to scholarship funds.

The Law School is losing not only a talented leader but a preeminent scholar. “His work is characterized by the rare integrity of an academic who writes because he wants to figure out how to live and act,” Pildes noted. Since Bollinger joined the U-M faculty in 1973, he has taught courses on the First Amendment and comparative freedom of speech, mass media law, contracts and law and culture. He has written three books and many articles dealing with free speech. A graduate of the University of Oregon and Columbia Law School, Bollinger was a law clerk to Justice Warren E. Burger from 1972-73.

It will be difficult to replace Bollinger, all agree. “We want to carry on Lee’s traditions, and we’ll be looking for someone with the same qualities: scholarly excellence and strong administrative capabilities,” St. Antoine said. Because Bollinger has done a great deal to build on the school’s basic character and assets, he leaves the institution in a strong position to face the future.