

5-17-1976

## Comments to the Senate Committee on Colleges and Universities, delivered on May 17, 1976

Arend D. Lubbers  
*Grand Valley State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential\\_speeches](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches)



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

---

### ScholarWorks Citation

Lubbers, Arend D., "Comments to the Senate Committee on Colleges and Universities, delivered on May 17, 1976" (1976). *Presidential Speeches*. 56.

[https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential\\_speeches/56](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/56)

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

Comments by  
President Arend D. Lubbers  
Grand Valley State Colleges  
to  
The Senate Committee on Colleges and Universities

May 17, 1976

What is a university? The classical definition is an institution in which are combined a college of liberal arts, other colleges, graduate programs and teaching and research facilities.

Grand Valley State Colleges fulfills that definition. Size is not a factor. There are universities with enrollments of no more than 4,000 and universities with enrollments of 45,000. It is the direction an institution of higher learning is taking that determines how best to describe it.

Almost since its beginnings, Grand Valley State Colleges has been developing into a university--not because of the ambitions of its faculty and administration, but because of the needs and demands of the area it serves.

That area is, of course, principally the central part of Western Michigan, the second most populous area in Michigan, embracing some 1.5 million persons; an area, too, not served by a senior educational facility until the founding of Grand Valley by a 1960 act of the Michigan Legislature.

It would be instructive to trace briefly the development of Grand Valley since it began operating in the fall of 1963 with one academic building and 226 students

All of those students were enrolled in what is now the College of Arts and Sciences. Within a relatively short time, however, it became

evident that the college would have to diversify its educational opportunities to satisfy the demands and desires of all those who wished to enroll in it.

There were students who did not wish to pursue the traditional liberal arts curriculum, who preferred to develop their own inner resources and drives along less structured lines.

To satisfy their demands, a school of general studies was established. It since has become Thomas Jefferson College, which is acknowledged to be one of the most successful ventures of its kind in the United States -- successful not only in achieving its desired goals, but successful in preparing its graduates for graduate studies and professional roles in private and public life.

In due time it became evident, too, that a distinct need existed in this part of the state for a college that would prepare students for specific careers not provided for in the two existing colleges. There was an obvious need for a college that would combine theoretical with practical training and thus enhance the students' adaptability in a world of constantly changing opportunities. And so William James College was born.

Meanwhile the College of Arts and Sciences was developing certain schools to meet the requirements of the many communities in Western Michigan. Under CAS a School of Business Administration was created, then a School of Public Service, a School of Health Sciences, and a School of Nursing followed. All of these were in answer to readily

definable needs in Western Michigan. That these schools have met those needs is attested by the large number of their graduates who now are serving in Western Michigan.

In conjunction with the School of Health Sciences, a program in Medical Emergency Training was developed. This, too, was the outgrowth of a widespread demand for such a program--a demand that had its genesis in the development of emergency medical techniques in Grand Rapids at the instigation of Mark Vasu, M.D., whose work in this field has been internationally recognized and who directs the EMT program at Grand Valley.

Certain other needs were identified in the West Michigan area and were met with the creation of the Environmental and Urban Studies Institute, the International Studies Institute, the Educational Studies Institute, and, most recently, the Religion Studies Institute.

These institutes serve both as educational and research resources. The research is carried on at the request of governmental units and other agencies, both public and private. All of it is intended to bring light to dark places, to identify public problems and, where possible, propose logical solutions. Numerous public and private organizations have come increasingly to depend on Grand Valley to provide such services from their senior public institution of higher learning in Western Michigan.

As in the case of all universities, Grand Valley's faculty members frequently are called upon to serve individually as consultants to industry, business, government, social agencies and a variety of other activities. GVSC can accurately be said to serve as a significant resource for scores

of enterprises which, without the talents available here, would have to turn to one of the major universities far more remote from them than is Grand Valley.

Nor are these the only ways in which Grand Valley serves the community at large. For many years citizens had discussed the possibility of establishing a public broadcasting station in this area. A station that not only would provide alternative programming to that available on commercial television, but a station that also would provide instructional-- or educational--television facilities for public, private and parochial schools, and a station that would also provide some outlet for the great reservoir of talent and knowledge that exist in this part of the state. Resources, I might add, largely untapped so far as most West Michigan residents were concerned.

GVSC finally decided it should step in to satisfy these needs and desires. In this venture it met with instant and warm-hearted response from, first, hundreds then thousands of residents throughout Western Michigan. And from business and public and private organizations as well. Today its public television station, WGVC-TV, Channel 35, is fulfilling all of the needs written or implied in its charter. It has a potential viewing audience estimated at 1.3 million--an audience not reached by any other operation of its kind. The success of the two on-air auctions it has conducted is testimony of the West Michigan community's devotion to the station and the gratitude it holds for the programs and services WGVC-TV offers.

While all of these services and facilities have been developing, the academic opportunities have been growing apace. In recognition of the fact that thousands of persons who want to pursue their education are unable to do so on a regular basis, GVSC developed what may be the most original new system of college instruction in decades: a college that would permit students to study at their own individual paces, completely away from the campus, if necessary, and where they could best master the instructional materials. The needs of these persons defined the form of what is known as College IV--College IV because it was the fourth college of undergraduate studies developed at Grand Valley.

College IV is serving the educational needs of persons in all age brackets, economic pursuits, personal activities, and even physical conditions, since in some instances it has proved especially adaptable to the needs of handicapped persons.

College IV was a brand new idea. It still is being expanded, modified, changed, to conform to the needs and wishes of those enrolled in it. New opportunities are being provided its students to engage in study in a classroom environment, if that is what they desire. It is flexible, adaptive, as a college among colleges should be.

What has happened at Grand Valley since 1963 has happened as a result of vast and profound changes in our society and economy. No one was talking of graduate schools at GVSC when the college was founded. But time has revealed a marked need for such resources at Grand Valley.

A large number of business and industrial firms, with their employees, made evident their desire to have provided at Grand Valley graduate courses in business -- courses that would permit them to upgrade the employees' skills and keep abreast of the rapidly developing field of knowledge and techniques applicable to business.

Out of this demand came the F.E. Seidman Graduate College of Business, a college so constructed as to make it possible for dozens of employed persons to work toward and obtain a master's degree in business administration at times and places convenient for them.

The success of this graduate college impelled local educators to press Grand Valley to establish a Graduate School of Education that would provide similar opportunities for teachers and school administrators. And so a second graduate school has been added to Grand Valley's federation.

There are other unmet needs at the graduate level in Western Michigan, needs that cannot be ignored by Grand Valley if it is to carry out what now has become its historic purpose.

Perhaps the question to be asked is not, "What is a university?" but "Why is a university?" A university exists to meet the needs, demands and desires of a large constituency. It exists because it is flexible, forward-looking and, yes, visionary. It exists to provide for the private and public sectors of society resources not otherwise available to them. It exists to inspire and to advance cultural interests, to encourage the advancement of the arts, and in general to expand the public's access to the arts and cultural activities. It exists, not merely to instruct its

students in how to make a living, but in how to live fuller, richer lives; how to enrich their communities and those about them through their talents, knowledge and vision. It exists that many may develop critical faculties that will enable them to appraise all elements of their society, including the arts, politics, economics, social programs, the quality of their environment.

All of these functions Grand Valley is performing. It in turn must be appraised not only on the basis of what it has become, but of what it is becoming. And by any definition, what it rapidly is becoming is a full-fledged university.

This is not to say that in becoming a university it intends to put decreasing emphasis on its undergraduate colleges. The chief emphasis will remain on undergraduate studies because that is what most students coming to Grand Valley are seeking. And the autonomy of the undergraduate colleges within the federation is well established and will be preserved. But others will want to continue graduate studies at Grand Valley in certain areas below the doctoral level. They will want to continue here for financial and geographical reasons, among others; and because, in many instances their employment will be nearby.

Grand Valley is truly an emerging university. I have tried to describe its characteristics. It is not a large university and there are many of us here who do not want growth for growth's sake. Yet by function it is a university and we believe it should be described as such. We are interested



in cooperating with other institutions in this area of West Michigan to bring a high quality of instruction and a program of instruction that is diverse enough on the undergraduate level to meet the needs of the people of the whole state and particularly this area . On the graduate level we want the same for those who live and work near us , and seek continuing education to improve their skills and understanding .

Grand Valley is a new type of institution , one that has adapted to changes in education . We hope we are combining the best of past with new approaches that will help people in the future . When we are viewed and evaluated for effectiveness , funding , and for possible admission to one of our colleges we want those doing it to understand what we are . We believe university is a better descriptive title for what we are and what we are doing .

To conclude on a lighter note -- I should like to add that the change also would forever banish a problem that continually plagues -- whether to use the singular or plural form of the verb "to be" with the title of Grand Valley State Colleges .