

July 2008

A Moment for Grove City College

My “Moment” this summer is personal and reflective. As I write, I am completing my fifth year as the Grove City College President. For me it has been the opportunity of my lifetime. Since taking office in 2003, the position as our President continues to be a great opportunity to return all that I can give of myself to what has always been a special place in my life from my days as a freshman 45 years ago this fall.

When I signed on five years ago, there was a strong mandate from our Trustees to continue to lift our alma mater up along the path of excellence. While I will leave it to others to judge specifics, I believe that together we have made much progress.

First, a few general observations: It came as no surprise (for I suspected as much as a long-time Trustee and past Alumni Association President) that our greatest strength comes from our 133 years of careful financial management and an abiding focus on our core animating principles of faith and freedom. Be assured we are not stuck in the past, but if you know where you have been and why, it surely lights the path ahead.

It is therefore this foundation of financial and moral precepts upon which our school and this administration stands firmly grounded. I sometimes say that my job is to be a chef who carefully follows the historic recipe, adding some new flavors and ingredients, but ever mindful of the success our basic recipe has brought.

I also know that we have a truly gifted faculty of men and women who teach and mentor here. They are more than assets; they are truly our natural resources.

So what exactly is Grove City College today? The term used now to answer that question is “brand identity.” I can tell you this, the almost 400 men and women who work here (140 are faculty) know well and live out our long held mission, vision and values. As a result, our prospective students know us well and seek us out from across the nation and around the world to obtain the three things we so often speak to: a quality education (comprehensive and rigorous), in a Christian environment (welcoming all faith walks), at an affordable cost (at 48 percent of the average American private education and just over 30 percent of the cost of many of the so called “elite” academic private colleges and universities with whom we now compete). In addition, for those we graduate – employers (including hundreds of school districts that offer positions to our education grads) from all over the nation know, value and hire our graduates and the leading national and regional graduate and professional schools regularly accept and enroll our graduates.

There have been a number of overarching themes that we have stressed over the past five years. First, as to our alumni – communication: through our GeDUNK Alumni Magazine, these “Moment for Grove City College” pieces, other communication tools and through many personal visits (with groups or individuals) to our alumni and friends. By traveling around the country, we have talked together about our alma mater, its yesterdays, today and tomorrows. My wife Dayl and I have traveled to close to 100 cities since coming to the College. We have spoken with many of you and we have listened carefully. As the first President to be an alumnus in almost 50 years (Dr. Harker '25 came in 1956), I particularly enjoy the affinity we all share in our school. I have stayed up many nights in many different parts of our great country exchanging stories about shared experiences, professors, etc. It is actually a fun way for me to spend a late night. In doing so I have found alumni (myself included) never seem to run out of stories! All of the foregoing comes under the category of “Friend-raising” and it is something I hope we are doing well and something I know we are doing sincerely.

Another theme as to alumni is that of contribution. Specifically, I mean time, talent and treasure. By any relevant measure you have stepped up! You have stepped up because we have done our best to make a case for your support and, frankly, because we have also asked you directly. All of you together (along with some foundations and non-alumni – or kindred souls, as we call our friends who are not alums) stepped up to fund our *Change & Commitment* Campaign, completed two years ago, to the tune of \$69 million, \$9 million over the goal! A whopping 65 percent of the money raised came from alumni – nearly two-thirds, therefore, from my fellow graduates. In our annual *Full Circle* campaign, you have also stepped up magnificently. Each of the last four years has seen a record amount of unrestricted dollar giving. This year was also the fifth consecutive record year of unrestricted giving (about \$1.9 million), which, if compared to the \$650,000 in unrestricted dollars that was recorded for 2002-03, represents about a 200 percent increase over that year. We also had another record year for restricted giving (a huge \$17.3 million – as



President Richard G. '67 and Dayl Jewell

compared to our highest historical year ever which was \$12.8 million in 2000-01)! More importantly, literally thousands more of our alumni over the past five years have participated as donors. In my mind I never wear out the words – “THANK YOU!” To each of you I say again with respect and affection – thank you for your willingness to share with a school that (as you know) takes no federal or state money and no longer relies (although the Pew Foundation helps a bit) on the large and continued beneficence of the Pew family. The future of excellence of our alma mater is in our hands. And while we can – and I am sure will – do even better over the next few years, we can all be proud of the progress in contribution that has been made. It is a down payment on excellence that has been well applied, and for that we are grateful.

So, the first two themes are communication and contribution, the third is consultation. This is an offshoot of communication, but it should and does stand alone. It is also a fiber of another “C” word and that is culture. When this administration began, an important goal (in close concert with our Chairman of the Board of Trustees David R. Rathburn ’79) was to make sure the decisions we made and policies we effected were done in an informed way and after consultation with those most impacted. It sounds reasonable of course, but it was something that needed to be done effectively, intentionally and persistently. I submit we have done much better in this area and it has made policy making more informed and better when many more folks get to have input. Examples abound – from many more faculty serving on special purpose committees, to our use of the Alumni Council, to many more special student committees and our use of Student Government as an important sounding board for policy making and procedures. In addition, while a student can come and see me in my office or in my many walks around campus, since coming back in 2003, I have had “Gedunk Hours” every Wednesday beginning at 4 p.m. at a table in the Gedunk inside the Breen Student Union. During that time, students are invited to see me about concerns, opinions, grievances, etc. And they do – I can assure you. I do my best to respond with in 24 hours. For me, it has been an eye-opener and has helped me to better understand concerns, explain policy more directly and, from time to time, occasionally change a policy based on good student input. Another example of consultation is that when we prepared our first-ever comprehensive five-year strategic plan in 2004, the advising committee was comprised of students, Trustees, faculty, administration, alumni and even town leaders. In addition, I hear all the time from alumni, parents and friends of the College. Serious questions are often raised, and timely and hopefully informed responses are given. So the culture of consultation has been changed. We know that, and without question, we are better for it.

As I look back over these past five years, I ask, what is most important? That’s an easy question. The answer is the academic, social and spiritual preparation of our students. We are deeply concerned about all three areas. Not many of the 3,000-plus colleges and universities in America are concerned about all those areas anymore. So, I am sometimes asked: by being so concerned about all areas aren’t we a bit out of touch in higher education? My answer is a clear and simple “no.” We present a substantial, rigorous education that has few equals and is the envy of many. But we also present it in the context of the notion of right and wrong built on biblical principles. Accordingly, I know our students are prepared to enter a difficult, often amoral world. They will be challenged and sometimes changed a bit – life is a challenging crucible – it’s that way for all of us, isn’t it? I trust that you would all agree that our graduates should have what I call a “trajectory of entry” into the real world that has the settings of a moral compass rather than none at all. So when someone asserts that by being different, aren’t we an “island”? (i.e. isolated), I respectfully tell them they have misidentified the land mass. I say we are not an island but an oasis in higher education, a place where character and scholarship continue to count. And then I carefully explain why that is.

Well, that’s my five-year look back and reaction. In the coming years we will continue these policies (striving always for positive outcomes) and report to you on progress. Strategically, for the long-term strength of the College, we will need to raise much more scholarship money for our students and retrofit and expand both Rockwell and Hoyt Halls to better support our strong science and engineering programs. There are a few other things we need to do as well. You will hear more about our plans in those areas shortly.

In closing, thank you all so much for your help and support over the last five years. It has made a great difference. Never before have our alumni been so invested in Grove City College. We were all students, we are all alumni and hopefully we can (and will) add a third description – that of being stewards – stewards of the historic principles of the school, stewards today for the future of Grove City College. As I write to you at this moment, I am firmly convinced that in the ranks of American higher education Grove City College is a national treasure. That is what we ask you to think about when you make your investment of your time, talent and treasure back to our alma mater.

As for me, I continue to pledge to you the following: all my energy and vision in concert with a great Board of Trustees and leadership team at the College. Our mission, vision and values are distinctive. It is what makes the difference in our case. The path of excellence will continue to be followed. And that is a promise.

Yours for Grove City College,



Dick Jewell '67
President