

1-1-1996

## Notes from an Interview with the Editor

Arend D. Lubbers  
*Grand Valley State University*

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Lubbers, Arend D. (1996) "Notes from an Interview with the Editor," *Grand Valley Review*: Vol. 15: Iss. 1, Article 6.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol15/iss1/6>

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](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

# Notes from an Interview with the Editor

*Arend D. Lubbers*

The most important functions of the president are clear direction and strong leadership. Of course, there are always external matters, in addition to funding, that affect the campus climate, but what the president does also affects it. Although external events have a hand in what happens to us, we can also shape our realities. I believe firmly that intangibles, like attitudes, profoundly affect the tangibles. A president must set the tone and build the ethos that affects attitudes. He must please the faculty and get them to cooperate; please the board of control, who must approve of what he does; please the citizens and get them to accept the concepts that he and the board are proposing.

I have been asked if fundraising is the most important job of a president. Of course, paying attention to finances and bringing in resources are essential; a president who didn't wouldn't last long in the job. It was particularly important in 1968, when Grand Valley wasn't growing as it was expected to and again in the late 70s and early 80s because of the economic crisis in the state. During good economic times, a university President should use the opportunity to add necessary facilities and strengthen the finances of the institution. Fundraising remains a recurring matter that has to be addressed, but it is not the main duty of a president.

Unlike presidents who are "field" oriented, I consider myself to be "institution" oriented. I was happy to come to Grand Valley because, having grown up in Ottawa County, I knew and loved the area. And although there have been opportunities for me to leave, to "move up," I have been happy to stay. As I look back on my twenty-seven years as president, despite some obstacles and tribulations in the past, I still get satisfaction from having contributed to Grand Valley, to have invested myself, given myself over to this institution.

I have seen Grand Valley grow from a fledgling college that needed to establish itself to a university of good academic quality and reputation. Grand Valley has been successful because it has always had good people, committed people, people willing to cooperate and unite for the good of the institution. And because we are situated in a dynamic, growing area, we have not had to spend most of our time on cutbacks and efficiencies, but have been able to plan exciting initiatives. Unlike some other presidents, I do not have to justify the existence of this institution to its funders or listen to complaints about its effectiveness. Although I am aware of the problems of universities in other states, I am too deeply involved in and too much enjoy Grand Valley to pay a great deal of attention.

The average tenure for university presidents is five years. Some last six or ten years, and then, exhausted, change their professions, often going into business. Some are "field" or "profession" involved or oriented and are eager to move on and up, to improve their statuses at larger or more prestigious universities. Some

institutions don't pay enough attention to getting a president who will fit, or they look for such credentials as a national reputation in scholarship rather than for someone who knows and loves the institution and the area and who can be diplomatic with the constituents. And some universities are hard to direct. For instance, a president may come in where there has not been recent strong leadership and may find already established and conflicting pockets of power, which are not concerned with the welfare of the university as a whole. Getting them to cooperate may be overwhelming.

Because I feel comfortable with round numbers, I used to encourage the Admissions Office to plan for 1,998 new freshmen in 1998. But this year we've already surpassed that number with 2,100 new freshmen, even though our admission standards are higher than ever. Yet I still feel comfortable with round numbers, so I plan to stay at Grand Valley until 1999, when I will have been here for thirty years. There is still a lot that I want to do, and I plan to keep going full blast. We need new and more facilities—more housing, a bigger auditorium, a communications building, and an addition to the library. We have to keep the Allendale campus as a strong and special university for undergraduates. We need to develop programs for the growing populations in Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland, to provide our citizens with what they need for personal and professional education. We need to add to graduate programs where the demand will be. I like to consider these issues not as problems to overcome, but as opportunities to take advantage of.

Ironically, even though Michigan's governor and state legislature have recently been financially conservative, and Massachusetts has been considered one of the more politically liberal states, the climate for fundraising for public higher education has been much more favorable in Michigan than it is in Massachusetts. Massachusetts has long taken pride in its many prestigious private institutions—Harvard, Tufts, MIT, Boston University, and so on—whereas Michigan considers its public universities to be one of its greatest assets. Moreover, the state government has recently decided to give greater recognition and support to schools other than its large research institutions, by equating funding with enrollment, so that as Grand Valley grows, so too will its funding.

Our most critical challenge will be in hiring good faculty over the next few years, people who are good teachers and more, people who are willing to participate in the Grand Valley community, outside the classroom as well as in it.

When I retire, there will still be a lot on the planning board, and new people will have to decide what to do with it and where to go.