**Dean Drake’s Remarks**

**Spring Meeting**

**May 4, 2021**

***Opening***

Today I am launching the tradition of offering a land acknowledgment before CLAS fall and spring meetings. The language of the acknowledgement explains its purpose; I’d like to thank the GVSU Libraries for sharing it.

*I recognize the People of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples on whose land we are gathered. The Three Fires People are indigenous to this land which means that this is their ancestral territory. We are guests on their land and one way to practice right relations is to develop genuine ways to acknowledge the histories and traditions of the people who originated here first, who are still here, and who tend to the land always.*

Lucille Clifton’s poem “Won’t you celebrate with me” goes like this:

won't you celebrate with me

what i have shaped into

a kind of life? i had no model.

born in babylon

both nonwhite and woman

what did i see to be except myself?

i made it up

here on this bridge between

starshine and clay,

my one hand holding tight

my other hand; come celebrate

with me that everyday

something has tried to kill me

and has failed.

Clifton’s poetry always centers Black womanhood and the Black experience, and models the balance of celebration and mourning, achievement and struggle. I offer her words as a frame for our thinking about the victories and losses of this past year: what we have learned and suffered through the COVID-19 pandemic, through a vitriolic presidential election, through the calls for and actions taken towards racial justice. Even as Derek Chauvin was found guilty on all charges for George Floyd’s murder, we could still feel the heaviness of much work left to do. *Daunte Wright. Ma’Kiah Bryant.* As poet Kwame Alexander put it, the verdict brought glee and sadness.

This has been quite a year.

We—staff and faculty—are very, very tired. A recent piece by Adam Grant in the New York Times suggests that the slightly joyless muddling that many of us are feeling—“that void between depression and flourishing, the absence of well-being—might be termed “languishing.”

This pandemic year brought workloads that we learned were not sustainable, despite our heroics. But we are inventive, and stubbornly resilient; we have each other; and we celebrate this day that marks the close of a very challenging term. I’d like to thank the CLAS committees whose reports we just viewed, and to congratulate our award winners. I’d also like to draw your attention

* to state and national teaching awards for Steve Mattox and David Austin;
* to books coming out by Laurel Westbrook, Chris Haven, Caitlin Horrocks, and others;
* to events such as the *Climate Change Education Solutions Summit,* play productions, concerts and dance recitals produced virtually, as well as virtual and physical art exhibits;
* to conference papers that you delivered around the world while you sat in your living rooms—

I know it was especially challenging for faculty to step back from scholarly and creative work this year in order to shoulder additional teaching, and you found a way to do more of what you do than anyone expected.

I’d also like to acknowledge our visiting, affiliate, and adjunct faculty as well as our AP and PSS staff—as well as staff all across the university, without whom none of us could do our jobs—who all found ways to maintain high-quality work while navigating the personal and professional challenges of this year.

I thank each and every one of you for the sacrifices you have made in order to serve and support and love our students.

***Sharing Budget Information***

I’d like to spend the next few minutes sharing—with Assistant Dean Michelle McCloud’s help—some information about the college’s financial position going into academic year 21-22, and then I’ll share the dominant themes and findings from our visioning sessions.

While we are in a position more enviable than our colleagues at many other institutions—as we all know, higher education was a sector in flux even before the pandemic—we are still in the process of shifting from Grand Valley’s rapid-growth years to a more measured, sustainable and planful approach to stewarding our resources. This shift requires developing new habits and building new structures.

One of the early actions I took as your new dean was to form a CLAS Budget Committee as a subset of the unit head group, led by Michelle, so that we can work transparently, collaboratively, and in a data-informed way on our college budgets. The Budget Committee and the unit heads are in ongoing conversation about the information Michelle is about to share.

*SHOW SLIDES*

Your CLAS Budget Committee and the unit heads have been digging into the longer version of this story, and we are working together on challenges like implementing the PSS reorganization and prioritizing a limited number of tenure-track and affiliate hires. I hope that this overview helps you to see how we are building our future inventively, through sharing and analyzing data, with an eye on college and institutional resilience.

***Sharing Takeaways from the CLAS Visioning Sessions***

I am still new here, rounding towards the end of my first year. I am listening to you, and while I am still learning about the history and culture here—the histories and cultures here, the many stories that comprise our community—I don’t feel like a stranger.

The visioning sessions have something to do with that, as does the warmth with which you have greeted me across many virtual meeting spaces.

Amidst the hard work of this semester, carrying both hope and worry, we shouldered the task of trying to view the future of higher education and liberal education, and our place—in CLAS, at GVSU—in this evolving ecosystem.

Thank you to our colleagues who volunteered their time to facilitate the visioning sessions and to join the Strategy and Innovation group (the SIG) that met this term to discuss innovation in higher education. I’m looking forward to working with the cohort of faculty from across the college that we’re calling the Summer SIG; this phase of our collective visioning and planning process will launch on May 26 with a Jamboard data analysis presented by colleagues who are experts in qualitative research.

Through the conversations in which you have participated and the additional labor of the Summer SIG, at our fall start-up meeting I will come to you with a draft vision, strategic direction and set of initiatives that will reflect our values and inspire our collective action. This will not be a *fait accompli* in August, but instead a draft plan for our work together next year.

The 80 hours of visioning conversations in which 500 CLAS staff and faculty participated have given us an excellent start. All of us who have been reviewing the Jamboard data and listener’s notes have been struck by the strong agreement across all units and groups on several core values and themes.

I can see that we have a clear sense of identity that unites us.

You are insisting on the value of a liberal education. You believe that teaching, scholarship and creative expression inform and need each other. You are committed to a future of growing access, more inclusion, and greater equity for our students, our colleagues, ourselves. You are yearning for connection, for human-scale and flexible structures that resist instrumentalization and create the conditions for our flourishing. To support our flourishing, you are calling for an expanded notion of community, in which:

* we connect our students to our alumni in new and exciting ways with relevance for their future careers and bountiful lives;
* we collaborate with partners in industry and community-based organizations to provide our students with more opportunities, no matter their financial status;
* we find a way to facilitate collaboration in teaching and research and creative work with teacher-scholar colleagues across the college whom we deeply respect;
* we combine the contributions of many disciplines to address wicked problems;
* we facilitate relationships with one another and make space for informal interactions across the college that offer play, joy and fun;
* and we work together to engage our communities—Grand Rapids, West Michigan and beyond—through authentic, reciprocal, sustainable partnerships.

Many of you offered specific ideas for realizing these aspirations. The Summer SIG will explore these and the many other ideas that have been gathered. Here are just a few:

* activating the Allendale campus through urban planning and design concepts and artist-led creative placemaking;
* following the lead of GV alum Littisha Bates, who is part of the leadership team of The Cincinnati Project, a CLAS-based research initiative at the University of Cincinnati that equitably partners with local organizations and translates academic work into action that improves people’s lives;
* creating centers—a Center for the Humanities was specifically mentioned—to focus, support, and coordinate team teaching, collaborative research and creative activity, and K-12 engagement;
* redesigning the CLAS curriculum; for example:
  + by thinking about our majors, minors and other credentials not as groups of semester-based courses but as collections of experiences that are located in classrooms, studios, and labs; online; in workplaces; and in the field, whether that is the lakeshore, the forest, the dunes, our schools, our cities, or across the world;
  + by expanding our current commitment to these kinds of high-impact practices by embedding them in every CLAS program and ensuring equitable and inclusive access (for example, by offering paid internships, funding summer student research, and reviewing tenure and promotion guidelines to ensure that faculty engagement in high-impact practices is valued).

This emerging CLAS self-portrait aligns with, and is central to, Grand Valley’s values of inclusion, inquiry, innovation, integrity and internationalization, as well as the university’s mission and vision, which—in their newly-minted versions, developed through the Reach Higher conversations—are as follows:

* Our mission—what animates our daily work—is that at GVSU, we prepare learners for the future they face and the communities they shape.
* Our vision—what ignites our long-range dreaming—is that at GVSU, learners are empowered in their mission and purpose, and that as a community, we advance equity, understanding, and learning as lifetime pursuits.

I see many synergies here with our conversations, and opportunities to connect our emerging vision and action plan to the university-wide work.

***Closing***

By design, our visioning conversations this semester focused on strengths, opportunities and aspirations. And within our conversations, many of us expressed the difficulty of dreaming big in the face of budget stringency. We are tired deep down, and worried about so many things: our students’ and our own complicated lives, the loss of our colleagues to retirements and resignations, the devaluation of the disciplines we love, the possible futures that we *don’t* want and that we fear might come true.

I don’t minimize any of that. I feel these worries too.

And yet…

I’m optimistic.

That’s my disposition, and that’s my job, and I believe in us.

Through creativity and thoughtful stewardship and ambitious planning, we can realize our vision for a relationship-rich liberal education that is inspiring, relevant, and purposeful.

That contributes to social innovation and has social impact.

That lifts up our students and keeps us all going, and thriving, every single day.

Thank you for your time and attention and getting your grades in on time. To those of you who will soon be pivoting into your research or summer teaching, I wish you at least a couple weeks of no alarm clocks and some sunshine. To the 12-month employees of our college, I wish you regular 8-5 hours and a chance to take some of your accumulated vacation time.

I want us all to find calm this summer. And joy. And pleasure. You have all certainly earned these things.