

The Serendipitous Match

In the early 1980's Grand Valley State Colleges, the cluster of several colleges on a single campus became Grand Valley State College and then Grand Valley State University. As a comprehensive regional university, the interest in involving students, faculty, and staff in the broader world community became a higher priority. When I was appointed Director of International Studies in 1985, one of the first charges Provost Glenn A. Niemeyer gave me was to set up an exchange program in the United Kingdom. When I asked him how best to approach this, he suggested that I contact Bill Baum, then a professor of Political Science, as he thought Bill had worked with someone from Kingston Polytechnic some years earlier. Bill provided a letter of introduction, and I contacted David Fyfe, who was Director of International Studies at Kingston. David and I exchanged a number of communications. It was an exciting time for them as they too were in the process of becoming a comprehensive university. It seemed as if our two institutions would be a good match.

Kingston had a number of partnerships, and I was calling the other schools in the United States with whom they had programs. The directors were very positive and enthusiastic about the ease and benefits of working with Kingston. I was making the final call to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. As I was asking their director of international studies about how the partnership with Kingston was working, she described a number of collaborations and then asked me if I wanted to speak with David Fyfe, who was in her office. David and I talked about the types of partnership experiences we might develop and basically the deal was struck on the phone. The following semester David arranged for two education students from Grand Valley to do their student teaching through Kingston; by the following fall, he had arranged for a group of students to participate in a common cultural program while pursuing courses in their majors. The faculty and staff exchanges began with a member of our English faculty and their faculty changing places for a semester. The partnership between our two institutions has indeed been a serendipitous match as the celebration of its 25th year well documents.

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