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## Eclectic Polytechnic

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# ECLECTIC POLYTECHNIC

*Edward Cole*

Have you noticed them lately? You see them standing around in little knots and groups on the sidewalks, at the building doors, in the parking lots. They are the old profs with the well-worn briefcases and the ready smiles for the passing students. And what could they be talking about so earnestly, every time they meet?

Students probably can not imagine what these old coots and cootesses could talk about. These antiques knew of music before there even was a rock n'roll. Younger profs doubtless imagine that these "back numbers" are discussing their own obsolescence and the brilliance of the new hires. Administrators, of course, are hoping that the geezers are planning early retirements. Administrators by definition want to be rid of mature professors who formulate ideas of their own, have tenure and, worst of all, are relatively expensive.

None of the above are the subjects of the earnest conversations among our senior faculty. These are people who have been here for decades: some even for more than a quarter of a century. Unlike the more recent arrivals, these people came here not to make careers, but to build a university. They can remember when this place was just a few buildings scattered across the cornfields. Now they look around the marble halls, the arches that frame the bell tower, and the fountains flowing in the courtyards. But something is going wrong, and the old profs sense it.

What is going wrong is the direction Grand Valley has taken in the new age of pyramid-building. This place was originally chartered with the intention of becoming the finest undergraduate liberal arts institution in Michigan. These old profs came here back in the days when people knew the difference between education and training. They remember when Grand Valley courses did not seek to indoctrinate, but to furnish the minds of the young for independent thought. The old profs came here to help students become interesting people, not politically-correct robots.

Now, of course, things are different. Nothing illustrates that so well as the sad state of the humanities. Once, along with science and mathematics, they were at the heart of the enterprise out here. Now they have been relegated to half of a division. Take away their general education requirements and they would fold for lack of enrollment. Any course of study in the humanities which depends on intellectual interest is currently threatened by the budget needs of popular training programs, such as film and video. And similar scandals are not unknown even in the lavish palaces of the sciences.

So what concerns the old profs? What do they talk about? Well, of course, "they don't get no respect." At this year's convocation a bunch of them went up on stage to get their well-deserved medals and were subjected to a kind of roast, a gentle mockery which made others in the audience wonder if they would show up for convocation when their turn comes. But that's not what bothers these veterans.

They've got pretty thick hides by now. No, what concerns them is that Grand Valley is a university in name only. It is giving its students only the illusion of an education.

So what should we call such a place? One of the ancients suggested that we are becoming a polytechnic, which the crusty old Oxford dictionary defines as "an institution of higher learning offering courses in many (esp. vocational) subjects at degree level or below." Another looked around at the discordant jumble of campus architecture and said: "I've got it! This place is Eclectic Polytechnic!"

Amusing, but sad, when you consider the original mission. But interestingly enough, the old pros are not entirely discouraged. They see the passing students, bright and full of youthful energy. Every quarter century or so, American young people discover that there's more to life than a big line of credit-card debt. Then they come looking for real knowledge, and wisdom, and . . . old professors.

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