

Jon W. Fuller

For fifteen years Jon Fuller was President of the Great Lakes Colleges Association. Superficially a mere description of place and length of employment, this sentence notes the history, definition, and growth of what has become the most successful permanent relationship among a group of premier American Colleges in the United States. In 1974, when Jon Fuller took over the leadership of the GLCA, its twelve member colleges were linked principally through the establishment of foreign study and domestic off-campus programs designed to meet their common need to provide more for their students than could be done on each campus. Under Jon's direction, these special opportunities for eager students have been expanded and enhanced.

Simultaneously, however, the Association has become much, much more than that. Recognizing from the beginning that the distinctive excellence of the twelve best colleges in Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan lay principally in teaching, in the teacher's nurturing of her or his students, and in the institution's nurturing of its teachers, Jon firmly established the GLCA as an unequalled encourager of good education. Through meetings among the teachers of the many subjects taught in its member colleges, through meetings of the staffs in all offices and at all levels, through a constant reflection on the learning, curricular and campus life problems that the twelve colleges shared and through drawing to the attention of the teachers and administrators of the twelve colleges those national trends which were affecting all colleges and universities, Jon created a widespread teaching collegium that was so successful that today we take it for granted and cannot imagine our lives in any of our institutions without it.

Looking outside our colleges as well as inside, Jon early on realized that the private liberal arts college--America's one truly unique and indigenous institution of higher education--was rapidly losing its place in the public consciousness. By the mid-1970's, our forgetful nation had grown to neglect its former understanding that these schools and others like them represented the locus of the best that obtained in our country beginning with the founding of Harvard as a small college in 1636. Persuading, cajoling, prodding and never letting up, Jon made the leading administrators of the GLCA colleges into public spokespersons and lobbyists for their schools and for private colleges in general, and today the annual meetings in Washington, where there is assigned and required lobbying, courting, and representation to government and congressional offices, have become a regular and expected part of the life cycle of the deans and presidents of the GLCA schools.

Jon Fuller's leadership of the GLCA was manifested in his learning about each of the twelve colleges with an intimacy which many of the members of that college did not possess. Modest and always gracious, Jon never let on how much he knew about each of us until circumstances demanded his help. And then--when crisis appeared--Jon was ready as an already fully informed and wonderfully supportive and encouraging counselor and friend. As a quiet, good-humored and always wise pastor to twelve colleges, Jon helped each of our colleges in turn confront and triumph over its worst problems, emerging strengthened from the experience and especially from working anew with Jon's insights.

A year ago, Jon Fuller was called to the presidency of the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, wherein he is already making a happy and needed mark on Washington. As we in the GLCA watch Jon become an ever increasingly influential national figure in American higher education, we temper our sense of loss with the knowledge that Jon Fuller has already added substantially to the wisdom and accurate knowledge that our nation's capital so desperately needs. And we at Kalamazoo College--a school which has benefited as much as any from Jon's close affection and needed guidance--are proud this day to be honored ourselves in Jon's acceptance of our honorary degree.