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Address to the Campus Community, delivered on September 11, 2000

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Address to the Campus Community

September 11, 2000

Colleagues and friends, I have asked to address you to assess for you the state of our University, lay before you a program for this academic year, and discuss the future. The University enters the fall term with the excitement that accompanies the opening of new buildings. Buildings are symbolic as well as functional. The DeVos Center makes a major statement about our commitment to downtown Grand Rapids. Its architecture and interior design set a high standard of quality, and, I believe, alert the citizens of the state that Grand Valley is a University striving to be the best.

In October we will dedicate the Fred M. Keller Engineering Laboratories Building on the Pew Campus downtown. Grand Rapids is a manufacturing city and west Michigan a region where products are produced. This building raises the level of engineering education at the Padnos School, and shows the manufacturers that we are serious in our attempt to meet their needs.

The dedication of Secchia Hall apartments on August 29th officially opened our first student housing in the city. It marks the fifth consecutive year that the University has opened new housing for its students, averaging about 400 beds each year. Our intention is to have the best student housing in Michigan. Along with good academic programs and beautiful campuses we believe this is an important factor in attracting good students.

The Alumni House and Visitors Center is completed and functioning. The dedication will take place at a logical time for it, Homecoming on October 14. This building is an entry and

welcome point for the Allendale campus and a place where guests of the University, particularly alumni, may stay. It has attractive dining facilities and other amenities all of us can enjoy, but it also sends a signal to the alumni. It lets them know that they are more than former students; they are important in our lives because they gave us the opportunity to pursue such fulfilling careers. It also sends the message that we have matured as an institution. Much of our support in the founding and formative years came from non graduates or graduates from other colleges and universities who were interested in developing an indigenous university in this region of west Michigan. Grand Valley is now at a place in that development where the alumni as well as the supporting friends will be necessary to carry the University to new levels of achievement.

We begin this year in sound fiscal condition. If we live within our budgets there will be no unpleasant financial surprises. That does not mean all budgets contain the spending opportunities they should, and we will have to consider ways to improve those opportunities. Years ago, I could not imagine being disappointed with a 10% increase in the appropriation from the State. I am today. Dollars are more important than % of dollars. You can't buy anything with a percentage. The Legislature set a minimum floor of dollars per student, and then failed to provide it for us. This is a year when the money is available. This year the year they should have appropriated it. Our local legislators tried. Both Senate and House bills had it right. But in the final conference committee shuffle our legislators were not in a position to prevail. To find sympathy when you object to a 10% increase comes hard. But in the local area people who take the time to understand that Grand Valley's growth requires more state financial expenditure (especially in these economic times) are taking our side.

I believe the pressure to grow evolves from two factors. First, we are in an area of population increase. Ottawa County is one of the fastest growing counties in the State. It is not

so unusual then, that Grand Valley is the fastest growing University. Second, our curriculum across the University meets the needs of our growing clientele, and we are known for emphasis on good teaching. Our location in a population center and our quality as a University make us attractive, in our region and beyond. We cannot be accused of accepting every applicant for growth's sake. I believe we are one of the most selective of the colleges and Universities in Michigan, public and private. We are, after all, a public University with a mission to serve the people of Michigan. When citizens want to attend we should attempt to accommodate if they meet our standards of admission, which are already higher than most public Universities.

As we opened our academic year, Carol Schnieder, the President of the American Association of Colleges and Universities led the faculty discussions, an appropriate choice since the Association's agenda is the health of liberal learning in America and we move into our first full year with a new core curriculum. Her compliments for the work of our committee and the faculty reinforced my belief that we were on the right track. I think the faculty's work on this issue again demonstrates the importance of the liberal arts to the people who comprise this University. The establishment of a Classics Department is further evidence. As life moves on with its inevitable changes we keep faith with the liberal arts principle that characterized the founding of Grand Valley State College. As our professional programs continue to gain prestige, and the expertise of our excellent professionals is sought after our liberal arts core continues to be the foundation of our curriculum, and essential for what we believe is a truly educated person. Though there are tensions and "soft spots" within a University, and we are no exception, we are a healthy academic institution. We do well in providing our students who seek a good education in changing professions while at the same time securing for them knowledge that does not so readily change.

Last academic year we delved in depth on the matter of equity. That intense exercise brought some changes. As a result, our compensation for faculty was equitable, though I am the first to admit that perceptions on that subject vary. I personally committed myself to do the best I could to guide us to a statistically sound examination and then act on it. I feel satisfied that the University did as well as it could. This year we have the more difficult task because administrative salaries are less easily compared for the purpose of achieving equity, and we are still in the process of working out a fair comparison. True equity, like perfection, is a desirable state, and exists in the abstract because in reality it is perceived personally from nearly as many points of view in a given situation as there are individuals sharing that situation. Continuing changes of personnel in an institution make equity a moving target. That is why I recommended to the Board that we appoint a person to constantly monitor equity concerns, and see that it is always considered as the University community plans for the future. We are fortunate to have a person with Dr. Oldt's experience in that position.

Those of us who have been here a long time know the history of our search for good students. To attract some of the very best an honors program was established, and Dean Mary Seeger and Professor Johnnie Callahan have guided it successfully for several years. To enhance the experience for the special kind of student who succeeds in honors courses, I will recommend that an Honors College be established at Grand Valley. I anticipate that some day an Honors College will bear an individual's name such as James Madison's at Michigan State. The college should be characterized by close faculty, student academic relationships, and student living quarters and faculty and administrative offices should be in close proximity. We have a plan for one of our new living centers that will accommodate 250 students, five faculty offices, two classrooms, and an administrative office. Our Honors College must have some faculty appointed

to it, yet I anticipate the majority of credit hours for the students enrolled will be generated in the departments and schools and most of the faculty will come from them. It will remain easy for an honors student who finds a more compatible home in another department or school to move to it. I have asked Dean Seeger, Professor Callahan, and Provost Niemeyer to refine the plan.

Last year a faculty task force came forth with a plan for academic reorganization. That plan is presently a tabled plan. There is one academic area where I believe action is required this year. The advance of health and medical research in Grand Rapids, the growth of hospital programs, the need for clinical placements for students, our participation with St. Mary's, Spectrum, and Michigan State in determining health and medical programs for the region, and the need for us to find resources to initiate new programs, I believe, call for a change. I propose that we establish a College of Health Professions and include in it the Kirkhof School of Nursing, the School of Health Professions, and that we immediately examine the possibility for a School of Pharmacy. The Schools would maintain their independence, but as I envision it, the College would have a Vice Provost, who would oversee all planning and expansion in health professions programs, work with the Development office and the University Relations office for fundraising, and carry out coordination and negotiation with outside health institutions and organizations which cannot be done within the schools themselves. I will ask the Provost to offer a plan for implementation. All of us want our University to meet its responsibilities and succeed. The health programs, with capable leadership, have done just that. Now we enter a different time, requiring a different approach, and in our own interest and that of the community we must act decisively and with modest speed.

There is a special challenge in Holland. Those of you who teach and administer there know the demand for what we offer. You know we are limited only by the resources to put

sections on that campus. This a problem we must clarify for legislators who can help their constituents by helping us. They have been supportive of Grand Valley, and it is our obligation to describe in greater detail the specific opportunities in Holland itself.

One of the opportunities relates to a population that will find two-year programs and associate degrees helpful. If we could combine our curriculum with the Ottawa County Tech Institute there might be the combinations of courses to construct Associate Degree programs useful to employers and employees. Northern Michigan University and Ferris State University are the two senior State universities that offer Associate Degrees. So the precedent is set. Ottawa County is the largest population area without a community college. We could be of significant service to that population. This proposal carries with it complexities in planning, and, I know, will have skeptics within the University.

I believe if we take the right action for people we will be a successful University. Faculty quality has led to a demand for undergraduate education on the Allendale campus. Students want to come for the good teachers in the fields they want. We have done the right thing. We have initiated our graduate programs primarily for employed people and we have taken courses to where people are. We have done the right thing. Maybe it is the right thing to offer a two-year degree to a population in Holland that is particularly ready for it and in need of it. Vice Provost Fletcher is investigating the possibilities, and he and Provost Niemeyer will lead the discussion on this matter in the appropriate governance bodies.

An important academic initiative that I place before you this academic year is Grand Valley as a virtual University, Grand Valley on the Internet. This is part of the discussion about the ways we must offer our curriculum to be of most service to students in the future. There are some who have so completely endorsed the virtual University concept that they believe it will

predominate as a higher education delivery system. They are wrong. The campus will be the place where most come to take classes and study, but they are right about the virtual University as important to the future of higher education.

This year we, as a University, should consciously decide what steps over the next three or four years we should take toward using the virtual university as a part of our educational arsenal. There are several ways to serve our potential students, at the graduate and undergraduate level, that we have not used previously or used sparingly. Matters of compensation and property rights are part of the discussions as we consider those alternative ways. We owe it, I believe, to do what we can for a wide spectrum of people who need the curriculum we offer. We are the people's University.

There are populations in the large cities of our state, in many cases minority populations, often lower income, who's chance for a life of high fulfillment often depends on the education they receive beginning in the lower grades and continuing through high school. They need teachers who are dedicated to their cause. Their situation requires the kind of commitment we saw in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to Christian missions at home and abroad, and that we see in the Peace Corps in our time. Schools of education across the country and the Universities of which they are a part must design programs to educate a special corps of teachers to teach the children of these inner city citizens. Let's begin at home. Let's ask our School of Education, in cooperation with supporting departments, to design such a program, and send out a moral call to idealistic young African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Caucasians to heed it. We must do better than we are doing.

Under Pat Sandro's leadership our charter schools are doing well. We are efficient in our supervision and the resources we receive more than covers the cost of our responsibilities. We

give some of the money back to the schools, and we can use some of it to make a new track to education specifically for inner city teachers. We recruit minority students into a teacher education program. Let's make it more effective. I believe this is a moral imperative.

Just as the Classics initiative stimulated me last year the Philosophy Department's interest in adding Religious Studies to the curriculum stimulates me this year. West Michigan as we know is a region of intense religious advocacy. There are many expressions and differing practices. In such a climate there is always risk when religion is studied and analyzed, but where it is done well in state Universities, it is a service to the ever-unfolding culture of the state and its regions. I think the Department should pursue its interest this year, and let us know what they conclude.

Recently, good fortune came our way in the person of Richard Norton Smith, Director of the Ford Museum. He indicated his desire to leave federal employ and retain his position as Director of the Ford Foundation. He agreed also to become a Distinguished Professor of History at Grand Valley. He will lecture, organize symposia, write the biography of Nelson Rockefeller, and be a commentator on Presidential issues for national television. His background and record of accomplishment gives the University an opportunity to consider a Center for Presidential Studies. We should chart our course on this matter during the academic year.

All of the programs are for students. They are our *raison d'être*. This year as we look beyond the curriculum to the life of the students there is a large agenda, and I will comment on a few items on that agenda. First, we must see if the systems of transportation, newly put in place, work as they should. Is the parking adequate? Can it ever be? Second, we will set final plans and begin construction for an addition to the Kirkhof Center, solving, we hope, space problems for student activities and provide for our growing number of residence students a place to "hang

out.” Third, in Kirkhof a Women’s Center will be established as recommended by the Women’s Commission. Fourth, nearly 500 more beds in three new living centers will be completed for occupancy next fall, continuing our plan to make Allendale primarily a residence campus. Fifth, plans for more student housing will be discussed for the fall of 2002 with students and those responsible for student life. Sixth, plans to increase the recreation and physical conditioning facilities and finance them will be on the agenda. And, seventh, we will try to find financing to add infant care to our Child Care Center.

You have noticed construction once again at the Performing Arts Center. With addition of dance to the curriculum, studios are being built and our performing arts curriculum completed. Music faculty studios are part of the program as well.

In addition, a major plan is taking shape this year. With all the funds needed for a Health Professions building downtown nearly secured in anticipation of groundbreaking next summer, a realignment of space at Allendale will take place in 2003 when our health programs occupy the new building. A plan is necessary. For years we have needed facilities for the School of Communications. There is also a need for more faculty offices, more academic spaces, theatre space, and a large auditorium. All of these will be included in a master plan, a plan that should constitute the University’s next major capital outlay initiative in Lansing and among our friends and alumni—a plan that should be ready this year.

Earlier I discussed the concept of equity. I direct you now to the concept of destiny. One of the definitions of destiny is “the seemingly inevitable or necessary succession of events.” In other words our destiny can be what we make it, yet it implies inevitability. Something of a paradox, and as Rheinhold Niebuhr writes we come closest to the truth in the paradox. I like to think our destiny comes with our understanding of what we are meant to do, even though we

must choose to do it. There is a proverb that says, “Destiny leads the willing, but drags the unwilling.”

I may presume too much in sharing my view of Grand Valley’s destiny with you, but in a sense I have been sharing it with you for years. In my recommendations today my opinion emerges. I believe our University is called to be the best undergraduate teaching institution in the state system whose reputation will begin to spread beyond the state. I believe our University, because of its early sensitivities, will relate in better and special ways to its constituencies in teaching, research, graduate and undergraduate programs and consultation. It will be a model of its relationships with those outside the University. I believe our University is destined to order its internal relationships and its conflicts in ways that will allow most of the people who comprise it to be positive towards their work and towards most of their colleagues. I see Grand Valley as a model for how faculty, students, administrators and staff work together and relate to one another.

There are complexities as the University moves towards its destiny. Growth is one of those complexities. There will be a time when enrollment levels. In the meantime, so many are asked to stretch, to do more with less or with the same. I hear legitimate complaints, and I am grateful to so many who are willing to carry extra burdens. It’s not easy working towards destiny. At times moving towards it in one area impedes for awhile the advance towards it in another. The process is not neat. My own view is that we have reached or nearly reached the right number of students on the Allendale campus. Here is where we serve by having high-quality students in a residential campus, a place that is stable in numbers, sought after by many, and exciting in what it offers. The Pew and Meijer campuses have further development ahead of them as do our operations in Muskegon and Traverse City before a clearer vision for what they

are to become emerges. The future will reveal itself when the University has all the programs in place, for the right number of students. At that time Grand Valley will know as the University of Michigan and Michigan State know what their student numbers are going to be for the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, the University must work diligently and insistently with the Governor and Legislature to support us at the level a legitimate destiny requires. In planning for next year I, and my colleagues in academic planning and finance, will do our best to secure as many faculty positions as finances and prudence will allow. We will continue also to follow the plan in place to change visiting professorial positions to the tenure track. And we will seek to add more African Americans and Hispanics to our faculty. I believe our local legislators understand or are beginning to understand the destiny for Grand Valley. We must help them carry the cause to their colleagues. John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, "The tissue of the life to be we weave with colors all our own, and in the field of Destiny we reap as we have sown."

My final concept for your consideration is unity. From the Psalms I quote, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for people to dwell together in unity." Agreement in all matters is not required for unity, but commitment to making a common endeavor succeed is essential. The greatest negative distraction in Universities is the failure to unify for the good of the institution. The disunity is intellectualized, personalized, and magnified. Adversarial relationships abound and eventually undermine the academic quality of the teaching experience for students. Our University is fortunate. I believe there is considerably more unity than disunity, more willingness to cooperate and collaborate than to dissemble and destroy. Aesop got it right, "United we stand, divided we fall."

Nancy and I have stayed in the Presidency of Grand Valley for 31 years because you and your predecessors have treated one another and us with an accepting spirit. You have done your jobs with diligence and skill. Many of you have been here awhile, a few even longer than we have, revealing that you gave your hearts as well as your talents to Grand Valley as we did. Now our University faces the circumstances which come with a changing of the guard. An unusual circumstance is that three highly visible positions will have new people in them. Most of you will be here. Your talents and good feelings will carry the University through the transition. Good administrators will bridge the transition and help the new administrators. A good University and a good Board of Control will be attractive to those considered and considering leadership at Grand Valley.

When the University was undergoing the ten-year review by the North Central Association, two factors were evident in the examiners' evaluation. First, the academic quality and spirit of the place were high and second, the forthcoming administrative transition caused some anxiety. They recommended we enter a planning process so that the chart for the future begins to take form before the leadership changes. Dr. Oldt will be sharing with all groups within the University the planning process that will include all of them and that process will begin this academic year. I think North Central's representatives were wise in urging us to adopt this course.

Albert Einstein said, "I never think about the future. It comes soon enough." His statement applies to Nancy and me. We have been bouncing along at Grand Valley well past the normal retirement age for me. Now the future is here.

Nancy and I have decided to retire June 30, 2001. Friends have said in the past few years, "Why don't you retire and do what you have always wanted to do?" I have done what I

always have wanted to do for the past forty years. I am one of life's most fortunate. I am fortunate because during the last three decades Glenn Niemeyer and Ron VanSteeland and I have worked together as an administrative team—unprecedented in its duration, mutual trust, and respect. I am fortunate because Nancy was ready to make my career her career, the only way I could successfully function in this position. I am fortunate because every Board member over 32 years has supported me. I am fortunate because faculty, staff, and students have made Grand Valley into a good University.

I am not looking forward to retirement with eagerness, but I do anticipate enthusiastically working with you this academic year on the projects I have suggested to you in my address. Our retirement decision is based solely on age. I don't know when I will "run out of steam," but I will be 70 three weeks after we leave the Presidency. That's as good an age as any to admit your mortality. With the steam that is left in me I will always be ready to use it for Grand Valley. This is not a farewell. That will come later. Together let's take on the challenges this academic year lays upon us.