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Farewell Address to the Campus Community, delivered at the Cook-DeWitt Center on April 17, 2001

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I have not counted the number of times I have addressed the college and now the university community since I arrived on January 15, 1969. There was a first time that I don’t remember. This is the last and I will remember. On the Sunday after announcing that I would retire on June 30th, 2001, worshipping in church, I was feeling sentimental, and to close the service we sang an equally sentimental hymn. It is a highly dramatic hymn; one might think schmaltz well describes it. My mood at the time contributed to personalizing one of the verses, relating it to our University and the meaning of a long career. The hymn is entitled, “Hail the Glorious Golden City” and here is the verse: “Hail the Glorious Golden City and the work that we have builded, oft with bleeding hands and tears, oft in error, oft in anguish, will not perish with our years; it will live and shine transfigured in the final reign of right: it will pass into the splendors of the City of the Light.”

A dash of 19th Century optimism finds a home within my heart. I substitute Grand Valley for Glorious Golden City at the beginning and for City of the Light at the end. In that edited verse you have my idealized version of what we, together, have been doing and our hopes for our efforts. This is not my time to lay before you an agenda. You have tabled most of my recent recommendations anyway. This is my time to thank you for being special colleagues in a special enterprise. As I do so I will share with you the characteristics of a successful university building – a city of the light. There are four of them, ownership, power, commitment, and sense of mission.
important to those whom they represent. They become owners for the people. A synergy for progress evolves when the representatives of the people work professionally to assist the university and the faculty and staff at the university work professionally to further the objectives of the society.

Our University is particularly fortunate because so many citizens in our region appreciate what Grand Valley can do to enhance the quality of life around us. They have been persuaded to help us achieve goals, goals that we share, and goals that were unachievable without their resources and active good will. They have bought into our mission. They are owners.

In the future, it is in the University’s interest to extend the circle of owners. We will always be the region’s University. We will always be a Michigan state university, and we should find more throughout the state who take ownership. We can be a national university. Without neglecting our home and state base, I think the national challenge will make for interesting careers in Grand Valley’s future.

The faculty and staff should feel that they belong, and in their belonging, have an ownership stake. In academia there is often a tension between loyalty to a field and loyalty to the institution. Loyalty to a field untempered by loyalty to the institution is likely to lead to more divisions, less interest in students, and acrimony. A university whose ethos encourages a feeling of ownership for the institution itself is likely to have professors and staff with long careers devoted to it, giving it the stability and personal investment that accompanies long careers. Of course, important contributions are made by those who, for the right reasons, move from the university. But it is best if the history of a university reveals tenure of many years, by many people of high quality and good will, by people whose commitment of time shows that they feel they own a piece of the place.
ruthless in the way it is expressed. It can be thoughtless in its exercise or wise. It can lead to right decisions or wrong ones. When it coalesces it is more likely to bring progress. When it is jealously guarded it becomes more difficult to make progress. When people trust its exercise the climate for right decisions improves. When there is lack of trust, there is likely to be stalemate. The acceptance of the power centers within the university, the acceptance of the appropriate use of power by individuals entitled to use it, the acceptance of the wisest judgments put forth in dealing with university issues, the respect for academic traditions when applied to the good of the whole rather than the protection of the destructive, and the consideration and inclusion of alumni and friends in some decisions will lead to the university becoming the best it can be.

The constitutional responsibility within Michigan state universities is easily understood. The power of the people flows to the Governor who appoints Board members who are entrusted with that power. They are affirmed by the State Senate. When duly confirmed, they together appoint a President, responsible to them, to be the chief executive officer and visionary. She or he is ultimately responsible for the appointment of other officers and deans – though by academic tradition, that power is shared by groups affected by those appointments. Faculty governance, administrative committees, and student senates all exercise power. In some areas each group makes definitive judgments; in others their decisions influence the final decision. Consensus is sought and the attempt to reach it should be a priority for all. Though disagreement and confrontation over disagreement is inevitable, it is ardently to be avoided.

There are many reasons for our University’s success, for our ability to meet in a timely fashion the objectives our mission requires of us. The way that power is exercised and flows throughout the institution is different from most among Michigan’s state universities. From my point of view, the wisest decision made by a majority of faculty on several occasions was to
We move on to a third characteristic. Some of the characteristics I am discussing overlap. Commitment is similar to ownership and comes by conscious decision. Power exists and has the potential for inducing irrational behavior. In talking about commitment I begin with the conditions necessary for it. Each job at the University is important to some aspects of its operation; therefore, it deserves the respect of all jobholders. Some have heavier demands, all require their own talents, but no position is intrinsically better than another. Arrogance because one is better than another is unsustainable. Of course, there are functions that are closer to the heart of the university’s mission than others, but the failure of anyone in his or her job affects, in a large or small way, how the university operates just as success enhances it. With every job ascribed its dignity there can be a common understanding about employment leading to the possibility of commitment.

The common understanding is not enough. People work for people and with people. The interpersonal relationships are the climate of employment. If the climate is pleasant, people enjoy and like the university, and usually stay. If it is unpleasant “they’re outta here” as soon as they find another place. Attention to best practices in supervision and to appropriate behavior amongst colleagues is high on my list of university priorities. When we seek people to fill positions, we appropriately concern ourselves with their professional qualifications. I wish we could find their neurosis quotient as well.

Fairness is an ideal, an ideal that is elusive as we try to put it in practice. Though we are likely to agree on a definition of the concept, our disagreements come when it is applied to specific individuals and situations. Yet, if a person is to feel a commitment to the university, he or she must feel that fairness is a concern, and attempts are made to have more rather than less of it. With this understanding even a few personal negative feelings can be overcome on the path to
And they exist. I have described, however, what the commitment by so many of you has brought to our university in the past decade.

The first generation of Grand Valley faculty and staff are leaving the stage. We are all gone or going soon. We have given this place, I believe, a larger dose of commitment than most new state universities. That dose has helped make some special things happen here, and my hope is that you who carry this place forward keep the commitment quotient high. You need to do that to see that Grand Valley earns the place in higher education that is waiting for it.

When I arrived here 32 years ago last January, I found a faculty devoted to the liberal arts and a college with a core curriculum that reflected that devotion. As I leave, the University, now complex, now home for professional programs defined by their excellence, I leave with the liberal arts core changed but excellent and intact. During this long course there have been disagreements about the direction of the institution; there have been changes in that direction. Through it all, I have held to the belief formed in high school, in college, and at home that the open door to being an educated person is through the liberal arts curriculum. Holding to that principle is the foundation on which Grand Valley will build itself into a premier institution.

And what is the mission of this premier institution? The sense of mission is the final characteristic of a university that I will discuss and commend to you. You must know where you are going and how you propose to get there. Over the years, I have attempted to describe Grand Valley's mission. To me the definition was clear, but I don't think I adequately made my thoughts articulate, or if I did for some, persuaded others to endorse it. On this my last address to you as President, I need to say once again where I was trying to lead. This is my coda, my repetition of a theme.
For Grand Valley there is a need to reorganize in the health area if the university is to reach its full potential. Other academic and administrative areas are worth examination too. Are they all organized for progress? This is threatening activity for it may lead to changes but if the need for change is the way to improvement, do you have the courage to make it?

I see so clearly that an Associate Degree in Holland is the best way to fulfill an aspect of Grand Valley’s mission. I understand that it may have no professional effect for a person who opposes it. Yet, in the long and short run, it has educational and social ramifications. More than that, failure to move forward will bring political and economic consequences.

Inertia and views that are not influenced by Grand Valley’s intense sense of mission dribble away opportunities and even responsibilities. I have mentioned two that now sit on your table. I would take them off as soon as possible. That may be reason enough for some in the room to think, “Be gone and be gone quickly.”

As my Presidential days near their end, a work by C. S. Lewis comes to mind. Lewis, an eminent medieval and Renaissance literature scholar, better known for his second career as a writer of Christian literature wrote a book entitled, *Surprised by Joy*. He states that, “It is not settled happiness but momentary joy that glorifies the past.” Settled happiness ranks high with me in my personal life, but as I reflect on my career it is those moments of joy that come when a goal is achieved or an obstacle overcome that gave me the satisfaction, energy and emotional reinforcement to move on to the next objectives with faith and positive thought. Though one hopes to reach objectives and circumvent obstacles, when success comes there is an element of surprise that accompanies the joy. I don’t know why. I do know that gratitude is the feeling that overwhelms both Nancy and me now, and we ask the question that has an imperative quality as well as interrogative, “Why have we been chosen for this task, for so many years, to influence
have been asked about my future association with you and there will be one. When I am asked I think about the early days when we traveled to the University of Sarajevo to establish an exchange relationship. Over several trips we were entertained often by university or government officials. On each of these occasions there would be in attendance an old, retired, partisan hero, noted for some significant act during the Second World War. He was a true warhorse. This hero, until his retirement, had usually held a professorship or a high government position. He was given differential treatment, and usually gave a toast at the appropriate time. The food and drink were plentiful and always of good quality. I thought I might enjoy serving that function at Grand Valley events, and I may volunteer.

As I wind down, I turn to the poets for expression. From Byron, “Fare three well and if forever, still forever fare thee well.” From Milton, “Farewell happy fields where joy forever dwells.” Well that may be going a bit too far, joy doesn’t forever dwell very many places. From Shakespeare, “Fare thee well; The elements be kind to thee and make thy spirits all of comfort.” Again Shakespeare, “Sweets to the sweet: farewell.” and again “Farewell and standfast.” Finally, to Byron again. I like English romantic poets, and that is enough to send me on my way. I understand English romantic poets are out, but on to Byron, “Farewell! a word that must be and have been – a sound which makes us linger; -- yet farewell.”

Upon his retirement from the Army after being recalled from Japan and Korea, General Douglas MacArthur was invited to address the Congress of the United States. In closing he turned to military lore for a quote. He said, “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.” I think that is true for my profession as well. “Old Presidents never die, they just fade away.”