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All of us together face an interesting year – one of the most challenging in recent times. Beginning in April the DeVos Center will be ready for its first occupants. By July it will be completed. No matter how well we plan, it is impossible to predict exactly the impact of so much additional space on the life of the University. It can have a positive effect because it gives us more space in which to do our work. It will bring significant public attention to the University, and therefore present us with opportunities to serve the public more effectively.

The move of programs and departments into the DeVos Center will bring about change for some faculty, students, and staff. Change has its difficulties and brings on apprehensions. They require our attention and good will, and if dealt with in sympathy and with intelligence, may lead to a stronger University.

I remember when the Eberhard Center was under construction there was concern that the Allendale campus might suffer when it was completed. I believe that the Allendale campus and the whole University benefited from the Eberhard Center. I contend the same will be true when we begin using the DeVos Center.

Early next year the US 131 S curve in downtown Grand Rapids will be closed for reconstruction. The project will take more than a year to complete. At the same time, we will be in the final stages of completion for the DeVos Center and the Secchia Apartments, and in mid construction of the Keller Engineering Laboratories Building. As we occupy these facilities and continue our work in the Eberhard Center, all of us who are downtown to pursue our professions will be tested. Our hope lies in the knowledge that eventually the construction will stop.

At Allendale more than five hundred student residence spaces will open this fall. Our campus population has grown nearly 1500 in the last few years. The need for recreational and study space accompanies the growth, and requires planning. The growth of academic programs at Allendale and throughout the University, with their added faculty positions, demonstrates the need for academic space and planning as well. This is the year, I believe, that appropriate student, faculty, and staff committees should undertake that planning and architects give us a picture of the campus additions.

As we begin the new academic year, we launch a new General Education Program. Established as a Liberal Arts College, Grand Valley, by its nature, is committed to the view that an educated person is one who is familiar with the Liberal Arts and Sciences. Our new program is a refinement and improvement of our commitment. Though there may be more improvement in the future, this is the year for the Faculty and Academic administrators to make the new General Ed Program work. To demonstrate its value to the students is to make it work. Given the legitimate interest each Professor has in her or his discipline, it takes extra effort for each to relate that field of study when appropriate to others and to call attention to the importance of other fields. This should be done to assist the student understand how the curriculum leads toward the objective of being educated; of being able to live the life of the mind.
Earlier this year I asked that the first step be taken to ensure that policies determining compensation at Grand Valley be equitable. As a result, salary adjustments were made early this year after consultation with an outside expert. Since then I have heard from several people that they were surprised at not being included on the list or they questioned some that were. That reveals how really difficult it is to agree on what is equitable. The Women's Commission urged that we bring in a consultant to assist us in reaching our equity objectives. I think that is a good idea, and the University will work toward those objectives this year. Our Assistant to the President for Equity and Planning will be appointed soon. Our commitment to see that equity goals are always pursued for students, faculty and staff will be part of that person's job description. It is too much to hope that all will be satisfied by the policies adopted and the adjustments made this academic year, but it is reasonable to expect that they will be rational and in the best interests of the University.

These are a few of the big issues for the academic year. They are enough to test our civility. They call for good will toward one another. They require a commitment beyond ourselves to our University. I will address the University community on October 7th at 3:00 p.m. to expand on these and other matters before us.