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New Faculty Orientation
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**"Teaching and Scholarship at a Comprehensive University
Grounded in Liberal Education"**

It's good to see you this morning at this our second day of new faculty orientation. We have about a half an hour set aside now to think together about teaching, scholarship and service as defined at a comprehensive university like Grand Valley where there is a strong commitment to a liberal education philosophy in our approach to our students. It's a big subject, and we will only just get started in the time we have, but there has been a fairly intense conversation taking place on campus over the past two years that I want you to know about.

Faculty Senate and each department and college has been working to define a faculty workload and performance expectations to insure equitable and appropriate work environments and rewards for faculty campus-wide. I hope that my introduction of some of the issues will keep you from feeling lost in the discussions taking place and provide you with entre to bring your own thoughts to the table. Have you ever come to Grand Valley at an interesting time!

It would be good for me first to define some terms. We usually use the term "comprehensive university" to describe ourselves, reflecting our previous Carnegie Foundation classification. (I have to say that their current classification for us, "Master, large," couldn't be more fitting in one way, though. Did you realize that last year we were the largest Masters U in the Midwest, numbering 23,464 students? We're one of only twenty or so Masters institutions of this size and scope in the country.) But in conversation, you will hear most of us use the older "comprehensive" term as a descriptor for what we do. Whatever term, Grand Valley offers a large array of undergraduate and graduate academic programs up to the professional doctorate degree, stopping short of the Ph.D.

The faculty is focused primarily on extraordinarily student-centered teaching, grounded, as you keep hearing, in the philosophy of a liberal education. We participate in several national programs for developing and evaluating student learning as well as student and faculty satisfaction at Grand Valley. We take seriously student perceptions of teaching effectiveness but

also work to include other systems of support and evaluation of faculty teaching, such as peer observation of classes, teaching portfolios, and other means. An exceptionally strong Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, led by Dr. Catherine Frerichs whom you met yesterday, guides many of our initiatives and resources in this area. We have in recent years intentionally tied co-curricular activities to the curricula in collaboration with our Student Services unit. (Student Services is included in Academic Affairs at Grand Valley, by the way.)

I think it would help if I take a few minutes now to talk about the liberal education tradition, not because we value our various academic disciplines less, but because it is a subject common to all of our work. How many of you have attended an institution with a liberal education foundational philosophy?

This is an approach usually associated with smaller universities and colleges. That we are a good-sized school that does not have to support the huge resource needs of a Ph.D.-granting institution means that we have wonderful resources to offer our undergrad and MA and professional doctoral students. It's a niche we like and that Michigan needs.

It's tricky to commit to a liberal education at Grand Valley these days, though, since the approach scales somewhat more easily to a smaller school that is primarily or exclusively dedicated to this philosophy. As Grand Valley has grown and times have changed, more and more of our students have come here for specifically career-oriented professional reasons. We have to work more than we did in some past generations to help them understand WHY we are requiring these expansive approaches and how liberal education ties into their chosen majors.

As you know, the idea of a "Liberal education" is a concept that has ancient origins. The Latin root of the term "liberal" denotes "freedom." In Old English, Greek, and even Sanskrit, we see that the root word for 'liberal' refers to "growth." Throughout history, education has differentiated classes of people, saving a person from a life of servitude and poverty and opening the doors to a different future. An educated person was freed to think, create, and act on behalf of society. Liberal education was and still is the requirement for a world that would develop toward ideals of community over individual, truth over ignorance, and humane over self focused values. Regardless of a person's major or professional degree program, a liberal education can engender a desire for learning that continues beyond the years spent in the formal classroom.

One of my favorite contemporary authors on this subject, William Cronon, has compiled a list of qualities embodied by people who are well educated in the tradition of liberal learning. He writes that such a person can do such things as listen, read, talk, write, solve dilemmas, seek truth and wisdom, lead, and work in a community. But most importantly, he sees as the ultimate value in such an educated person is that they "connect."

They pay attention to others and the world around them. They can pair their critical thinking skills and self knowledge to connect their formal training, their emotions, past experiences, values and traditions with those of others. These are the people who can critically discern the path of integrity, humaneness, and appreciation of the world's diversity from that of self-involved, circumscribed and short term thinking. With humility, tolerance, and self-criticism,

the liberally educated person has the intellectual range and emotional generosity to step outside their own experiences and prejudices to understand, appreciate, and act in the wider world.

I hope that our Grand Valley graduates are just this type of people.

Everywhere around us we see the need for accountable and active citizens and leaders. From domestic and international violence and military conflict, to poverty, to international economic uncertainties, to divisive politics and stalemates, the world faces daunting challenges. In our own much loved state, we face the urgent need to reinvent its work and education environments and improve its faltering economic health.

The good news is that, increasingly, society recognizes the need for traits that are the foundation of a liberal education. We may be calling those abilities "thinking outside of the box" or "entrepreneurial spirit." We may be considering the challenges and opportunities of globalism, of speedy technological innovation, of adapting to and thriving on change, but the ability to deal with the jarring developments in our world is at the core of this traditional model of education.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities in 2005 began a multi-year program called Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) to help form the public awareness that the more complex, and uncertain the world becomes, the more a liberal education is needed. Grand Valley subscribes to the LEAP ideas. Employers more and more identify the competencies born of a liberal education as desirable in their employees, to go along with their specialized expertise. To quote Robert T. Jones in a 2005 issue of Liberal Education, "the application of specialized knowledge will be more and more integrated within a broader range of sociopolitical environments that place a premium on judgment, communication, collaboration and analytical skills. Virtually all occupational endeavors require a working appreciation of the historical, cultural, ethical, and global environments that surround the application of skilled work. As knowledge, technology, and global impacts escalate at dizzying rates, so too will the value and significance of the liberal education framework increase."

No longer confined to an elite, non-vocational curriculum, liberal education finds application under all areas of study, as an integrated part of the experience of any professional who expects to survive and thrive in the economy today.

At Grand Valley you will find that we are developing a more and more distinct voice for our liberal education commitment and creating institutional structures to support its key components -- connection, collaboration, diversity, curiosity, communication, analysis, and integration. Faculty discussion groups, website resources, and FTLC programming are all available for your support in this liberal education effort.

Closely following our expectation for excellent teaching, is the expectation for active scholarship, which is understood in our conversations to include creative activities and librarianship.

You'll notice that I used the word "scholarship" rather than "research," terminology that is also characteristic of Grand Valley's approach. We value scholarly work in the way that was notably

defined by Ernest Boyer in his *Scholarship Reconsidered* of 1990 - that paradigm-shifting book whose concepts continue to be revisited and deepened since then. It is, simply put, the idea that research is more than only the creation and dissemination through peer reviewed publications of new basic knowledge but that it also includes the creation of, as he so famously put it, the knowledge of integration, application and teaching and its dissemination in a variety of appropriate venues and forms.

For the past two years, we have been reviewing and clarifying university expectations of faculty work. Following faculty governance's university-wide Workload and Reward policy that was painstakingly developed over this time, each academic unit and college has developed discipline-specific criteria for successful teaching, scholarship, and service based on best practices, accreditation standards if applicable, and the work of admirable peer institutions as well as Grand Valley's own traditions and innovations.

Most colleges and departments are pretty well finished with clearly defining their expectations. We still are discussing definitions of scholarship, and how to value each type, as maybe we always will be. You can be assured that if you contribute to your discipline or disciplines through original scholarly work (again, broadly defined), disseminate the work for perusal and use of your audiences and peers, in the most appropriate venues for your subject, you will be on the right track. I encourage you to have discussions with your chair or director about the details of the unit's expectations as you begin this year.

It's been difficult for faculty to set these expectations, given the wide variety of standards and practices represented among our separate disciplines. It is actually far easier to define scholarship narrowly and then simply count peer reviewed academic publications than it is to look at the variety of ways disciplinary expertise can be used to create new perspectives, applications and methods and then assign relative value to them. But we believe that adopting only the traditional research model is too confining for the Grand Valley mission overall. I look forward to your contributions to the conversations in your own department and college.

The third area of university expectations concerns professional service, as it does at most universities. What makes the situation somewhat different here is that Grand Valley is exceptionally closely tied to the West Michigan region. Started by private contributions from our community, this University has never forgotten the community it serves. In fact, those ties have been forged ever stronger as years have gone by. We now enjoy our status as the "adopted university" of the Grand Rapids area. Therefore, we have many opportunities to connect with the community in professional service. University service is needed and valued, as is our involvement with our professional associations at the national and international levels. Definitely a third rung on the ladder of expectations, it is nevertheless an important one. Defining appropriate levels of service and how to document the quality of one's contributions is part of the campus discussion taking place as we've been refining our workload practices.

It may seem unusual that we are talking about these basic issues now, but it is easy to understand, given our history. Starting as a very small liberal arts, teaching college, less than 50 years ago, it wasn't until about 25 years ago that Grand Valley switched from striving to be an alternative liberal arts school to becoming a comprehensive university, adding to its repertoire

both professional and graduate programs. There are plenty of people here who have witnessed that change, frankly, some who still lament the change, and have questions about how the university can make the transition complete but still retain much of the valued "old Grand Valley way" -- our student centered stance, our flexibility and entrepreneurial approach, our sense of community -- in spite of our enormous growth and the changing times that have left us with less state support and more public demand for accessibility and accountability.

You will note some tension as we work out our next paths, and strive to fully embrace the best practices that should characterize an institution of our size and complexity. I would say the tension is healthy and productive, with sometimes angst-filled but also creative debates about our future directions.

As I said, it's an exciting time to be joining this young, excellent school, one with all the potential in the world to keep building the excellence that already characterizes our environment and increasingly builds our slowly but steadily growing reputation.

It is a lively place -- I'm glad you're here to experience the excitement and contribute to the shaping of this university that is still "becoming." And I hope by the time you complete these two days of orientation you realize how many people there are here who are pulling for you, ready to help you succeed. I look forward to seeing each of you as our paths cross and we join together to create the best working and learning environment we can muster! Good luck to each of you.