

1-1-1999

Address to the Campus Community

Arend D. Lubbers

Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr>

Recommended Citation

Lubbers, Arend D. (1999) "Address to the Campus Community," *Grand Valley Review*: Vol. 20: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol20/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Grand Valley Review by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Address to the Campus Community

4

President Arend D. Lubbers
spoke to the University Community on Tuesday, October 26, 1999, Cook-DeWitt Auditorium.

A friend of mine subscribed for me to a Washington commentary on both domestic and foreign policy. Occasionally, the writers refer to national polls and recently, the domestic policy guru referred to a poll on education. There was no great surprise, but I was impressed by the large number of Americans who are interested in and concerned for education. The major focus is on the failure of so many public school systems to teach their students fundamentals in reading, science, math, history, and geography. Though higher education claims slightly less attention, there is a concern that it will be affordable and that it will meet current needs, both in content and delivery.

Reading the report affected me personally. A new feeling came over me about the importance of an educator's work. I have had that feeling before. I have intellectualized it over the years, but here again was the emotion of it: I have to keep the faith, my colleagues have to keep the faith, and my University has to keep the faith. Keeping the faith means recommitment to effective teaching and to a curriculum that is focused on the students as they move toward higher levels of intellectual development and professional competence. We must be aware that there can be a tendency in university departments to teach what professors enjoy even when the full range of enjoyment fails to cover the field adequately. In some fields change seems to be accelerating. Failure to keep up makes a department or school an anachronism and the University has a responsibility to help the faculty remain current. In discussions with faculty during departmental meetings, I was told how difficult it was to find time together or individually to accomplish cur-

ricular planning and implementation. To assist in overcoming that difficulty the University will establish Teaching Initiative Awards for up to four units annually. The awards will range from \$10,000 to \$15,000. The awards are intended primarily for summer use, with the size of the stipends tied to the particular task each faculty member is performing and the amount of time required to carry it out. If the nature of a project may mean release time during the Fall or Winter semester as the most appropriate time, that can be considered. Guidelines for these awards are available to you after the Convocation. The Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center has taken the ideas and given them substance. For that I extend to the Director and all who assisted her my appreciation.

The gift of \$2,000,000 to the Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center may be one of the most significant gifts the University has received. It is directed to the core of our being, the improved teaching of students. The faculty response to the Center is encouraging. Yet, we as a University faculty would go beyond human nature if all who could find assistance in the Center had sought it. I ask all faculty to take your student evaluations seriously. Over a period of time I think you will find a valid assessment of what you do well and where some possible improvement can be made. The Center was a faculty initiative and demonstrated to me how serious faculty leaders take the teaching responsibility of the Faculty. I urge all those who teach, adjunct professors as well, to associate themselves in some way to the Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center. By doing so, you keep your eye on the University's primary target-excellent teaching of students. The grants made available to individual Faculty members as a result of the gift may help professors do that.

Though the establishment of the Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center is a help and a reminder to do better, it is a reflection of something else as well. It reveals the Faculty will for teaching excellence, and in many areas of the University that will has brought us a degree of recognition

as an institution of quality. We are marching in the right direction, and I commend the faculty for their emerging good reputation.

Recently, I met with faculty from more than one department who work in molecular biology, chemistry and genetics. They agreed for an hour to inform this administrator, limited in his knowledge of science but intrigued by what he had read, about their rapidly changing field. I was impressed again, as I have been whenever I visit with faculty, how many excellent active scholars we have. I saw again how significant research activities enhance a professor's teaching and her or his relationship with students. My faith in our faculty is high.

With changes and growth come distractions that tend to claim our attention and can, if we are not careful, keep us from our primary teaching goal. They are distractions, however, with which we must deal. All who have been on the west bank of the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids watching the creation of the DeVos Center know that our University will change when faculty, staff, and students begin to occupy it. Combined with the Eberhard Center and the new Secchia Hall apartments for students, our downtown buildings take on the appearance of a campus in its own right. As faculty and staff, we must strive to keep a single University in mind, loyalty, and structure.

What courses to offer downtown and what programs should have their primary office there may be easier issues than access and parking due to the two-year closure of the S-curve. To feel helpless in the path of a government juggernaut is the most helpless of feelings. The proposed S-curve solution may not be the best, but it is the one we are going to get. I am asking my Executive Assistant, Jean Enright, to form a committee, consulting with governance and others she believes appropriate, to cope with immediate and long-range non-academic issues engendered by the move into the DeVos Center. For the immediate future I see the Committee as a "trouble shooter" group, identifying problems and proposing solutions. I think most of us will take pride in this intriguingly designed building. It will add excitement to our University for a time, but the highway woes will add to the usual tensions that come with a major addition and shift. I hope there is enough good will and management skill to see us through the next two years.

As moving day approaches, the Provost and his staff will work toward the academic decisions and the logistical decisions that undergird them. This should be a great building for the students of Grand Valley and for those of us who serve them in it. We expect to begin moving the first of May and complete the process in August. Faculty gov-

ernance groups, departments, and schools should be in constant dialogue with the Provost and his designees as we examine ways to make the new building work in the best interests of the University. The work of the University, I believe, will require some departments, schools and individuals to have lives in both places. This will take some sorting out and experimentation. To those who ask, as was asked when the Eberhard Center was under construction, "What will the new building do to Allendale?", I can answer that it will add to the luster of the University and thus enhance life at Allendale, where many students will come and remain for their entire collegiate education at Grand Valley. In the meantime, for those who will move between campuses for their instruction, new and improved transportation is under consideration, a consideration that will involve student recommendations.

Another important distraction of my own making is consideration of academic and administrative reorganization of the University. The Provost's and my tenure in our present jobs is not long, but it will be long enough for a reorganization if there is a will for it. We come to you because we believe there are some inevitabilities that might better be managed while the faculty and staff are dealing with a president and provost they know well. There are three administrative moves that are in the works or should be considered. First, Joyce Hecht, the Director of Development, wants to reduce her load considerably. She and her staff have served this institution better than most realize. Joyce, with my assistance, has raised private funds. Matt McLogan, with my assistance, has worked with the Governor's office and the legislators for legislative appropriations, reaching such long sought-after objectives as floor funding. Matt McLogan has also worked on private fund-raising projects. Lansing, Washington, and our Public Broadcasting needs, as digital requirements descend upon us, will claim all of his time in the future. You might call the Development Office with Joyce and me as the personal askers a "Mom

and Pop Shop." Now is the time to move Development to a new organizational level. Board members are urging me to get moving, and I am.

We will interview next week the final three candidates for the position of Assistant to the President for Equity and Planning. I appreciate the work the Faculty-Administrative Committee did in selecting the finalists. I expect to make an offer by November 10 in the hope that the position will be filled by the first of the year. The new Assistant to the President will immediately begin work with Dr. June O'Neill, who has begun her consulting task for us on salary equity issues.

Unfortunately, this task has built in difficulties before she arrives. It appears from recent statements from the Chair of the Women's Commission that Dr. O'Neill—who I believe is eminently qualified for doing the equity work—in her opinion, is not the person to do the job. Since the task force I asked to recommend an outside consultant could not reach agreement, I searched for someone I thought knew the equity salary field and would not approach the subject with a biased point of view. Dr. O'Neill, I believe, meets those requirements. We should await her report with an open mind. Then the Faculty Task Force and the A/P Task Force appointed to receive her report can study it and make their recommendations to the Board of Control. I think all of us are agreed that we want our University to be fair in its salary policies. It appears that it may be difficult to agree on what fairness is. Though the door to controversy is open, maybe we will be pleasantly surprised by the degree of compromise and acceptance that emerges. At least we are dealing with a subject that should be addressed. Balzac in *The Commission in Lunacy* writes, "Equity is the outcome of facts." Let's see where the facts lead. Ultimately, our Board of Control will decide the path to equity that Grand Valley will follow. I know they will listen carefully.

There are other matters relating to diversity that I will ask her to study and make recommendations on. We need to set goals for the hiring of minorities in each of the schools and departments. By next Fall I want those goals established and

supported, and a plan for their implementation drawn up. While these immediate tasks are undertaken, I will ask the new Assistant to the President to become acquainted with the people on the campus as she prepares to assist the campus with the formation of a University-wide plan. Though there will be an administrative transition before all the objectives are met, it is time to begin planning. We have achieved many objectives and it is time for the University to chart the next course.

The more traditional University administration has a Vice President for Student Affairs who reports to the President. Here our chief student affairs officer reports to the Provost. We have reached a size where I believe the demands on the Provost's office suggest that we move to the traditional reporting structure.

Earlier this semester the Provost and I met with the Executive Committee of the Senate and a Committee in the Social Studies Division for the selection of a new Dean. With a vacancy in that position, we thought it was a good time to consider our academic reorganization. Is this the time to create a Liberal Arts College or School within our University? The best time to raise that question is when there is a vacancy in a Dean's position in a Division that will contribute to the organization of such a college or school. I also have been directly approached by representatives of the School of

Communications, from Music and Art, and from disciplines in the Health Sciences for consideration of the establishment of independent schools. The time seemed right to look at our academic organization, and the Provost and I are ready to work with the Faculty on the matter. From actions taken by the Executive Committee of the Senate, there is interest.

The Provost and the Chair of the Faculty Senate have appointed and will serve on a Task Force to set the parameters for academic reorganization, examine the proposals that come to them, and make recommendations to the Faculty Senate for reorganization.

For the past decade "construction" may be a word that describes our common life. We never seem to satisfy the appetite to enclose space. What we have done fits our mission, but there is always more space needed to fulfill the mission we have accepted for our University. In the past few years we have moved vigorously to make Allendale more completely a residential campus by adding more than five hundred beds a year. While adding to the numbers, we have paid more attention to academic themes in our housing plan: Language houses, Honors Program Living Centers, and now the Calder Residence for Art students. This year we paused in housing construction to see how well we had planned. After observing this Fall, we have concluded that we

should build again. Allendale should have at least 5,000 spaces. To date we have 3,168. Academic themes and students' advice will continue to influence the kind of housing we build.

But students need more than housing. The Student Senate has called to our attention the shortage of space for student activities and services usually provided in a Student Union. We have been working with them to finance and to plan for additional space to the Kirkhof Center. I hope we can begin construction in 2000. Those members of the faculty and staff who never or rarely enter or use the Fieldhouse should wander over for a viewing. If you are over forty, you may be surprised by the number of students engaged in wellness activities and recreational sports. I understand the number of centenarians increases steadily in our nation. What's happening in the wellness centers and the gyms of the country will add to the increase. As good as our facilities are, there is a need for more, and I believe we should add a recreational building to the list we are making for the next private fundraising drive.

For our students who are parents, we would like to add to our child care center. I think we have one of the finest facilities for children, but we do not provide infant care. We are making plans to add that service as soon as financing can be arranged. I am sure all members of our community who have infants or who anticipate having them in the future will welcome this development.

When we scrutinize the academic space at Allendale it becomes apparent that much of what we have is good, but there are still legitimate needs. The School of Communications, offering a curriculum sought after by many students, is one of the academic units with requests for space that cannot be ignored. There are others, and offices for faculty and staff are on the list.

There is no State money in the pipe line for Allendale academic buildings presently, but in the past our University has benefited when we plan ahead. We should plan for the time when there is an opportunity for a capital outlay bill to finance a building at Allendale. Our model is the Padnos,

Henry, Loutit, and Student Services Building. It is four buildings in one because the State usually allows only one building at a time. I see a large project in our future, and we should find the architect to design it now. We want to be ready.

Downtown is filled with excitement. What is evolving is a medical, health professions center that is usually a part of one university. Here it is comprised of Spectrum Health, St. Mary's, Michigan State, the Van Andel Institute, and our University. Recently we agreed to join the two hospitals and Michigan State, each surrendering some individual sovereignty, to offer one complete, coordinated curriculum and internship programs for the education of medical and all health professions students. The caregivers and educators in collaboration are closely allied to the Van Andel Institute providing the important research capacity. This will be a new model for a major health care, education, and research center unlike anything that exists. Our educational structure is called Grand Rapids Medical Education and Research Center for Health Professions. Each participating institution-Spectrum, St. Mary's, MSU and Grand Valley-must agree if another full partner is admitted to the corporation. With 20 percent of our new students indicating interest in a health profession, we are heading for a space problem in this academic area too. The health professions area is most likely to spawn new programs as this new medical education and research center begins to take Grand Rapids to new heights in the world of medicine and health. This will compound our space problems if we do not anticipate and plan now. We are in discussions with Spectrum Health about the purchase of their land at Michigan Avenue and Lafayette Street, and with the Capital Outlay Chairman about a bill to authorize planning for a building on the site. As these negotiations proceed we will keep the University informed. For construction projects underway or recently completed-including Secchia Hall apartments, the Calder Residence, the Keller Engineering Laboratories Building and the DeVos Center-we have raised 28 million private dollars and received

\$37,500,000 in State appropriations. That has been a time-consuming task. Yet there are other matters to consider besides our primary mission of teaching, research, major constructions projects and the programs related to them.

1) A few years ago we raised our standards for admission. At that time our freshman academic profile improved and we have maintained that higher level. Many excellent students come to us, but we want more. In my view there are several questions we must ask ourselves. How do the best students perceive our academic quality, and no matter what that perception, how can we improve it? Is our recruitment program for good students the best it can be? Are our scholarship offerings adequate to compete for the best students? Are our academic programs attractive and challenging enough to attract and keep the best students here and keep them growing intellectually? We have an Honors Program with what seems to me exciting courses. Should we expand that program? Should we have an honors college or school? Would that be attractive to more good students? Let's make a serious effort to answer these questions.

2) Our percentage of minority students has not changed much in the past several years. With our rapid growth as a University, that may not be unusual. Perceptions are important in this population as they are every-

where, and most minority students are first generation college students. The big name universities are aided by the media in claiming the consciousness of this group, and those universities are active recruiters of minorities. They have more money and more air and print time. Those are our disadvantages. Our advantages are a more human scale of life and a friendlier academic climate. Can we use those advantages to raise the percentage of minority students? I am asking the Dean of Student Affairs and the Dean for Multicultural Affairs to form a task force to analyze what we do right and what we do wrong in attracting minority students, and to suggest ways we can become more attractive to them.

3) For a long time schools and departments at our University have offered graduate programs. As I contemplate the future for this growing and dynamic west Michigan region, I see the demand for graduate education increasing. Employed people will want more education, and employers will seek educated, skilled people over a wide spectrum of vocations. Generally, our emphasis on undergraduate teaching-an emphasis that should always characterize our University-keeps our focus there. We must now pay more attention to our graduate programs without altering our undergraduate teaching mission. This should be a consideration in our master plan, but we should implement some changes sooner than a plan can be formulated. We must be more aggressive in our recruitment: that can begin immediately. We need the analysis of the area and its future graduate school requirements: that can be part of a plan. We need University-wide graduate education standards and development of funds for graduate professors' projects and research: that will require the appointment of a Dean for Graduate Education and consideration in our reorganization discussions. There are many universities who see the Grand Rapids area as a higher education prize, and they are going for it. I have been explaining for years that this part of west Michigan needs a fully developed indigenous university. No higher education brought in from a university

that has its center and ethos elsewhere can match that of a university whose center and ethos is here. We have a responsibility to the people here to provide them the graduate education that will sustain them professionally and intellectually. In areas such as law we will cooperate with other universities, as we are with Michigan State–Detroit College of Law, to bring an opportunity here. For financial and political reasons, joining with others is sometimes the only way. At least the home for this joint program in Grand Rapids is at the indigenous University.

4) I am not sure what label to place on this fourth point. I could call it “Keeping Up” or “Understanding our Responsibility.” Maybe this is the day to be a classicist. With the changes scientists face almost monthly I have sympathy for the amount of work they must do to keep up. At least the classicist’s body of basic sources is established, though discoveries and theories keep them from complacency. I mention classics because we are using classics to keep up. With a new major in the field we add to the richness of humanities at Grand Valley. We demonstrate as a University that the heritage of our civilization and the roots of our culture belong at this same place where we examine the implications of the new genetics and molecular biology. We keep up by being whole as well as current.

There is another aspect to keeping up. It relates to the way education is provided. There are choices that can be made. There is a place for the traditional liberal arts college where enrollment is limited and courses are offered between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., three or two times a week in 50 minute class periods from Monday to Friday. We expanded on that model long ago. We had to in order to keep faith with the people whom we serve and who support us. They expect their State University to try the best it can to offer them opportunities for higher education at times and in segments that are possible for them. We try. We know our responsibility.

With new technologies adding to the ways knowledge can be disseminated and discussed, where and when will teaching take place in the future? My daughter, who is an elementary teacher with a husband and two children, decided to take a Master’s Degree. The only time she has is on the weekends. With her computer and the commitment of a Saturday and a Sunday a couple of times a month, she can reach her objective. For her it was the only way. With courses on the Internet, will universities become degree brokers? Non-traditional times and non-traditional teaching methods are a part of the future and, I believe, part of the successful survival of a state University. As a community we must be alert to what we have to do to serve and compete. At times we must move quickly in the University’s best interest.

I don’t believe the traditional campus will become obsolete. I don’t think the old way of organizing teaching and courses will disappear. To compete and serve we have to provide a variety of delivery systems including the traditional. It is important for us to begin examining how we will accommodate the “brave new world.” This topic we can deal with in a planning process, but our new downtown facilities may require discussions and decisions on aspects of new ways to offer our programs during this year. The weekend college concept brought out some negative

response. Perhaps the idea came upon us too rapidly, but the accommodation to non-traditional students' life that a weekend college provides is something we as a faculty and academic administration should consider. Scheduling, compensation, and amount of time committed are all legitimate faculty concerns in the discussion of offering courses and programs on weekends. There is a precedent at Grand Valley. Professor Cross and others in the School of Education offered a program for school administrators. In our discussions we can draw on their experience.

As we look at the new ways to offer our curriculum to students, many at the University should be involved in the process. Our process for decision making on curriculum content and program establishment works well in my estimation. The same or a similar process can work for determining the variety of ways to deliver our curriculum.

Cicero wrote "Old age is by nature rather talkative." I have been talking at you for a rather long time, and it is time to formulate a concluding section to this address. "To be seventy years young is sometimes far more cheerful than to be forty years old," said Oliver Wendell Holmes. Though I am only approaching seventy with just less than two years to go to reach that venerable moment, I can attest to the cheerfulness of this stage of life. I am aware also that there is

talk about my retirement. For some that inevitable date will be a relief, for others its contemplation brings concern, and perhaps in some both feelings combine. I suggest you all hope that the change of leadership will be accompanied by new, exciting perceptions and ideas, and the vigor that usually sweeps in with a new leader. This University community has reason for hope when the inevitable happens for two reasons. First, the University Board of Control is comprised of highly capable people, people with wide experience in public life and some who have been involved in the selection of leaders. I know they will work effectively with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community representatives when it is time to choose a new leader. Second, all of you have participated in building a University of strength and good academic quality. In addition to being proud of yourselves for your accomplishment, you should realize that what you have done has the sustaining qualities that transcend presidential leadership. It cannot be undone for many years by anyone or any group who will come here or who is here now. As Franklin Roosevelt said, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." You deserve to be confident. Be confident.

By an overwhelming majority, you are people of good will and it is important to let that good will dominate when the guard changes. I can best illustrate what I mean by harking back to my selection as President of Grand Valley. Here was a new state institution whose first president had been a distinguished professor at the state's oldest internationally known major university. To succeed him the Board of Control voted in a president from a church-related college, Dutch Calvinist, without a Ph.D. I am not offended to think that the profile was unappealing to a segment of the faculty and staff. It is more important that the person has the qualities to lead than where those qualities matured. Bringing a determination to keep the good of the whole University foremost

in the selection process and a willingness to demonstrate initial good will to the one chosen will be in everyone's self interest.

There are universities where finding a good president may be impossible. These are universities where some vocal faculty leaders have institutionalized hostility and mistrust towards administrators, or universities where inept administration has brought the institution so low that the challenge of rebuilding relationships and systems is too daunting. In the former, I have observed that my colleagues want out after a few years. In the latter, they will not allow their names to be submitted for consideration. Grand Valley does not fit either category. If we maintain our collegiality, the presidency of our University will be attractive to several people capable of satisfying you and our clientele.

My rhetoric sounds as if it is leading to an announcement of a retirement date. That is not the case. Since my retirement is on the minds of some people, I thought this was a good time for me to talk about succession. There is so much to do this academic year that I don't want to deal with that blessed state just now. I will consider the matter next year and let you know my plans. I thought I was the oldest President in the United States until I met President Rudenstein from the University of Bridgeport, who after retiring from Florida State took on that troubled University. Now in his 76th year he has helped restore peace. When the time for me comes, I will try for a smooth transition and remain in office until a new President can occupy my warm chair.

The millenium year will bring many strong currents to our University. Matters of race, gender, change, and growth that capture the attention of our society are part of our University life as well. Like a current, they flow in and through us. In a presidential election year things are likely to flow more swiftly and powerfully. It takes calm temperament mixed with civility and respect to keep the University on course. As President and a personal colleague, I thank you for the part you will contribute to the improvement

of this place in a year that will bring so much change, and will see new initiatives taken and planned.

I like to read about Abraham Lincoln and I like to read his speeches. There is one passage in a speech of his that I think is appropriate at this time in the development of our University community. Lincoln said, "Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down, in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. We . . . even we here . . . hold the power and bear the responsibility." Allow me to paraphrase this eloquent passage for us. "Colleagues, we cannot escape our history. We of the University

and this faculty and administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The decisions which we are about to make will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. We . . . even we here . . . hold the power and bear the responsibility."

We have big tasks before us: move into the DeVos Center, move into the Keller Engineering Laboratories, implement the new core curriculum, look at reorganization, begin a master plan, make more faculty appointments than ever before, increase recruitment of minorities, academic super stars, and foreign students, bring a salary equity plan to fruition, decide what new programs to advance, and plan for new buildings. All this we will attempt to do as daily, students must be taught, research pursued, systems managed, snow plowed, children cared for, and our personal lives given the attention they need for happiness to prevail. I hope we can do it all and do it well. I am reminded of Keats' poetry, "Sweet hope, ethereal balm upon me shed, And wave thy silver pinions o'er my head." Keep looking up. You never know when you will see a silver pinion or get doused with ethereal balm. ~~END~~