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I am curious about the origin of the term "ivory tower" as it is applied to the college and university. There is an implication that academia is immune from the pressures and tensions of most social and economic enterprises. That somehow in the educational cloister contemplative work takes place and pure truth emerges and is imparted to colleagues and students. There is a further implication that we who devote our lives to the academy are impractical; that we live in an unreal world sheltered from the harsher realities with which normal mortals must cope.

In the past fifteen years, particularly during the Viet Nam war, were the protests and riots on campus less real than in the streets of our cities? Is there something different about broken glass on a college campus and broken glass in a Los Angeles or Newark ghetto? Ask the parents, college friends, and professors of a student murdered on campus how sheltered the academic environment is. The ivory tower has tumbled down for hundreds of professors and administrators throughout the country who have lost their positions because of economic recession or decline in enrollment. Arson in dormitories, students
threatened by fellow students, Faculty and administrators charged publicly with misconduct in a way that tends to sensationalize, and make them appear guilty until proven innocent, all these conditions and more, have destroyed any immunity college life had from the harsh and often dangerous forces of American society.

The term "ivory tower" originated, I am sure, at a time when less than 5% of Americans enrolled in colleges and universities. Higher education was an experience removed from the lives of most people, though still influential in the technological, political, and religious direction of the nation. It was an experience reserved then and deemed necessary for only a few. "Ivory tower" is not an unusual sobriquet for a place that provided such an exclusive experience. Now that one half or more of Americans attend college at some time in their lives, it is not surprising that those who devote their careers to higher education deal with a greater range and volume of human problems than their predecessors.

Whether or not the "ivory tower" was ever what those who coined the term perceived it to be, today we know it is not a sanctuary.
Just as "ivory tower" implied a special place apart from harsh realities, it also expressed indirectly a special purpose for those who worked there. Though I regret the passing of those easier days when the world was not too much with us, I am more concerned that we will lose our sense of special purpose as the corroding problems of the modern campus stain the "ivory tower."

In addition to being appalled by the invasion of harshness to which I referred earlier, we must listen to and respond to terms such as productivity, market, and accountability - terms foreign to our profession. They are thrown at us and explained in a manner that offends our sense of what we are about, and increases paranoid feelings towards those outside and within the university. We try to explain, we argue, we feel powerless, we defend, we develop positions, we intellectualize, we map out strategies. We want to preserve what we hold dear, and we want to survive. All of these actions taken for self preservation more often appear to me to be self destructive.

The sense of special purpose is endangered by the fears and fights brought on by economic stringency, closer public scrutiny, and
continuing criticism. We cannot ignore the new conditions on the campus, but the best way to survive is to hold before ourselves and the public the special reason for our existence. Without our doing what we have chosen to do, what we have been called to do, society itself is endangered. If we in the academy lose our vision because we are not tough enough to cope with some adversity, we will betray ourselves and all of society.

The origin of our profession winds back in time to the period when Socrates and even his predecessors became preoccupied with human problems and from that preoccupation grew a concern for man's improvement and education. In a simple statement Socrates is reported to have said, "If we want to improve and educate our young, the first thing to consider is what virtue is." Virtue in ancient Greek is a morally neutral word compared to the meaning it has after centuries of the Christian experience. In Socrates' time it designated excellence, the excellence of anything in any field. As described in Plato's Republic, Socrates states that whatever is able to do its proper work, fulfill its proper function, attain its proper end or good, we call
a thing of virtue or excellence. Socrates never tires of saying, "Virtue is knowledge." This is the substance of his moral teaching.

Am I correct when I say we believe as Socrates did? The twenty-five centuries since Socrates have seen an explosion in knowledge. Man continues to pursue knowledge and uses it in pursuit of his self fulfillment. This is what we call education. The process is one in which we are seeking excellence (virtue) for our lives through our knowing. By knowing we come to deeper understanding of ourselves, others, and the nature of that which is a part of our experience.

What we describe as the mind is the part of each human life that perceives knowledge, excellence, and ultimate meaning for that life. The mind is the receptacle of human consciousness. It is even used consciously to probe subconscious behavior. It provides the means for us to make the religious decisions of our lives, even to decide to downgrade its importance for those with obscurantist tendencies. It is the machine of each human life that produces knowledge, that finally determines what life for the human being will be. Whether one embraces a loving God who works through the minds of men and women or believes
that man shapes what destiny he can in the natural order, the mind is all one has to consciously perceive and know. It makes human life, human life.

Can you think of anything on earth much more important than the human mind? I cannot. In all of life, what priority do you give to the growth of the mind and through it to the increase of knowledge and understanding? For me it's right at the top of the list along with love of family, and securing food and shelter. In fact, it assists in the full realization of all other priorities. As inheritors of the Socratic tradition and concern we, the members of the academy, have assumed as our responsibility the nurture of the mind so that knowledge may be expanded, truth discovered, and the life of man enriched and dignified.

Now tell me again that the state or society cannot afford so much education? We are not dealing with outmoded products no longer useful in society. We are dealing with the mind, a limitless, exciting necessary resource. What we can do for the mind is without limits. The academy like any other institution can learn to live with more
or less depending on conditions, but it must live. Once our society has committed itself to the ideal of an educated citizenry, it should not turn back. Knowledge for the many, not just for an elite few, is the new American ideal. It has become part of our national dream. Only in recent American life have we moved towards it. Naturally its achievement is not complete, nor is the process unmarred by false starts. The goal is noble and at Grand Valley we are instruments in our own way towards the realization of this goal.

The most serious threat to a college or university comes when its members lose their commitment to the life of the mind. When those who teach and pursue research have other interests that impinge on their time, keeping them from doing their best, when there are distractions of a personal nature or frustrations because the system does not provide a good environment in which to work. When staff at all levels forget that they, too, are trying to create a place where learning and knowledge take precedence.

To live with declining purchasing power is particularly difficult for those accustomed to an affluent society. Tension arises over the
division of resources. One finds it less tolerable to accept programs and people with whom one disagrees or does not respect. Comparisons of who gets what become odious. There is always the fear that less today may bring even less tomorrow. Such times are hard and distracting. They require hard decisions. Yet those decisions must be made, always considering the responsibility of the academy for the life of the mind.

While collecting my thoughts for this address, the sacred quality of our mission impressed itself on my mind with a renewed force. What our profession requires of us is so important in the lives of the people we serve, it is awesome. Their minds, their thoughts, their decisions, their careers, the relationships that flow from all of these are at stake in what we do with them. When they are not we lose sight of our mission. We become mixed in pettiness, internal power plays, and lack the necessary attentiveness to our most important tasks. We become vulnerable to and deserving of attack from outside. The Faculty are closest to the holy of holies of the profession because they deal most often and directly with the students' primary reason for being in college, but that does not detract from the essential
contribution others make to build a worthy college.

To enter a classroom, to conduct a class, is almost a priestly act. One has a feeling of that as I did while watching an able first grade teacher lead her twenty-four six-year-olds through their lessons in reading, word definitions, and writing. She was awesome in the simple way she communicated with her students. The same feeling of awe used to come over me in an American History class when the Professor day after day presented us with the most literate, analytical lectures I have ever heard. He performed high art. He was immersed in his subject. He loved the knowledge of it. His pride would not allow him to demean his subject nor himself. What he taught was lifted to a high place. The subject earned stature and both had an influence on his students; he because his devotion and intelligence gave us an example of superb teaching and the subject because it was taught so well and had a richness and complexity that was fully explored. He helped us understand what he wanted us to understand.

Ours is a sacred profession because knowledge is our metier. If we hold with Socrates that knowledge is virtue, there is no more
important human endeavor than the extension, understanding and use of it. Knowledge is comprised of lesser and greater elements. It is incapable of being comprehended in its entirety by any single individual, yet all of it is within the purview of the Profession called teaching and research. Each of us in our own way works with a part of it. There is no more important profession than the one that deals with knowledge in the search for truth and understanding. We must believe it. More important, we must practice it worthily. Finally, we must explain as best we can the nature of our work and its consequences for the future.

Ours is a sacred profession because we are involved in a force that shapes the future for individuals and society - the aspirations of our students. We encourage them or discourage them. We help them to see themselves realistically. We open doors to knowledge so that they may achieve their goals. We are drawn into their lives when they face decisions and work towards objectives that will have ultimate effect on who they are and what they do. There is a frightening aspect to this responsibility. Clearly each class and
counseling session is significant because of whatever effect it may have on the direction of a student. Each administrative system that injects itself into the life of students may alter attitudes, hence the way a student may go.

For the past several minutes I have shared with you my view of our profession. I have done so because ours is one of the worthy, noble professions of humankind, and we are going through a difficult period. Last year the economic disaster made these the most trying times for our young institution. No institution lives through retrenchment and reallocation happily. No college or university will survive a difficult period unless its people have a sense of the worthiness of their profession as educators, and through all viscisitudes hold to that ideal.

Here we are at the beginning of a new year. There are 2,500 new students with their hopes still intact. They are not conditioned by the threat of Tisch amendments and 14% budget reductions. They are placing their aspirations in our care. We will summon the ages old commitment of the scholar to his discipline, to his institution and to his profession, and immerse those students in the life inspiring
process of education. We will treat their minds with reverence. We will reward their success, but we will not tolerate indifference or indolence towards that which is precious, even sacred, to us. We will be renewed by all of this. We will live and take pride.

As we enter this academic year with new students, with returning students, and the commitment we have to them, we should hold before ourselves a few objectives that will assist us to be a strong institution in these times. Quality, after all, is determined primarily by people, their thoughts, their work habits, and their dedication to task. I do not wish to imply that books, equipment, travel, and facilities do not affect quality. Yet all of these can be provided and without the will and intelligence to use them they will not make a strong college or university. In these days all of us can give careful thought to how we can improve what we are doing. The committee on Research and Development is available to assist those who conceive a formal plan to contribute to the scholarship and teaching of our institution. A better lecture, greater intellectual involvement with students, a good article, cutting of red tape, solution of a problem in an
equitable manner, make for a better place. To improve in these ways may do more for a college than costlier additions. Is it possible for each of us to dedicate ourselves to doing something better this year than we have done it before?

This summer there have been discussions with the Committee on Research and Development about recognizing teaching and research excellence each year. To do this to call attention to the purpose of our profession, to honor what we are entrusted to do, and those who do it particularly well. Awards would be presented at the Opening Convocation. Discussions are underway also to find ways to appropriately acknowledge superior administrative and staff work.

Two years ago I asked that an all colleges general education program be considered by the Faculty. Actions taken recently by other colleges, including Harvard and Stanford, indicate that the request was timely. I am aware of the conflicts amongst our colleges on the acceptance of credits. Yet it seems to me scholars and teachers bent on excellent education and broadly educated students can find a way to identify the areas of knowledge to be included in such a program,
and to establish the means to see that the quality of instruction is acceptable to all. To fail in this endeavor is to fail as an institution of higher education. To build a coherent general education curriculum in the pluralistic, professions directed university today is a major challenge; one that educators must meet for the good of the human mind, and the professions themselves.

The days we have lived through recently brought us unforseen retrenchment and some necessary reallocation. In some ways we have become more efficient; in others we feel the loss of what was cut. I do not foresee the immediate need to retrench positions again, nor is there any reason to threaten the existence of our four fine colleges. We must continue, however, to pursue ways to increase our effectiveness academically and financially. Last year we combined some functions formerly in two or more units into one. We should examine our operations to see if other combinations are in the best interests of the Grand Valley State Colleges or any one of the colleges. This, too, is an area of potential conflict, but we cannot avoid it.
Grand Valley found financial support from the private sector from the beginning. The land for the campus, Seidman House, WGVC-TV, Loutit Hall, the Stadium Track are some examples of projects that relied on private support. Our future depends on even broader participation by individuals and private organizations in our fund-raising campaigns. The Board of Trustees of Grand Valley State Colleges Foundation has been expanded for the purpose of increasing our endowment fund, and securing a downtown center. Our alumni, our friends, and all of us will be asked to make what contribution we can, and we will seek out new friends as well. What we are doing here is important for this region and for the state. We will see that we continue to do it with state assistance and we hope, increased help, from all those who recognize our significance.

Here we are together again. All the problems thrust upon us have not disappeared, but neither have the opportunities. We will have to deal with the problems, but let's dwell on the opportunities. If we think together, keep communication open, we may find creative ways to help each others, and enhance our colleges. I invite you to
talk with me anytime about any subject. I hope you will return the invitation and extend it to all colleagues and students.

Socrates talked about virtue and knowledge. He also talked about wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to discuss inner qualities and relationships. Wisdom keeps knowledge working in the best interests of the human race. Wisdom is knowledge’s safety valve. Wisdom is common sense. Knowledge by itself is not wise. The way we use knowledge, the way we perceive relationships, the way we act toward people is wise or unwise. The success of these coming weeks and months will be determined by how much accumulated wisdom we have around here. I trust the supply is sufficient.