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COMMUNITY PRAGMATISM VS. ACADEMIC FOUNDATIONALISM: THE BEGINNINGS OF GVSU

Anthony Travis

The first ten years of Grand Valley State College, as it was then known, were dominated by two philosophical paradigms that competed to test which would form the academic culture of the new institution. The first of these I have termed "community pragmatism" and the other "academic foundationalism." During the first ten years of Grand Valley State College these two educational philosophies were in a creative tension. As the second decade of the institution dawned, however, academic foundationalism was clearly being eclipsed by community pragmatism and a newly emerging academic progressivism.

The Community-Pragmatic Philosophy

In the late 1950s, L. William Seidman, a partner in a large accounting firm named after his father, with offices in Grand Rapids, organized a community-based effort to establish a much-needed college in the Grand Rapids area. James Zumberge, the first president of the college, recognized L. William Seidman in 1964 as "the man who rightfully deserves the title of Father of Grand Valley State College. . . . Without his dedicated effort and unrelenting drive, [it] would not exist today."

In 1958, a comprehensive study commissioned by the Michigan legislature bolstered Seidman's case for a regional college. The study, informally named the "Russell Report," after its chief author John Dale Russell, anticipated significant growth in demand for higher education among the post-war baby-boom generations. The report noted that the first of these would come of college age in the mid-1960s. It also predicted that a high proportion of them would desire to attend college because of the growing realization that social and political mobility would increasingly depend on a college education. In addition, the American economy was developing to the point where companies needed more people with a college education than ever before, and there would be new white-collar job opportunities.

In light of these circumstances, the Russell Report recommended that the higher education system in Michigan expand by building new four-year regional colleges instead of adding new capacity to existing campuses. Further, it argued that regional colleges could provide undergraduate education at a lower cost than existing institutions, such as the University of Michigan, because they would not be burdened by the high costs of graduate education or academic research. Additional money could be saved by not building dormitories at these regional colleges because local

lower-income students would be able to attend college by saving room and board costs and by working part time in the nearby cities.

To the delight of Seidman and the other civic supporters of a regional college, the Russell Report identified Grand Rapids as the area of greatest need for an institution of higher education and recommended that the state build its first regional college there.

In response, in 1959 Seidman formed the Committee to Establish a Four Year College (CEFYC). The committee set about convincing two key audiences of the need for a regional college in Grand Rapids: the local citizens, and the state governor and legislature. On the local front, the CEFYC obtained a grant from the Grand Rapids Foundation to fund a more detailed study of the educational needs of the area. John X. Jamrich, a professor at Michigan State University, was commissioned to conduct the research for the study. The Jamrich Report found that "by 1965 there may be 6,000 young people in the eight-county area seeking a higher education, for whom there will not be a facility available." Seidman and the CEFYC effectively used both the Jamrich Study and the Russell Report in public presentations to convince the citizens of Grand Rapids of the need for a regional college.

On the second front, Seidman and the CEFYC worked to convince the governor and the legislature to establish the first regional college in the Grand Rapids area. Such action, they argued, was necessary to insure the economic future of Michigan. Seidman's first success in the political arena came when he and other civic leaders persuaded the local Republican legislative delegation to sponsor an enabling bill in the House to establish the college.

The House Republican leadership, however, was another story. Committed to cutting expenses and balancing the state budget, they questioned the very premise that it was necessary to expand the capacity of the higher education system. They tended to view the bill as unnecessary "pork" for the "[Republican] boys" in Western Michigan. It took Democratic legislators from Detroit to tip the balance in favor of the enabling act. The Democrats supported the bill for ideological and political reasons. They were sympathetic to the idea of enabling middle-income families to send their daughters and sons to a low-cost regional college, and many were persuaded by the early and powerful support of the bill by the United Automobile Workers Union and by the Democratic Governor John Swainson. Equally important in obtaining Democratic support from the eastern part of the state was Seidman's very effective lobbying effort. As a recognized civic leader with a reputation for integrity, he was able to frame the issue as a matter of good public policy rather than as a partisan or regional advantage.

In the end, both houses of the legislature passed the bill by large margins, and the governor signed it into law, with a smiling William Seidman standing beside him. It had passed with overwhelming support. However, a critical compromise had been worked out between the Republican leadership and the bill supporters. In order to test the depth of community support and to put off to the future any large

appropriations for the new regional college, the compromise measure required the community to raise one million dollars from private sources. Only then could Seidman achieve his dream and receive a charter for a new, state-supported college.

Seidman now set about meeting the new challenge. He organized a fund-raising committee, representing the business and financial elite of Grand Rapids. The leaders of the fund drive included such men as Richard M. Gillett and Edward J. Frey, heads of the two largest banks in Grand Rapids. It was civic leaders like these who signaled community approval of financial support for the institution. In response, contributors representing a wide spectrum of the community contributed to the campaign, with more than 5,000 donors giving between \$1 and \$200. Organizations such as the United Automobile Workers Union and the Affiliates of the Michigan Education Association, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Grand Rapids), and the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce gave substantial amounts to the drive. Foundations such as the Grand Rapids Foundation, a local philanthropy organization dedicated to funding worthy community projects, also participated. The response was so enthusiastic that in little over a year Seidman and the CEFYC had raised the required one million dollars. In 1960, the legislature fulfilled its commitment by authorizing and funding the college. In return for funding the new college, community members and state legislators expected Grand Valley State College to educate, at the lowest cost possible, highly trained workers for the local economy.

From these events, one can see the outlines of the community-pragmatic philosophy that was one of the two paradigms that shaped the early history of Grand Valley State College. This story of community support in the founding of the University is still evoked to demonstrate the historic lineage of community and state interest in and expectations for Grand Valley State University. The financial involvement of Grand Rapids citizens, for example, is used by President Lubbers and other University leaders on various ritual occasions to remind potential donors of the historic legitimacy of giving money to the university. One of the most recent examples was the University's dedication of the Cook Carillon Tower, named after businessman and philanthropist Peter Cook, who donated the necessary funds for its construction. At the state level, President Lubbers has recently reminded the legislature in the funding process that the University has been true to its charter promises of keeping tuition lower than that of most of the other universities in the state.

Academic-Foundationalist Philosophy

The second of the two polar stars that has guided the development of the university over the years is the academic-foundationalist philosophy. Based on their philosophy of education, the founding academic fathers decreed that the institution would be modeled after private, selective, undergraduate liberal arts colleges. There would be no technical, vocational, professional or graduate education.

This group of founders included not only William Seidman, the chair of the Board of Control, but also James Zumberge, the first president of the college; George Potter the first academic dean; and W. Harry Jellema, the first faculty member. This group was joined by a number of consultants from other Michigan public universities to meet at Hidden Valley Ski Club, located just north of Grand Rapids, on June 22 and 23, 1962, to chart the academic future of the college. The principal members of this group shared an academic philosophy which rejected most of the historical developments in public higher education since the late nineteenth Century, harking, instead, back to earlier American and British models.

Until the early twentieth Century, small private liberal arts colleges, such as Kalamazoo, Calvin, and Hope, had been the model for higher education in Michigan as well as the in the rest of the United States. Such institutions emphasized classical studies, which included ancient history and literature, and moral philosophy. Because curriculum choice was limited at these colleges, most students took similar courses throughout their four years. As a result, graduates all completed similar educational curricula.

In late nineteenth century America, however, higher education began to undergo a dramatic transformation. Most importantly, the German University model began to challenge the dominance of the liberal arts college. The American version of this German model stressed graduate, professional education, and scientific research. University faculties were intensely interested in graduate programs and in research, delegating the teaching of undergraduates to new, untenured faculty members or graduate assistants working on their advanced degrees. In such institutions, the curriculum was divided into distinct disciplines housed in their own departments. Although undergraduates were required to major in one of these newly emerging fields of study, they were given a broad choice of electives to complete their program. Beyond requirements for individual majors, little thought was given to the question of what all college graduates ought to know.

After World War II, the large public and private universities dedicated to graduate teaching and research began to dominate the higher education system in both student numbers and prestige. Many policy makers saw them as vital to the future of the country, and the United States government decided to continue to expand its war-time research collaboration with America's universities. The Cold War, the space program, the managed economy, and the health care system all required expensive research. The federal government thus spent large sums of money on campus-based graduate programs and research projects. In response, these universities emphasized research and graduate studies over the less prestigious and less funded function of teaching undergraduates.

The leading universities were invested with so much prestige and federal funding that most undergraduate teachers colleges desired to emulate them by transforming themselves into regional universities. They too lusted after federal research funds and the prestige of graduate programs. As a result, in the late 1950s and 1960s there emerged many new, regional universities which de-emphasized undergraduate

education. Other single-purpose colleges, such as Michigan State College (agriculture), transformed themselves into large multi-purpose universities.

In opposition to these trends in higher education, the academic founders of Grand Valley State College committed themselves to reinvigorating undergraduate education and restoring the nineteenth century ideal liberal arts curriculum. They especially wished to avoid becoming a regional university. In their eyes, such institutions shortchanged undergraduate education for second-rate research and inferior graduate study. Furthermore, they wanted to avoid even the appearance of being a teachers college. They felt that such a school would be dominated by its school of education and, as a consequence, would maintain a narrow professional focus. Grand Valley State College would focus all of its efforts on undergraduate liberal arts education.

At the Hidden Valley Ski Club meeting, Executive Assistant to the President, George Potter, presented to the group a first-year core curriculum that was based on his experiences at British and Canadian Universities, one which would focus on classical studies. Potter's plan was modified by Harry Jellema, a well respected philosophy professor at Calvin College, to include moral philosophy. President Zumberge was in general agreement with Potter and Jellema on these issues, and William Seidman, now chair of the Board of Control, also expressed his fervent support for a strong liberal arts curriculum, but he argued that eventually the institution should also offer some professional programs, including education and business. Seidman did not, however, press the issue. For him it could be put off for future discussion, since the group was at the the time working only on the first year curriculum.

The group reached consensus on a foundation program of nine core liberal arts courses required of all freshman students, three five-credit courses to be taken in each of the three quarters of the freshman year: The Art of Self Expression, The History of Greece and Rome, Introduction to Moral Philosophy, Problems of Modern American Society, Introduction to College Mathematics, The Foundations of Life (Natural Science 1), Frontiers of Science (Natural Science 2); and two courses in French, German, or Russian (the third to be completed in the second year). Students were also required to participate in a program of physical education, unless excused for medical reasons. The designers of this core curriculum saw it as the centerpiece of a revived traditional liberal arts undergraduate college based on their foundationalist philosophy.

Having agreed on the intellectual philosophy that was to undergird the institution and having laid out the subject matter for the core curriculum, the founders left the development of the actual content of the courses to the faculty who were yet to be hired. Yet they were determined to hire a faculty that agreed with their academic philosophy. Zumberge, Potter, Jellema, and Seidman now turned their attention to more pragmatic matters.

The Conflict between the Academic Foundationalists and the Community Pragmatists

The academic idealists faced a series of challenges from those espousing the community-pragmatist vision. This conflict set the stage for future decades of growth, innovation, and transformation.

President Zumberge and Dean Potter recognized from the outset that their commitment to a nineteenth century liberal arts college model clashed with the state legislature's requirement that costs per student at Grand Valley State College be kept much lower than those of the state's major public institutions, such as the University of Michigan and Michigan State University, not to mention premier private liberal arts colleges. After all, an essential characteristic of private, ideal, liberal arts colleges, such as Hope, Calvin, and Kalamazoo, was small classes to enable a great deal of student-professor contact. Accordingly, the idealistic administrators and faculty felt strongly that the tutorial method of instruction, with one faculty member engaged in discussions with five students or fewer, should become the hallmark of the institution. Yet the widespread introduction of such intense faculty-student contact inevitably would drive up the costs in excess of what the state government thought tolerable.

William Seidman, enthusiastically supported by Zumberge and Potter, proposed a bold solution: an experiment in advanced instructional technology. In order to achieve the necessary cost savings for the tutorials in the face of increasing numbers of students, they introduced an elaborate audio-visual system which would enable professors to tape their lectures, thus making them available on demand to students seated in individual, audio-visual equipped study carrels. A student needed only to dial a code number to receive a previously tape-recorded instructional program. In all, there would be 120 tape units that could deliver 120 different lectures. William Seidman was instrumental in winning a major grant to pilot this concept. The designers of this instructional system hoped that, ultimately, professors would be spared some of the required classroom lecture time and thus would have additional time to work with students on a personal level in tutorials.

The academic foundationalists were challenged by community pragmatists on a second front: the state held the college to the Jamrich Report's growth projection of 10,000 students by 1971. This figure dated back to the period when Seidman's committee, citing the Jamrich Report, successfully convinced the legislature that there was a need for a new college in the Grand Rapids area. Although the administration and most of the faculty understood that they needed to achieve this goal, they also knew that such numbers would undermine their plans for a small liberal arts college.

To solve this problem, Dean George Potter proposed that for every 500 students admitted to the college (later increased to 1,500 students), a new academic complex would be created, with its own facilities and faculty. Some functions, however, would remain centralized; for example, the science, physical education, and library buildings would serve the entire campus. Thus, as the college grew, it would

decentralize, and, with the exceptions noted above, each academic society would remain small and autonomous. Potter's plan was modeled after Oxford University, itself a collection of relatively autonomous liberal arts colleges.

Theoretically, this plan would preserve the integrity of Grand Valley State College as a premier, public, liberal arts college as enrollments grew. But no one was prepared for what followed. In September of 1963 the first freshman class arrived on campus. As James Zumberge wrote, "we were not deluged with applications...[in fact they] came in at an agonizingly slow rate." Zumberge believed that this small number of applications was not indicative of student rejection of the philosophy of the college; rather, he asserted that low enrollments were due to practical considerations. On the one hand, "local students with adequate resources would most likely attend a residential college away from home"; on the other hand, "most students who could not afford to go away to school were inclined to select an institution of established reputation in the area before taking a chance on a new non-accredited college whose physical plant was still on paper when they applied for admission." Grand Rapids Junior College, for example, was one of the oldest in the nation, with a strong academic reputation.

As it turned out, the applications were so meager that, according to Zumberge, "we gambled on a good many borderline students who should not have been admitted, as their academic performance later indicated." Even so, that first year, only 226 students showed up for registration, out of the 400 students earlier projected by the administration. This projection had been sent to Lansing in support of the college's budget request for the next fiscal year. The legislature took unfavorable note of the discrepancy.

It soon became very evident that the college would not measure up to the growth curve projected by the Jamrich report of 1957. For example, in 1964 the college attracted only 334 new students (as compared with 226 in 1963). In 1965 the figure doubled to 659, but in 1966 new enrollment fell back to 551. In 1967 new students increased to 715. Yet the report had projected 2,500 students for the college in 1965. The student body was, in fact, about half that figure.

The Jamrich Report had not taken into consideration that the existing community colleges and universities would massively expand their enrollments or that new community colleges would be established. Higher education in Michigan had become a buyers' market by the early 1960s, and the buyers were not buying Grand Valley State's brand of education.

The challenge to the idealistic model became direct. The state legislature interpreted the slow growth of the college as a failure to meet the expectations of regional students who wanted preparation in professional occupations, not exclusively in the liberal arts. Other state universities that had instituted professional programs were experiencing swelling enrollments. The legislature further noted that the lack of an adequate number of students at Grand Valley State College drove up the cost per student to a level that was slightly below that of the University of

Michigan. For the state legislature, this negated the purpose of regional colleges: low-cost undergraduate education.

Thus a dilemma was created that could not be resolved. How was an institution with programs and expectations modeled after liberal arts colleges, which selected academically talented, upper-middle-class students seeking self-knowledge and fulfillment, to appeal to largely working-class and rural applicants who were only marginally interested in the liberal arts and were being admitted on a relatively non-selective basis?

As early as November 1963, only a month after the first freshman class arrived on campus, D. J. Guzzetta, the North Central Association (NCA) consultant for the college's accreditation effort, had issued a warning in this regard. In his second report to the Grand Valley State College administration he wrote:

The interesting point to mention with regard to the college's program is that, as a state-supported institution, it cannot be too selective, yet it is offering a liberal arts program designed to require more individual student initiative than is normally demanded by many "prestige-selective" institutions. Should the College achieve the success it is counting on under the above conditions, a major break-through in American public higher education will have been made. . . .

. . . . The real challenge to the college lies in the ability of its staff, the nature of its curriculum and the teaching techniques applied to motivate a comparatively 'non selective' student body into assuming more individual responsibility for learning. A spot checking of student's records followed up by random interviews with students left the writer with the impression that this may be possible at Grand Valley State College. However, this can only be accomplished by aiming for even closer faculty-student-administration team effort than one normally finds on a campus.

The next year, the NCA advisor had become blunt in his negative assessment of the college's chances of success. "There appears to be some question as to whether the College is admitting the caliber of students who are prepared to cope with this type of curriculum." Although the college was to achieve accreditation in a timely fashion, this discrepancy was a major factor in convincing both Zumberge and Potter that they must, however reluctantly, move the institution away from its original goals.

In addition, prospective and existing students, reflecting the more pragmatic twentieth century aspirations of the surrounding community, sought an education that would directly prepare them for an occupation. Student surveys indicated that many of them wanted to become teachers. The surveys also revealed a high rate of dissatisfaction among the students with the foundation program and with the lack of a wider choice in the curriculum. It was also difficult to attract transfer students from the area community colleges because they were also required to take the foundation program.

In the face of such dismal enrollment figures and student disaffection, innovative technology and the decentralization models for the future proved insufficient. In only

its second year, the college was forced to begin to move away from its original foundationalist ideal.

A teacher-preparation program was in place by 1964. Zumberge, writing in 1965, felt that the original plans for the college to be a traditional liberal arts college did "not necessarily mean that a program of teacher education would be included, but I could not see how a state supported college could possibly abrogate the responsibility of producing teachers for the primary and secondary school system throughout the state." In other words, his support was based on the pragmatic grounds that the state government expected Grand Valley State College to have a teacher-preparation program.

It was evident that the idealists did not hold complete control of the agenda. Despite misgivings on the part of some of the pioneer faculty, they all agreed that it was indeed necessary to institute a teacher-education program. They, however, stipulated that no major in education or school of education be created and that as many teacher-preparation courses as possible be offered by liberal arts departments. To house those courses that did not fit into any liberal arts department, such as student teaching, a center without a separate faculty was created. It was not until 1972 that an Educational Studies Institute with faculty, but without the status of a liberal arts department, was formed.

On the heels of the inauguration of the first professional program at Grand Valley State College, a group of pragmatic faculty emerged, led by Glenn Niemeyer (History) and Marvin DeVries (Economics). To attract a greater number of students to the college, they proposed a Business Administration program. This proposal was supported by the administration, if reluctantly, because William Seidman, although a supporter of the liberal arts, had always thought that the college needed to offer education and business programs. In addition, still faced with shortfalls in student enrollment, the administration looked around desperately for ways to attract new students to the college.

After furious debate, replete with accusations of betrayal of the liberal arts ideal, the Faculty Assembly, comprising all the faculty, passed a compromise proposal. Business subjects could be offered, but only within the confines of the economics department. Located there, idealists hoped, the business "track" could be infused with liberal arts concepts.

After 1965, Zumberge, growing more desperate over the failure of the liberal arts college to attract adequate numbers of students, increasingly worked with the pragmatic faculty to boost low enrollments. The college had predicted, for example, for fall of 1965, an enrollment of 1,800. The Jamrich Report had, in 1957, predicted 2,500. Yet only 1,340 students were enrolled. Between 1967 and 1968, major changes were made in the foundation program in order to attract more students. For example, the pragmatist faculty, with administration support, successfully convinced the Faculty Assembly to drop the foreign language requirement for all students, because many other colleges had already done so. The option was a Bachelor of

Science degree, which did not require the study of a foreign language, as did the Bachelor of Arts.

Pragmatic faculty, again with the support of the administration, also proposed a number of new courses as options to the required Foundation Program in order to give students more choice. Students would also be allowed to complete the Foundation Program over a two-year period, rather than one. In 1969, President Zumberge wrote, "[i]n retrospect, had not those changes been accomplished at that time, the future of Grand Valley State College could have been in severe jeopardy." In 1973, the foundation program was done away with altogether. It was replaced with a distributive education plan. After only ten years, little was left of the original Foundation Program in form or philosophy.

Another blow to the special nature of Grand Valley State College had come when it became clear by 1966 that neither the students nor the faculty were willing to utilize the study carrels with their audio-visual capabilities. Faculty were reluctant to tape their lectures for use in the system. The more distant goal of using tapes as a substitute for live lectures was out of the question. As a result, the carrels soon were transformed into study areas that students often used as lunch stops, leaving apple cores and banana peels behind.

The failure of this technologically advanced system to evolve into a substitute for some lectures struck a mortal blow to the plan to balance high-intensive faculty-time tutorials with low-intensive faculty-time study carrels. And as the faculty found more students in their classes and were forced to hold tutorials on their "own time," in order to maintain state mandated student-faculty ratios, the number of tutorials declined. By 1973 tutorials had largely disappeared.

Another straw in the wind was the development of Grand Valley State's intercollegiate sports program. From the beginning, the college had urged and provided for a number of intramural sports, but student surveys and opinions printed in the student newspaper clearly indicated that students, especially males, demanded intercollegiate sports, especially basketball and football. In the first years of the college, President Zumberge hoped to avoid "entry into this activity." It became clear, however, to President Zumberge by 1968 that football would be coming to the College as soon as the institution could afford it:

In 1968, we still had no football team, and if some of the faculty members in the humanities division have their way, we will never become involved in this sport, at least not on an intercollegiate basis. It is doubtful, however, whether the view of the dissenters will prevail. I think not. The question is no longer, "*will* GVSC engage in intercollegiate football," but "*when* will the first game be played?" The important thing to remember is that football is a tradition of long standing on the American college scene. Students love it. Alumni demand it, and a good many faculty members enjoy it.

In regard to the football question as well as the academic ones, President Zumberge was increasingly forced by outside pressures to adopt a pragmatic position. In the process, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, Grand Valley State

College began to resemble the comprehensive regional university model that it had wished to avoid.

In 1968, some of the idealistic progressive faculty, such as Dan Clock, Gilbert Davis, Bill Baum, and Dan Andersen, formed a new, ultimately autonomous, alternative learning society, at first called the School of General Studies and later Thomas Jefferson College. The remaining faculty formed the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), which still contained by far most of the faculty and students at the institution. With the departure of many of the progressive idealists, and the hiring of professional studies faculty in business and education, the pragmatic faculty now made up a CAS majority. Separated as they were into two different colleges, the two groups of idealistic faculty could no longer make common cause against the drive to make the college over into a regional university with a host of professional programs.

The departure of President Zumberge in 1968 and of Academic Vice-President Potter less than a year later further demoralized the foundationalists. Arend D. Lubbers, who replaced Zumberge as President of Grand Valley State College in 1969, did not bring the foundationalists hope. He was more interested in new, progressive educational ideas than in re-instituting a nineteenth Century liberal arts curriculum. Idealistic progressive faculty, on the other hand, hoped that he would advance their ideas for alternative colleges. He did. Within a few years, there were two more experimental colleges: William James College and College IV (later called Kirkhof College). With the establishment of these colleges, President Lubbers hoped that the institution could meet the expectations of the community for professional education in the College of Arts and Sciences and, at the same time, fulfill its progressive education mission in the alternative colleges. The institution, in the 1970s, now called the Grand Valley State Colleges, would earn a national reputation for experimental education within a cluster college model.

Although he leaned toward an idealist, progressive, educational philosophy, President Lubbers also had a keen pragmatic sense. A good symbol of this pragmatism was his decision to establish, as one of his first acts, intercollegiate football. He was very aware that the survival of the institution depended on meeting the expectations of the community and those of the students.

Although the previous president had not been forced to resign, there had been rising dissatisfaction in the state government and in the local community with his inability to bring costs down and increase the numbers of students enrolled at the college, as well as with his slowness to move the college away from a rigid liberal arts philosophy of education. Therefore, it is not surprising that another of President Lubbers' first acts was to appoint as dean of the new College of Arts and Sciences Glenn Niemeyer, a leading pragmatist faculty member who also had a strong commitment to the liberal arts.

Nor is it surprising that the new dean proposed a new array of professional programs, such as nursing, criminal justice, public administration, and social work, in the first two years of his administration. His actions were especially timely in the face

of declining student enrollment in the teacher-preparation program, and thus in the liberal arts majors in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Ascendancy of The Pragmatic Community Philosophy

The cluster college concept was not to survive the 1970s. Falling enrollments in the experimental colleges, an economic downturn in the state of Michigan, and a more conservative era all joined together to cause its collapse. This left the proponents of the pragmatic community philosophy in charge of the agenda for Grand Valley State. In the 1980s and 1990s, Grand Valley State intensified its drive to become a regional university. By 1995, Grand Valley State University had become a regional comprehensive university recognized for the academic quality of its undergraduate and graduate programs, its attention to teaching, and its focus on the individual needs of its students, as well as the needs of Western Michigan, as is indicated by the willingness of the business community of Western Michigan to donate substantial funds to University projects. The pragmatic community philosophy now dominates the social space at Grand Valley State University. It is continually invoked to justify the academic course the University is on.

The foundationalist, liberal arts philosophy, on the other hand, has continued its decline as its adherents have begun to retire in large numbers and few new faculty with that philosophy are being hired. The one area where idealist faculty, both progressive and foundationalist, continue to try to exert their influence is in arguing for a core curriculum in the general education program, which President Lubbers has supported. He has, for example, proposed considering a new, core general education curriculum that would sharply limit the courses allowed in the program and insure that they would be clearly interrelated to each other. The core would reflect what every Grand Valley State University graduate should know, regardless of major. He also supports, but does not mandate, a consolidation of the liberal arts into a single college located on the Allendale campus and the consolidation of the professional programs on the Grand Rapids campus, when the planned expansion of the Grand Rapids campus is completed. Enough money has been donated for the first stages of the project to begin.

In effect, a new, two-campus university may be created in the next five years, with a number of important links which will allow for the continual growth of the comprehensive regional university model undergirded by a pragmatic philosophy, and at the same time strengthen the public, liberal arts college model undergirded by an idealistic philosophy. Will idealists, if given a third chance, be able to achieve what they hadn't been able to achieve before, a healthy number of students enrolled in their various programs?

If these initiatives do not blossom into real change that creates a supportive structure for an idealistic liberal arts based philosophy of education, the university will no doubt settle into its role as a highly successful regional university with deep roots in its community.