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## Faculty Speech, delivered on February 19, 1991

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BACKGROUND AND MISSION

As the 1970's turned toward the 80's, drastic changes were taking place at Grand Valley, nurtured by internal forces and precipitated by severe economic recession in Michigan. There was only a decapitated field house for student recreation. Thomas Jefferson College was closed eliciting grim satisfaction from its detractors with the comment, "It's about time," and anger or disappointment from its students, faculty, and alumni. The budget was reshaped by surgical methods, severing programs, trimming departments and schools, cutting away fat, and reconstructing the institution into a lean yet more traditional organization. There were academic redirections, stepped up fund raising from private sources, and an aggressive, well planned admissions initiative. With the economy in a trough, we were still able to persuade the Governor and Legislature to restore recreation to our campus. By 1982 we had a new field house, and we were ready to take advantage of all that was put in place during the past two years of diligent, often painful, Faculty and Administrative effort. The last trauma of the deep recession was just ahead of us, but we were prepared for it. The most significant element of that preparation was the Faculty and Administrators' willingness to forgo salary increases for a year. That forbearance pulled the University through a most difficult period without the disruption suffered earlier or the continuing disruption on other campuses. When it all came to an end we were able to provide salary increases retroactively, and we were poised to ride the new prosperity to

levels of enrollment and service to the state and our community significantly beyond that achieved before the recession.

From that time early in the 1980's our dual mission as a college, now a University, became more clearly defined. Our responsibility to offer a good professional education to the citizens of our region was thrust upon us by their compelling needs to improve their lot and by their increasing numbers. Their needs reflected those of the agencies, schools, manufacturers, health care institutions, and businesses of the region. We set about to secure facilities and resources to more ably fulfill that part of our mission, and the downtown Eberhard Center now stands on the west bank of the Grand as a result. It is a symbol of the modern university in the city state. The classrooms, the laboratories, the broadcast studios, and the conference rooms serve a region with a city at the core and smaller cities, towns, and farms within its economic and cultural purview; all requiring today the development of talents that a university provides. Before the 1950's major universities, liberal arts colleges, and teachers colleges offered all that was thought necessary in the United States. Life is more complex now. Each city state needs its own, and we have that vision.

Our initial and continuing mission as a college on this beautiful, rural campus was to provide undergraduates with a sound liberal arts education in an environment where eighteen-year-olds would mature into adults of character and integrity. That has not changed. Of course, there are more professional programs available

to the Allendale campus undergraduate, but we insist on a liberal arts core for all. In this we are like other excellent colleges and small universities. And it is my hope that our undergraduate education on the Allendale campus will come to be recognized as the best in Michigan for academic quality, development of values, and personal environment. For most of our founding faculty, this was their vision and their commitment has the verification of long use and pervasive success in our society. If we hold to it, we will distinguish this campus in our state and beyond.

#### ECONOMY

As we move toward the fulfillment of our objectives as a University, we do so faced periodically with a different set of realities. The relatively strong economy of the mid and late 1980's has given way to a condition that resembles the period between 1979 and 1982. We hope the downturn will not be so severe, nor last so long. The University of Michigan economic prognosticators are hopeful; others are less optimistic.

The most reassuring aspect of these troubled economic times is the recently elected Governor's commitment to education. We share his vision of a strong Michigan, formed and developed by well educated and creative minds. The first priority is reform of the K-12 system, but that does not infer neglect of higher education. The future generations will require more higher education, not less, if Michigan is to retain a high quality of life. The concept is in place. Are the dollars available to make it a reality?

The battle over the extent of state government services has

been joined. So far higher education is not the target, but we are caught in the cross-fire. With disagreement between the Republican Governor and the Democratic House on how to balance a budget that is one billion dollars in deficit, there is some feeling that higher education should pay back more than the current 1%. The deficit reduction plan presented by the Speaker of the House calls for an additional 1% to be taken from the state universities. Even if that is enacted, the 2% will not match the loss suffered by many agencies and continues to make us targets for attack by those who are more severely wounded. I anticipate finger pointing, accusations, and viciousness in the public arena before state policy is finally determined.

While the Governor and Legislators debate the fiscal crisis, we should make our preparations. Though I believe we are already the most efficiently operated state university in Michigan, we must scan our internal budgets to ascertain where they can be reduced. We do not need to cancel travel and institutional hospitality already planned, but throughout this year and the next only that which is deemed essential should be undertaken. Our budgets for improvement of facilities and maintenance will be trimmed until better times return. These are the first two steps I propose while we await the outcome of fiscal debate.

My first priority during this recession is to save jobs at Grand Valley. So long as our enrollment is maintained at current levels, and I believe it will, we need them. I hope there is enough consensus on this matter so that together we can work toward that

end, taking proper actions as the unfolding situation requires.

As we at Grand Valley confront the fiscal realities today, I want to remind you of a period nearly a decade ago when we were forced to reduce our budget by nearly 15% in one fiscal year. We came out of that crisis a stronger institution. Faculty and Administrative cooperation resulted in the best possible decisions during a painful period. No other institution in the state managed the last recession better than Grand Valley and I am confident we will do the same during this down-turn in the economy.

#### ENROLLMENT

The state's financial condition forces us to examine our enrollment policies. The Enrollment growth since 1982 elicits mixed reactions. The burden of too many students and too many advisees falls on a majority of faculty, and more administrative tasks each day than the people here can accomplish brings frustration. That's the dark side. The bright side brings with it the knowledge that students want to attend Grand Valley in substantial numbers, and the amount and quality of the work we must do gives challenge and purpose. There is no doubt that our growth rate has attracted attention in our region of the state, that it is both a cause and an effect of a more favorable attitude toward our university. The

numbers of people who attend demonstrates the need for us in the state and in the region. There should be no more talk about closing as there was between 1980 and 1982. We have made our point. We have staked out our territory, not because we willed it so, but because so many people have claimed us as their institution.

The decade of the 80's is past and so is our rapid growth, unless state funds flow to us more abundantly than they have in the past. Our percentage increase in appropriations has been among the highest in recent years, (2nd of the 15 state universities) but our enrollment growth has outpaced it. Without the benefit of careful analysis and based only on experience and intuition, I believe Grand Valley's enrollment could reach 15,000 to 16,000 students by the end of the decade if the programs we have in place were funded at a level to meet the natural demands of the region and the state. For this to happen, Grand Valley will need special attention from the Legislature, just as Michigan State did during its formative years following the Second World War. All we can do is ask.

In a time when funds are limited, we know that our programs

cannot expand to meet the demand of all the students who may measure up to our admissions standards. Since it is our desire to see the Allendale campus have an undergraduate student body of the highest quality in Michigan, we have limited the number of first time freshmen, seeking to enroll to 1,500 a year. By doing so we can control the enrollment on the Allendale campus and adjust it according to our educational objectives and financial resources. I have no difficulty limiting the number of freshmen since there are two community colleges in our region and access is not denied to those who deserve an opportunity. My difficulty arises when we put a cap on the number of transfer students and graduate students we accept. For many who qualify for admission at that level, we are the only "act" in town. I regret denying access to qualified students who for family financial or professional reasons must seek their education here. This year that has begun to happen because we cannot afford to offer the sections that these qualified students need.

Until we can see more clearly the financial future of our



state and the educational policy of our government, we will hold the line on freshman enrollment and do as well as we can for qualified transfers and graduate students. My major objective is to increase staffing levels to adequately serve our present enrollment, not to add substantially to that enrollment. Then, if resources become available, we can make a decision together whether or not we want to admit more students.

#### FACULTY GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Most important for us is to continue improving our University no matter what the external realities. As a faculty and staff, our ideas, creativity, and moral will are not held captive by the forces beyond our control. There are many ways open to us to enhance our quality.

I have always maintained that the quality of the faculty is the definitive measure of a university's quality. Good students are drawn to good faculty, and an able faculty can survive inept administrations. When I arrived twenty-two years ago, I was impressed that this new college had attracted so many able people

to teach here. Through our difficult periods, they have sustained the integrity of our institution. I am encouraged today because the faculty and the Deans have enhanced their own standing, proven their good judgment, and demonstrated their personal security by appointing exceptionally capable colleagues in recent years. One hundred thirty-six tenure track faculty members have been appointed in the past five years. Less than half, or 48% of the present faculty, were here ten years ago. People create change, so we are changing. With no slight to those of us who were here ten years ago, I am confident we have changed for the better.

An aspect of that change is the tension between teaching and research. Our success is built on the students' recognition that they have been well taught. I am amused by the large institutions' rediscovery of teaching as a legitimate university function. Since they pay scant attention to institutions like ours, they don't realize that many of us have known that from the time of our origin. We will always hold good teaching and the scholarship that sustains it as our primary mission, and demonstrate that commitment

through reward and recognition.

At the same time, we have among us those who want their scholarship to result in publication as well as good teaching. That is legitimate, and we should strive to make that possible without adopting a publish or perish policy for all faculty. That has often subverted good teaching at many institutions. To incorporate these goals in a consistent faculty policy is easier to announce and embrace than to accomplish for at least three reasons that occur to me.

First, and most important, we do not have the resources to provide every faculty member who wants to publish released time each semester for that purpose. Second, some departments and schools are so inundated with students and course demands that with present staffing it is virtually impossible to consider time for research. Third, there are limited funds available for released time; some given to newly appointed faculty in order to persuade them to join us. The concern of Professors of long standing who have difficulty securing those funds is obvious and legitimate.

Often I have seen them defer so that they can secure a capable new colleague. That builds a better university, but at a cost higher than we should be satisfied to indefinitely pay.

A proposal to deal with the rewards aspect of this issue emanated from the Psychology Department. I thought it was a good one. Such a proposal should be a priority on the Faculty Governance agenda. To define the teaching and research goal of the University, to determine the rewards and recognition for both is, to me, a major and necessary task for Faculty Governance. As a university evolves and changes, that task will be revisited. The matter is too important for it to slide into adversarial contests within the University because it is not confronted and resolved by Faculty representatives in the properly constituted Senate.

I see also other pressing matters that require attention and action by the established governance bodies, faculty, student and administrative. Last spring the racial eruptions on campuses throughout the state caught us mid-term in our plans to improve the climate here for a racially integrated life. Two task forces have

worked during the first semester of this academic year, one to plan for curriculum improvements in the area of multicultural studies, and the other to examine the campus living environment.

The first, led by Professor Rod Mulder, has submitted its report, and the report is ready for scrutiny and debate among the faculty. The most intriguing proposal calls for a course required for graduation that might be entitled Diversity in the United States: Race and Gender. I hope the Faculty will look carefully at this recommendation. Without strong majority support, such a course cannot accomplish its objective. With it and with a plan for ongoing development, it could achieve the multicultural awareness we seek. The changes in the curriculum called for I can support, but those changes are a faculty prerogative, as are all matters relating to the curriculum.

The second, co-chaired by Professor Jacquie Johnson and Dean Donald Williams, is making excellent progress and soon will make recommendations to the campus community. I urge that appropriate bodies take action before the end of this academic year on the work

of these two task forces. If that action leads to further work this summer in order to implement recommendations adopted by the faculty or Student Senate, we will strive to provide funding.

The curricular upheavals of the 1970's throughout the nation and the broadened mission of universities like ours, have buffeted the liberal arts core. Emerging in the 1920's, fixed in the 1930's and 40's, it remained more or less intact through the 1960's. At Grand Valley we have never surrendered the concept, though there have been varied perceptions of that concept. The matter has been on our agenda throughout the 1980's, and after labored effort, improved liberal arts requirements were fixed into our curriculum. Though improved, I hope they are not the best we can achieve. The structure put in place to keep the core curriculum pot boiling is likely to keep the heat turned up. I hope so. We can do better as we strive in a specialized world to educate a cosmopolitan person.

We cannot deny that a professional curriculum makes greater demands as knowledge explodes. Yet we do not want the core curriculum to be damaged by that explosion. If the high schools

become more rigorous in their teaching of the subjects we include in our core we would be grateful, but I doubt our problem would disappear. We decide what material, skill, and understanding is necessary for each major and we must at the same time determine the most efficient way to accomplish the task. The same holds for the liberal arts core. After that process is completed we will ascertain the amount of time necessary for a student to graduate. What is beginning to happen will accelerate. Most students will not be able to complete a degree in four academic years. This is not new in some fields. In the future, it may be common in most. As we are carried by this tide of increased knowledge, I want us to understand what is happening and find out whether or not a university-wide plan will contribute positively to our dealing with it. I ask the Faculty Senate to consider the issue. Before doing so, the Provost and I will present in more detail our thoughts about the core curriculum at Grand Valley, and the integrity of that curriculum and that of the major.

THE FUTURE

Looking to the future, I see the growth of two strong campuses. I know there has been and remains some concern about having two campuses. The decision about who should be downtown and who in Allendale is really a process, one in which we are still engaged. For some the matter is settled; for others the debate continues. My objective is to have a full range of undergraduate programs at Allendale and professional graduate programs in Grand Rapids. That does not imply limiting either to one campus, nor will there be an attempt to force people against their will to move. A rational approach to delivering our curriculum to the students will lead to the right decisions.

Our science building seems to be a fantasy or dream. We think about it often, but it never materializes. All I can say to the state is, "We're ready when you are." I don't know Governor Engler's position on capital outlay for universities. This economy can use some construction. I hope he and the legislature see it that way.



We will have the Cook-DeWitt Center, thanks to the Cooks, the DeWitts, and the DeVos'. A few more needed square feet of space will be added to the crowded campus for lectures, seminars, music performances, and worship services.

I think we are on the right course. Let's build on the success we have had and improve our university. We will emphasize high quality teaching enhanced by scholarship. I know that necessitates filling more positions with the kind of high quality people who have joined us recently. We will strive to do that when we can. It means more faculty and professional development funds, and a more complete library. I am confident this decade will allow us to move toward these goals.

For us, undergraduate education and experience is our specialty. By providing a special experience comprised of good instruction and healthy living, our students, I believe, are gaining more from college life than an outside observer might expect from a university of our age, numbers, and budget. This too happens because of the professional competency and personal concern

of our faculty and staff, and justifies our interest in character and integrity when appointments are made.

As a university in a "city state", the interaction with our community is important in our life. The whole graduate curriculum flows from that interaction, and many who reside within the "city state" consider that our right to live is based on our service to the community. Our television station brings learning and meaningful entertainment to people's lives. Our technology and space helps them communicate with whom they must. Our future depends on the ways we find to help people improve themselves. We must continually be attuned to their needs and find out how to meet them.

These are the broad themes that guide us. They will fuel our creativity, and lead us to higher achievements. Each of us can find an excellent place for ourselves within them. If we are faithful to them, Grand Valley State University will become what we want it to be, and we, our students, and our alumni will bask in the recognition that we have succeeded.