

Field for Dreams
by
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Dreams! For centuries men and women have been motivated into action because of dreams. From a young Jewish boy with a multicolored coat several thousand years ago whose destiny and that of powerful nations were foretold in dreams, to a young Afro-American preacher a few decades ago whose dream activated a nation to address years of inequities, dreams, whether real or idealizations of personal goals, have activated people for centuries. Dreams have been the subject of great literature of the past and have formed the basis for modern films. At times it has been as mundane as attracting a legendary baseball team to a field in Iowa. "Build it and they will come!"

For early faculty at Grand Valley State College, the dream was building a unique institution in a cornfield in Allendale. Although there were some visions of buildings and other physical facilities, for most faculty it was the anticipation of being part of the formation of a college at which we would not repeat the mistakes that other institutions had made or introduced during their development.

"The Dream" is what attracted both faculty and students to this new institution. It certainly was not the physical plant, for it was essentially non-existent. It was not the programs-there were none. It was not the alumni or the exhibited value of a GVSC education, for these were some distance into the future. It was the dream to develop programs, the opportunity to actually build the curricula and philosophical underpinnings of the institution.

In our first few years, there were many issues to resolve and, consequently, much interaction between faculty. It was the second year of the college's existence before a faculty retirement plan was adopted. There were multiple debates, which sometimes went on into the evening (even during blizzard conditions), on "What is a liberal arts institution?" Although the debate was vigorous, there seemed to be a sense of unity among the faculty: people worked together. Personal agendas were set aside, and directions that represented faculty consensus were mapped out. Most faculty members were very supportive; a few, including one or two of the most colorful debaters, became disenchanted and left the institution to establish their dreams elsewhere.

In those early years, it was observed that an increasing number of faculty were members of many committees and, consequently, had insufficient time for teaching and professional development. The faculty passed a resolution that no faculty member was to be a member of more than two committees, a resolution that was rather short-lived, as is readily evident today.

One issue in which there was both great unanimity as well as significant disagreement was the design of the program for the training of teachers. It was generally understood that Grand Valley would include programs to prepare K-12 teachers, but there was great debate as to how best to accomplish it. There was strong agreement that what other institutions were doing should be significantly improved and that we should not have a proliferation of methods courses (a characterization of most education programs of the time) and that teachers learn by observing and doing. What emerged was the Teacher Aiding Program, a feature of many of today's teacher education programs.

As one can imagine, in starting a college in the early 60s, there was strong sentiment against developing into a "publish or perish" Institution. Grand Valley was to be a college in which excellence in teaching was of prime importance. Faculty should be rewarded for good teaching, not for research. On the other hand, there was an equally strong attitude that this institution was not to be an extension of high school. The curriculum was to be designed and delivered to teach the students to think, not simply to recall facts and regurgitate the content of a professor's lectures. The emerging library was an integral part of all instruction. In all disciplines, students were required to utilize the library and to write papers. Faculty met

in tutorials with groups of three-to-five students on a regular basis to assist them in developing their thinking and writing skills. This was a time-consuming but very valuable experience for faculty members. As a young faculty member, I probably learned as much as or more than many of my students did through these experiences. It was virtually impossible for students to go through a course without significant personal interaction with a faculty member. Unfortunately, the influx of students and the increasing time commitment of the faculty for tutorials led to their weakening and ultimate demise.

Although faculty members were occupied with charting the course of the new school, not all the students were similarly involved. There were no planned student activities, so inventive students designed their own. Outhouses and other imported items were the focus of some pranks, but the most impressive one was the student painting of the Grand Valley water tower. Only recently, in a discussion with two students in that Pioneer Class, was I privy to the details of how it was accomplished. The regular sight of herds of cows and sometimes herds of deer on campus was simply not sufficient to satisfy the extracurricular needs of the students.

Changing offices or classrooms as buildings were completed during a semester was a regular occurrence during those early years. At the time of my first visit to campus, Lake Michigan Hall was mostly completed and portions of Lake Superior Hall were occupied. Other than the Great Lakes complex of buildings, the campus consisted mostly of fields. During those initial years, I occupied an office in most of the academic buildings on campus, in some cases even on several different floors. Getting stuck in the muddy parking lots, which had not yet been paved, was another frequently expected challenge.

Library accumulations were growing as fast as possible in those early years, but a major teaching tool for mathematicians was non-existent on campus: we had no computer. In the '60s, of course, no desktop computer was available, only large and medium-sized mainframes. Prior to coming to Grand Valley, I had taught a FORTRAN course for mathematics and science majors at another institution. (That language certainly is not in vogue now, but was state-of-the-art thirty years ago.) I complained about the lack of a computer on our campus to the dean, George Potter, on numerous occasions, but was consistently told that computers were not necessary at Grand Valley and that it was more important to build the library. Without debating the necessity or wisdom of that choice, I did manage to overcome this deficiency. During my second year at Grand Valley, I taught a course in FORTRAN in which we debugged our programs in small groups and, at the end of the quarter, traveled to Argonne National Laboratory near Chicago to utilize some of their computer facilities. We had hands-on experience with key punches and actual computers to run our programs, experiences which are now several generations outdated, but were valuable for students at that time. The following year, arrangements were made with a local bank to utilize their computing facilities, and a student made regular trips to submit our programs to be run during the night shift. On the basis of these experiences, several of those pioneering students became successful professionals in the computer field.

When President Lubbers arrived on campus some five years after my initial appointment and noted in a faculty address that we lacked a computer, within days I met with him to encourage and support his efforts to obtain such a facility. My efforts were rewarded by his appointing me to chair a faculty committee to address the issue. The result was a state-of-the-art computer which was considerably less powerful than today's smallest desktop computer and not much more powerful in many ways than today's graphing calculator.

Although it was exciting to be one of thirty or so faculty members developing the policies and structure of a new institution, it was even more exciting to be one of two faculty members (Dr. Dan Clock was the other) developing the curriculum for a discipline. We were both second year faculty members; there had been no mathematicians on the faculty during the first year. Dan and I determined a four-year mathematics curriculum and service courses during our first year. Many additional courses have since been added as the programs and mission of Grand Valley changed, - but virtually every course in the original curriculum has survived to the present. In fact, even the numbering scheme has survived as new courses have been added.

One final anecdote. My first quarter (before we changed to the semester system) at Grand Valley was the beginning of the second year for the Pioneer Class of students. These students had taken Foundation courses their first year, which included no pre-calculus material, and I had the dubious honor of teaching them in the first calculus class on campus. What the students had in enthusiasm, they lacked in preparation. During the first year of operation, it had been decreed that any Grand Valley student could enroll in calculus independent of mathematical preparation. I questioned the dean about that decision, but he was insistent that such a policy was appropriate. I had taught calculus for several years elsewhere and very quickly realized that many of these Grand Valley students were very inadequately prepared in basic pre-calculus fundamentals. Predictably, about half the class failed, which led to some heated discussions between the dean and me. As a result, in the second quarter, I taught a much smaller class in Calculus 11 and tutored many of the students who failed so they were prepared to take Calculus the next quarter. By the beginning of the following year, a pre-calculus course was in the curriculum.

In recalling those early days of Grand Valley, I have many pleasant and rewarding memories. I was very fortunate to be part of a faculty which really developed an institution, one which has deviated from some of those early ideals, but which, nevertheless, has emerged into an institution consistent with most of those original dreams and aspirations. To my former colleagues, administrators, and students, my deepest and sincere gratitude for a rare and rewarding professional opportunity.