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CHARGE TO THE COMMISSION - President Arend D. Lubbers
February 28, 1989

The current that carries Grand Valley State University from year to year is as swift as that of the Grand River flowing past this building in which we are preparing to deliberate our university's future. The times are not languid, they are intense - even a hint of urgency arises when we discuss the future. In his book, The Origin of Consciousness, Julian Jaynes puts forth the theory that the evolution of the human species can be measured in about 1,000 year periods. That may be debatable, but for what it is worth, our calendar is bringing us to a moment in time when one millennium ends and we move without pause into another. Perhaps that accounts for the rapid pace that is carrying us to our future. Whatever the reason, the feeling is extant that there are great opportunities awaiting our society if we are ready for them.

When we put the focus on our part of the world in west Michigan, we have much to satisfy ourselves - growth, leadership, economic diversity, good quality of life. We also know that our future depends on encouraging the entrepreneur, and having an educated, well trained population to carry this generation's success into the next. Each year the number of new jobs in the nation and in the state is weighted toward the professional side, not the low-paying service jobs that we have been led to believe. What is the best educational program to prepare people for these new jobs, and for the existing ones as well? What kind of environment should dominate in the halls and on the campuses where teaching and learning takes place? We are here today to begin dealing with these issues at our university.

There are fifteen senior university campuses in the state of Michigan. Excluding the three major research universities, the twelve as a group enroll 56% of the students in public universities, and of their graduates, 70% remain in Michigan. I estimate that 60,000 are teaching in Michigan schools, and 101,000 are working in the state in business or engineering. Our universities are big players in Michigan's future, and we have the responsibility to see that Grand Valley plays well. Grand Valley has 18,000 graduates and 12,000 live in west Michigan. In the next decade that number will at least double. By the turn of the century over 25,000 Grand Valley
alumni will transact business, invest, teach, tend the ill, broadcast and write, paint and sculpt, design and maintain products, practice law, govern, and administer – all in west Michigan. By then Grand Valley will have more graduates in the tri-county region than any other college or university. These numbers place in perspective the importance of the quality of a Grand Valley education for the future of west Michigan, and that is why we are gathered here today.

As you begin to contemplate GVSU in the last decade of the 20th century, please consider the following four objectives.

First: We must provide access to higher education for students of all ages whose work qualifies them for admission.

As we enter the next millennium, I believe the numbers will swell. The quality of K-12 education will improve, and a larger percentage of students will qualify for and seek a college education. Though Grand Valley's requirements for freshman admission are higher now than ten of our fourteen sister state universities, we draw 52% of Ottawa County's students who are enrolled in those institutions, and 37% of those from Kent County. When we contemplate the numbers of Afro American and Hispanic populations in our state and region, we know that more of the young from these groups will find the aspiration and skills to seek a university degree. At the same time there will be no decrease in the aspiration level of the white population. Add to that the growth in west Michigan and you know that Grand Valley has a market and a responsibility. The expansion of our downtown campus, the facilities on the lakeshore and in Allendale are all a matter of the access and the quality of that access we want to provide.

Second: The universities must provide a curriculum that leads their graduates naturally into satisfying positions in the new world.

Here we need to step up the interaction between the university and the professions that make up our economy and society. The Foundation Board members are included in our planning process because of that need. I will be surprised if a wholesale restructure of university curricula is required, but the closer academe comes to those who work the vineyard, the more likely changes will occur in the way the university prepares people for the vineyard. Because of the cost of higher education, we, the faculty and administrators responsible for the university, should find ways to discard what is no longer needed, alter when necessary what is, and hold fast and improve that liberal arts core which is essential for high quality learning.
Third: Each University has a responsibility for research and public service.

In the past little was required in the way of research from our public colleges and universities except from the major research universities. The need to compete in manufacturing, the demand for sophisticated information systems, the complexity of local government, all keep the telephones ringing and the fax machine gorging and disgorging at GVSU. The major universities should be encouraged and protected as they pursue basic research. The regional universities will have to take on more of the applied nuts and bolts research and consulting that emerges from the business and industry in their areas because the majors cannot do it all and proximity has its advantages. I predict that we will increase as a center of expertise in some fields related to our area's requirements for education, health, and commerce.

Fourth: The environment in which our students live and learn and our faculty and staff work contribute to their well-being and sense of self-esteem.

To a significant degree this objective is gained where students, faculty and staff are aware that they are part of a community that cares about well-being and self-esteem. Though this comes mostly from the attitudes of people, those attitudes are encouraged by good personnel policies, advising and counselling services, housing arrangements and programs, extra curricular activities and social life. To achieve in this area requires a bureaucracy that is responsive and humane. GVSU will not be what we want it to be without smoothly operating human services, and we must keep this in mind as we chart the university's future.

Let us get on with the business of projecting enrollments, planning campuses, proposing programs, matching those programs to Michigan's requirements, and discovering means to implement what we propose and plan. Linking education to the health of society is an ancient concept. Diogenes said over 2400 years ago, "The foundation of the state is the education of its youth." In our modern state we can expand that to include older adults as well. Through our working on a plan for the future, we may find the way for worthy men and women to build on our heritage.