CALVIN COLLEGE EQUIPS STUDENTS TO THINK DEEPLY, TO ACT JUSTLY, AND TO LIVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY AS CHRIST’S AGENTS OF RENEWAL IN THE WORLD.
Dear Friends,

A president’s report is a chance to communicate with the stakeholders of a college, to share updates on the state of our institution and to demonstrate our mission in action.

You play a vital role in our collective Calvin College story, and I invite you to read on to get a glimpse of this moment of time in Calvin history.

In the following pages, you will receive an overview of the past year at Calvin, plus a look at three highlighted programs: our Festival of Faith and Writing, which is going strong with its 14th installation; the emerging Clean Water Institute which has one semester under its belt; and the new Calvin College Rehabilitation Services clinic, which just hosted its grand opening celebration. You’ll also get a bird’s-eye view of our current financial status and a chance to do some in-depth exploration of the role that higher education plays in today’s changing world.

But before we begin, let me first thank you for choosing Calvin as a community in which you have invested your time, prayers and heart. As I travel around the country and the globe, I meet many who love Calvin deeply and love Christ even more. It is an honor to connect with kingdom builders like you, and I thank you for supporting the kingdom builders currently studying at Calvin.

Sincerely,

Michael K. Le Roy
President
Calvin College
In spring 2012, professor of engineering David Wunder was more than 1,000 miles away from Calvin when he received a call.

On sabbatical in Austin, Texas, Wunder listened as Calvin’s Senior Associate to the President Bob Berkhof shared a vision for a water institute at the college. The conversation piqued Wunder’s interest, so he penciled in a summer meeting to explore Calvin’s role in this endeavor.

Little did he know he was taking on an ambitious interdisciplinary project that would span multiple years and include countless collaborators. But it was an idea he couldn’t shake.

CONTAGIOUS ENTHUSIASM

A few months later, Wunder and Berkhof were sitting down with those alums to discuss their vision for “an institute at Calvin focused on water and sanitation in developing countries,” as Wunder puts it.

Joining the Calvin representatives around the table were geologist Jason Brink ’96, businessman Sid Jansma ’65 and geology professor emeritus Tom Timmermans ’84. Soon after initial discussions, geology professor emeritus Gerry Van Kooten ’73 joined the vision committee.

Support rose as word spread across campus. For Matt Walhout, dean for research and scholarship, this was no surprise.

“This new institute promotes Calvin’s mission in so many ways,” Walhout said. “Its root motivation is found in a gospel-inspired vision of flourishing communities. Its work draws on the technical expertise of Calvin’s faculty, students and institutional partners.”

By late 2014, the idea had gained the force of a formal proposal, campuswide endorsements from a variety of departments and a donor at the ready. In November, the concept passed through the approval process in the faculty senate. And on July 1, 2015, the Clean Water Institute of Calvin College (CWICC) opened.

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Though Wunder—who serves as the institute’s first director—is an engineer, he sees the path to clean water extending far beyond his field. “Water and sanitation overseas is not just a technical issue,” he said.

“It’s an issue that really links to watershed-based, community-based approaches and shifts in practice. So when you look at it with that kind of perspective, you need the technical aspects—engineering and geology—but you also need people that are experts with community development and education, and more broadly, policy.”

Wunder expects the institute to draw from the disciplines of international development, public health, social work and political science. He said that even with the various academic approaches, some guiding concepts will resound: “One thing that’s unique about this institute is that it’s very intentional about service, learning and teaching. We expect that the involvement of students and faculty with this work will be not just transformative for those we are serving overseas, but especially transformative for those that are involved with the work.”

Jeff Bouman, director of Calvin’s Service-Learning Center, is excited about the student opportunities and community partnerships the institute can offer. “This institute will provide many meaningful opportunities for Calvin students to participate in service learning in academic contexts,” he said. “Contexts that address real problems, real communities, real assets in indigenous communities and real partnerships around the world.”

Wunder views the Calvin community’s involvement as just the beginning of the center’s potential. “I would love for [the institute] to be a place that is drawing new people to campus,” he said.

Wunder is working on a team to vet possible partnerships in Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti and other countries, exploring project compatibility with the institute’s resources and expertise.
Festival of Faith and Writing
The biennial festival’s new director, Lisa Cockrel, says this posture comes from the influence of Reformed theology. “The festival is a pure distillation of what a truly Reformed posture in the world looks like as it relates to literary culture,” she said. “Instead of being at war with these voices in literary culture that are across the spectrum as relates to faith—whether they’re from another faith or even just a different version of Christianity—there are deep theological resources for generosity and listening and regenerative conversation. It is rooted in this confidence that we don’t have anything to be afraid of. It’s all God’s.”

Starting from this position of confidence and curiosity, Cockrel said the festival has become a staple in the literary world during its 25-year history. She calls it “the Lollapalooza of literary festivals.”

STEADY GROWTH
The numbers tell a story of steady growth. When the festival began in 1990, about 200 people attended. That number quickly rose within the first few years, and now attendance is around 2,000 visitors biennially.

What is the magic that draws these thousands? Faculty planning committee member Lew Klatt, associate professor of English and Grand Rapids’ poet laureate, said the planners specifically look for speakers who can command a crowd.

Klatt points to past-year guests as evidence: Marilynne Robinson, Michael Chabon, Annie Dillard, Gene Yang, John Updike, Joyce Carol Oates, Jonathan Safran Foer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Maurice Manning, Maya Angelou, Salman Rushdie.

Some of the greatest names in literature come to the festival for one purpose, Cockrel said. Points of Connection “We are bringing people from different perspectives together around a common table, around a common purpose of engaging themes of faith,” she said. “The real magic is in our differences and how we can find points of connection in those differences versus having a homogenous group of people here.”

At the 2016 festival, a conversation between two authors will illustrate those differences. Authors George Saunders and Tobias Wolff will have a dialogue at one of the evening sessions. Saunders, who formerly was a pupil of Wolff’s at Syracuse University, is a Buddhist who grew up Catholic, and Wolff is a practicing Catholic.

Cockrel said she is excited to see what will come of that discussion. “To have them in conversation is the kind of thing we get to do at the Festival of Faith and Writing,” she said. “It’s the conversations between writers that I get most excited about—hearing people interact with each other’s work and thought.”

“There really is something for everyone if you love books,” she said.

Klatt said the festival holds true to Calvin’s mission in a number of ways.

“The mission of Calvin College sends us out into the world to be agents of renewal in all areas of life, including writing and reading,” he said. “Language is fundamental to the cultural mandate outlined in Genesis; we are called to unlock the potential of speech, to explore its properties, to develop it as a vehicle for art and thought. The festival brings writers and readers together to talk about vocation, to explore a life of letters from a faith perspective, to examine the ways literature can be prophetic, to enjoy the pleasures of story and the music of words. In short, the festival is involved in resuscitating our relationship to language.”

Cockrel said the best thing book lovers can do to support the festival is to come.
Calvin Rehabilitation Services

Calvin College’s Speech Pathology and Audiology (SPAUD) program is flourishing. Just 23 years ago, it was rescued from elimination and had only a handful of majors. Now, the program includes a master’s degree, 100 students, ongoing student-faculty research, a Skype-based training program for doctors in Afghanistan, and its very own clinic.
SIGNIFICANT GROWTH
The clinic, Calvin College Rehabilitation Services, opened this fall to meet three crucial needs for the program and the regional clients it serves.

The SPAUD program has seen its numbers grow to more than 100 students, 34 of them in the master’s program. In the final year of the program, each student rotates through three internship placements.

“We have top-notch health professionals and faculty from three universities,” said Steve Vanderkamp, director of the clinic.

In addition to managing the clinic, Vanderkamp will serve as a physical therapist. He will be joined by faculty in physical therapy, occupational therapy, social work, speech pathology and audiology. Calvin College, Western Michigan University and Grand Valley State University will provide graduate interns for the clinic.

SWALLOWING THERAPY STUDIES
Beyond the work of the clinic, Calvin’s SPAUD student-faculty research is thriving.

“We have top-notch health professionals and faculty from three universities.”

Speech pathology professor Beth Oommen has dedicated her recent research to developing practical and cost-effective treatment options for swallowing disorders: exercise therapy for the tongue.

“I wanted to develop a home-based treatment program that is focused on strengthening the tongue,” she said.

This past summer, Oommen and three Calvin speech pathology graduate students collected data from healthy older adults who performed exercises—like pressing the tongue to the roof of the mouth and holding for five seconds—over a period of weeks to determine the effects.

The results, which are still being analyzed, will serve as the foundation for examining similar measures in patients with swallowing impairments, specifically in patients who have suffered strokes.
**JANUARY**

Philosophy professor James K.A. Smith wins *Christianity Today’s* Book of the Year Award in its Christianity and Culture category for *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*.

Calvin is recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for its commitment to community engagement.

**FEBRUARY**

Professors Matt Heun (engineering) and Becky Haney (economics) and Clemson professor Michael Carbajales-Dale (environmental engineering and earth sciences) publish a book urging scientists and policymakers to look *Beyond GDP* in defining economic success in an age of resource depletion.

Calvin College is recognized by the U.S. Department of State as a top producer of Fulbright U.S. Scholars.

**MARCH**

Calvin College hosts its biennial Festival of Faith and Music. This April, the college will host the 14th edition of its Festival of Faith and Writing. Read more on p. 6.

Partners for a Racism Free Community designate Calvin as a Level II Partner for its anti-racism efforts.

Calvin hosts the NCAA III Women’s Basketball National Championship.

**APRIL**

Mathematics major Sam Auyeung becomes Calvin’s 16th Goldwater Scholar since 2008—a number unmatched by any other undergraduate institution over that span of time.

Philosophy majors and profs interact with the top scholars in their field at the Conscious Persons Project, a workshop on campus that featured world-renowned philosopher David Chalmers.
MAY
Calvin College publishes the first edition of the International Journal of Christianity & Education (IJCE), a new journal that focuses on the relationship between Christianity and educational theory and practice.

Calvin graduates more than 850 students representing 60 majors.

Calvin wins the Commissioner’s Cup in athletics (2015 also marks the first time in school history all four varsity winter sports teams claim league titles).

JUNE
The Calvin Press releases its first title in the Calvin Shorts Series, a series for global Christians who want to understand the world better.

JULY
The Clean Water Institute of Calvin College is established. Read more on p. 4.

Michelle Loyd-Paige becomes Calvin’s first-ever executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion.

AUGUST
Calvin releases its new logo, one of the more visible outcomes of the college’s collaborative re-branding process.

Calvin is recognized as a top college by Princeton Review, Fiske Guide to Colleges and U.S. News & World Report. Money magazine says Calvin is the best college for your money among private schools in Michigan.

SEPTEMBER
The Nagel Institute funnels a $2 million grant from the Templeton Foundation to help African scholars address long-neglected social and religious issues.

Calvin collaborates with two local universities in opening an innovative rehab clinic that offers speech, physical and occupational therapies all under one roof. Read more on p. 8.

OCTOBER
Nora Faber ’98 is the first recipient of the Calvin Alumni ArtPrize Award for her 2015 ArtPrize painting “Heavenly Choir.”

Biology major Peter Boersma becomes Calvin’s first undergraduate student to present his research at the prestigious biennial Cornea Research Conference at Harvard Medical School.

NOVEMBER
Calvin’s Entrada Scholars Program receives a $300,000 commitment over the next three years from Meijer Corporate, allowing 25 more students per year to benefit from the college’s flagship pre-college program.

The Institute of International Education ranks Calvin second nationally among baccalaureate institutions for total students studying abroad.

Calvin hosts the NCAA III Volleyball National Championship.

DECEMBER
Calvin’s Oratorio Society, under the direction of Sean Ivory, presents Handel’s Messiah, a 96-year tradition of the Christmas season, to sold-out audiences in the Covenant Fine Arts Center auditorium.
Financial Status

2014-15
CURRENT FUNDS
REVENUE
(IN MILLIONS)

- TUITION & FEES $114
- ROOM & BOARD $20
- RESTRICTED GIFTS, GRANTS AND CONTRACTS $9
- ENDOWMENT INCOME $5
- DENOMINATIONAL MINISTRY SHARE $2
- OPERATING GIFTS $3
- CAMPUS STORE $2
- OTHER REVENUE $10

2014-15
CURRENT FUNDS
EXPENDITURES
(IN MILLIONS)

- SALARIES & WAGES $53
- BENEFITS $19
- COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS $44
- FOOD CONTRACT $9
- OTHER $40
2015: Earned a four-star rating from Charity Navigator for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency.
The Future of Higher Education
by Michael K. Le Roy

When I leave the college campus to cross the city or the country, I frequently encounter people who want to talk with me about the state of higher education in the United States. I hear deep uncertainty expressed about most social and cultural institutions today, but I am also aware of the growing uncertainty about the state and future of higher education. So it becomes clear that if the friends of Calvin College are to think about its future, we must consider this future in the broader context of higher education. Calvin is a unique place that fully engages a wide range of the academy's robust subjects and spirited discovery, all through the eyes of faith in Jesus Christ. As unique as Calvin is in its mission and its offerings, this Calvin College exists in a higher education space where common challenges confront thousands of other four-year institutions.

So, while this report also offers Calvin-specific updates, I find it fitting to speak into the conversation on the general future of higher education. The public tone on this subject has become loud and shrill in recent years, as colleges and universities have faced a barrage of scrutiny in the face of escalating tuition sticker prices. The media has done an inadequate job of explaining the strengths and weaknesses of higher education today as it lumps many very different institutions together and characterizes them with sweeping generalizations. As a place of high-caliber Christian learning, I believe Calvin College can influence the conversation and perhaps even help to calm our culture's growing higher education hysteria.
To address the sustainability of higher education, I’ll begin by discussing the main claims of higher education hysteria in hopes of helping us discern fact from fiction in the matter. Then, I will break down eight challenges to higher education, each with a respective pathway forward. Third, I will address the unique contribution that private Christian higher education—and Calvin College in particular—offers society today. Finally, I will conclude with my own reasons for optimism about the future of higher education in the U.S., and I’ll invite you to continue the conversation.

**REASONS FOR ALARM?**

What I’m about to address is a hype you’ve probably heard about. The sense of higher education hysteria is a doomsday prophecy about the modern academy. The truth is, this kind of hysteria has roots in legitimate concerns, but these concerns have expanded beyond proportion to mischaracterize the whole sector based on specific cases.

First is the assertion that higher education has lost its purpose and its value. In the book *Academically Adrift,* authors Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa argue colleges and universities have become places where learning is no longer a priority. In their depiction of higher education, the campus party culture has eclipsed the mission of learning.

Considering institutions where learning is still happening, other critics of the American university lament the cultural and social turn toward careerism and the view that education is merely a commodity. The fashionable inclination to measure the value of an education by earning potential is what Andrew Delbanco laments in *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be.* Moreover, he expresses the concern that liberal arts education has now become the province of the wealthy few. This latter point is a legitimate concern, but it is a reflection of stagnant family incomes over the past 15 years as much as anything and it overlooks the extent to which private higher education still provides excellent opportunity for students from the widest variety of family income levels.

Still, others predict the imminent demise of higher education by means of a technological revolution. In fact, Glenn Harlan Reynolds asserts in *The Higher Education Bubble* that colleges and universities are on the verge of economic collapse if they insist on perpetuating a high-priced and outdated education model likely to be overtaken by modern technology.

All three stances have notable bases in fact, with enough supporting evidence both to call into question many colleges and universities that fit these descriptions and to provide fair warning to those institutions that are at risk thanks to these trends. Still, these three major critiques, if taken as a characterization of all higher education, are not supported by the evidence found in private Christian institutions. Likewise, the proponents of this hysteria also evade other positive trends that are emerging or, in many cases, persisting throughout higher education’s longstanding history of cultural, political and social value. While learning in the U.S. academy is weakened by a party culture, is diminished by the view that higher education only exists to change a student’s resume, and will be changed by technological innovation on some campuses, these arguments do not and cannot characterize the full landscape of higher education, now or in the future.

I’ll concede this: No one in higher education believes higher education will be the same in 20 years. However, few of us agree on what it will look like. The literature on those predictions can be divided into “revolutionaries” (some of whom we just met), who believe that higher education is no longer viable and will either collapse or be made obsolete by technology, and “evolutionaries,” who see higher education as stable social institutions that will be buffeted by social, economic and political forces and will adapt to these forces with the passage of time. After reviewing most of this literature and reviewing the evidence, I find myself standing with the latter.

I am persuaded that higher education continues to meet significant social and individual needs. Furthermore, I believe the private, nonprofit version of higher education is the hidden gem in the sector. The educational missions that characterize our country’s more than 700 nonprofit higher education institutions provide an important foundation for identity and worldview formation in our diverse country. And Christian establishments, when true to their promises, put Christ at the center of those pursuits. Notre Dame President Father Hesbergh noted Christian higher education was one of the last places where “all the vital intellectual currents of our time meet in dialogue; where the great issues of the church and the world today are plumbed to their depths; where every sincere inquirer is welcomed and listened to and respected by a serious consideration of what he has to say about his belief or unbelief, his certainty or uncertainty; where differences of culture and religion and conviction can co-exist with friendship, civility, hospitality, respect and love; a place where the endless conversation is harbored and not foreclosed.”

In the midst of the contemporary obsession with rankings and measures of all that we do, we might be tempted to forget that educating the next generation of learners and leaders is a noble calling, and that service at a place like Calvin College is a great privilege. How do we focus on that privilege and live into our mission in the midst of a growing hysteria over the fate of
higher education? We can begin by putting this hysteria in perspective as we learn from lessons of the past.

HYSTERIA IN PERSPECTIVE

Forty years ago, publishers were touting new books such as Academy in Anarchy, Academics in Retreat, Destruction of a College President, The Fall of the American University and—no, not its sequel—Death of the American University. Since these foreboding texts were penned in the 1970s, scholar Robert Zemsky notes undergraduate enrollments have increased from 8.5 million to nearly 20.5 million, the size of the American professoriate has nearly tripled, the number of Americans with earned doctorates has quadrupled and the proportion of 25–29 year olds with bachelor’s degrees has quadrupled. Does graduate quantity alone determine the wealth of higher education? Certainly not. But, at the very least, it speaks to the vitality and societal place of higher education? Certainly not. But, at the very least, it speaks to the vitality and societal place of higher education?

A few years ago, I participated in an education program at Harvard University and read a case study of a struggling college from the 19th century developed by Arthur Levine and Joseph P. Zolner. Despite a legacy of academic excellence, this college was experiencing significant enrollment fluctuation. The school’s fiscal position had worsened, and endowment was used to cover operating losses. The school’s ninth leader, Jeremiah Day, began his presidency during a period of substantial change. The U.S. economy was turbulent and uncertain. New technologies were burgeoning. Old industries were troubled. The national demographic picture was in flux. The number of young people was decreasing, and the number of elderly was in ascent. The population was moving west and south. Large numbers of immigrants were entering the country. Civic involvement was declining. The emphasis in Washington, D.C., was on shrinking the size and influence of the federal government.

Within higher education, times were equally difficult. The number of traditional college-age students was declining. Post-secondary institutions were dealing with new financial pressures, and an era of enrollment and resource growth appeared to be over. There was growing uncertainty about the utility and value of a liberal arts (classical) education. In increasing numbers, students were opting for more vocational courses of study. In response to heightened competition from non-collegiate institutions and technical schools, colleges were aggressively pursuing new markets by attempting to attract students from nontraditional populations. College costs were thought to be excessive, eroding public confidence in the higher education enterprise. The state legislature had conducted a review of all higher education institutions in the state and found this college wanting. The legislative consensus was that educational quality had slipped and costs had risen too much. The state legislature pronounced that the college’s curriculum was poorly matched to the “business of the day” and took the college to task for delivering too much liberal arts and not enough career preparation.

This case study reminded me that as much as the world changes, many of the challenges remain the same. In the midst of uncertainty, this college—now Yale University—not only survived but thrived, rising to the top of American institutions in many areas. The hysteria waned as Yale passed the test of holding on—albeit innovating and reforming—through the challenges.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

It may appear that my perspective—that change in higher education is likely to be “evolutionary” rather than “revolutionary”—dispenses serious concerns and objections about higher education. This couldn’t be further from the truth. There are serious challenges that keep me awake at night. With a proper dose of perspective and humility, I would like to underscore that higher education does have significant challenges, but remind us that we are not the first generation to discover them. As I describe these challenges I will also suggest the current ways that Calvin is rising up to meet them.

Will there be students?

For Calvin, our first challenge to maintaining current enrollment at capacity lies in our geographic location. Just as Yale experienced in the 1820s, the primary growth in college-bound populations are occurring in the west and south. The number of high school graduates in Michigan is declining as Midwest birth rates decline and is not expected to level off until the middle of next decade. Colleges that remain focused on recruiting close to home need to be highly competitive, continue to develop a strong reputation and be prepared to recruit outside this region. Success in recruitment will require a clear mission, strong performance and investment in the expansion of our primary recruiting region—all features of our current recruitment strategy.
Is there a future for the liberal arts?
Liberal arts majors as a whole are currently experiencing enrollment decline. Fifty years ago, 14 percent of those graduating from college majored in the humanities, whereas only seven percent of today’s graduates come from these programs. Still, majors are not the only indicator of the health of the liberal arts, as most majors outside the humanities benefit from learning in the liberal arts. The value of the liberal arts for all Calvin students is that they develop the knowledge, skills and Christian virtues associated with a common core education. In addition, Calvin students are challenged to cultivate an integrated moral and spiritual life that most of the rest of higher education left behind decades ago.

While the power of economic instrumentalism in the culture will change liberal arts institutions, I am witnessing the adaptation of liberal arts education to our current circumstances. Students and parents need to be reminded of Harvard University President Drew Faust’s observation that “many of today’s students will hold jobs that have not yet been invented, deploying skills not yet defined. We not only need to equip them with the ability to answer the questions relevant to the world we now inhabit; we must also enable them to ask the right questions to shape the world to come. We need education that nurtures judgment as well as mastery, ethics and values as well as analysis. We need learning that will enable students to interpret complexity, to adapt and to make sense of lives they never anticipated. We need a way of teaching that encourages them to develop understanding of those different from themselves, enabling constructive collaborations across national and cultural origins and identities.” This is what the liberal arts teach, and our social need for leaders steeped in this education is not likely to dissipate.

Is college still worth it?
Drawing on anecdotes or even personal experience with post-degree unemployment or underemployment, many in the media cast doubt on college’s enduring value. To be sure, the Great Recession was hard on the young in our country, but college graduates in general, and Calvin graduates in particular, had far lower unemployment, significantly higher incomes than non-college graduates. Beyond the economic benefits, it is also clear that higher educational attainment also offers significant general benefits. Gallup is currently conducting a study on the concept of well-being, based on the subcategories of career, social, financial, physical and community well-being. In fact, these are key elements that lead into human flourishing and key areas built up by a liberal arts curriculum. In its extensive research, Gallup has found that the single most significant predictor of well-being across each of these areas is the completion of a four-year degree. To me, this alone demonstrates that college is well worth it.

Can students afford it?
Stagnating middle class incomes, the perception of mounting student debt load and rising sticker prices for tuition in higher education lead many parents to wonder about the feasibility of a college degree. Over the past 15 years, family incomes for all but the top 20 percent of Americans have stagnated. Unbeknownst to most, the higher education market has had to respond to this trend. According to the College Board’s annual pricing study of private nonprofit higher education, the net price of higher education—that is, tuition and room/board minus financial aid—has remained flat between 2005 and 2015. What has been true nationally has also been true at Calvin during this period. In addition, Calvin continues to enroll and graduate students from every income category in substantial numbers thanks to our strong program of merit- and need-based aid.

Will government support higher education?
In the United States, students benefit from an excellent public funding model. The federal government supports the education of students directly rather than giving money to colleges and universities. Students then have the freedom to choose an education that suits their passions, interests and worldview convictions. This blending of individual and common good represents a genius that is unique, but it is apparent that government at all levels is increasingly reticent about supporting public good through the pathway of higher education. Moreover, some even question the validity of allowing government resources to support a student’s education at a faith-based college. Federal and state appropriations for private undergraduate institutions have decreased in recent years at the same time that federal compliance requirements, and thereby associated costs, have increased. I spend a portion of my time with legislators at the state and federal level to remind them of this investment in future generations. You can help us by doing the same when you meet your representatives.

The single most significant predictor of well-being is the completion of a four-year degree. To me, this alone demonstrates that college is well worth it.
Indeed, the academy, with its mission to advance and sustain human learning so foundational to civilization, has demonstrated its capacity to endure across centuries.

Is there a sustainable business model?
The business model for private higher education contradicts the conventional wisdom of business and economics in two confounding ways:

1. Competition leads to higher prices
   In most markets, increased competition leads to decreased prices. But private higher education is bound by an opposing principle. This is, of course, because the things that give a college a competitive edge are the very things that cost the most money, including services, facilities, technology and the personal attention of faculty.

2. The dilemma of high price, high aid
   Private higher education institutions tend to offer a high sticker price but include high levels of financial aid, while public higher education operates on a low-cost, low-aid model with high government subsidies. Every instance of a tuition increase at Calvin is always accompanied by a corresponding increase in financial aid for students. Students and parents like to tout a large financial package and perceive that a higher cost tuition is associated with greater value. This so-called Chivas Regal effect also leads many to associate a lower tuition price with a lower level of quality.

I know, this is maddening to me, too. If it were up to me, and if collusion were legal, I would gather all higher education leaders together in an effort to reduce our published tuition prices simultaneously. Since that is not an option, we continue to focus on affordability, scrutinize our costs, adapt aid to the current economy and evaluate opportunities to escape this cycle.

When will technology disrupt?
Since 1994 when I entered higher education, I have heard about the end of brick-and-mortar colleges and universities as we know them. And in some ways since then technology has disrupted the higher education landscape, largely by opening up new degree opportunities for adult learners using new technologies. Pedagogy inside and outside the classroom has also been transformed for many disciplines thanks to technological innovation. But the end of brick-and-mortar colleges has not yet happened—if it ever will—for the majority of 18- to 24-year-old college students. Parents don’t seem to want 19-year-olds living in the basement earning an online degree. Students don’t appear to want that either. The residential college experience is still highly desirable. Of course, we must be ready for change and open to innovative learning, and yet we need not wholly reinvent an education model of proven success. We look at evolutionary changes rather than a revolutionary upending.

Can we compete?
The threats to a college such as Calvin abound. Private colleges don’t have the safety net provided by state governments, nor can we predict what might cause demand to shift. We’re faced with the following reality: We know higher education will be different in 20 years, but to what degree? And if the shift is radical, will we be ready? I believe this emerging competition will make Calvin College stronger, though it might marginalize some private institutions, namely expensive colleges without a distinctive mission, and those colleges with low enrollment and high discount rates. Both of these models are unsustainable in the long-term.

Through these challenges, I am confident education will persist, adapt and endure. Clark Kerr, a president of the University of California who served in his post for more than 40 years, reminds us that “about 85 institutions in the Western world established by 1520 still exist in recognizable forms, with similar functions and with unbroken histories, including the Catholic church, a few parliaments, several Swiss cantons and 70 universities.” Indeed, the academy, with its mission to advance and sustain human learning so foundational to civilization, has demonstrated its capacity to endure across centuries.

UNQUANTIFIABLE VALUE
In 1820, a man by the name of Alexis de Tocqueville came to America to try to understand whether it was possible to have a nation founded on the principle of liberty. In the wake of the French revolution, he worried liberty would descend into a selfishness that would leave only a nation of narcissists atomized and disconnected from each other. “Nothing is more wonderful than the art of being free,” he once reflected, “but nothing is harder to learn how to use than freedom.”

When de Tocqueville came to America he could not comprehend how a society could believe in human freedom and human depravity at the same time. Instead, he found a nation where individual freedom was constrained by educated civic leaders who could restrain their passions. The ingredients to this restraint were the civic institutions in communities such as schools, colleges and churches that modeled and instructed its members to balance the tension between self-interest and the common good. And this became his understanding of the
foundation to a free society: “Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith.”

There are many great things that commend the liberal arts taught in a Christian context, but de Tocqueville’s lesson might be one of the greatest. We still believe in the paradox of sin and grace and teach that the reality of sin and misery is formidable, that we are set free from all our sins and misery through Jesus Christ, and we thank God for this deliverance. The way we give thanks is leading students to know their subject well, and by teaching students the virtues of humility, self-control and love of neighbor. There are few places left in society where a professor sits down with a student and says, “You are a bright and capable student, but this exam didn’t go very well for you. What’s going on?” Conversations like this one happen here at Calvin College. It might appear that these are conversations about grades, but these are character formation conversations. These are daily conversations about sin and grace, and whether a student is an engineer, accountant, artist or philosopher, these are the conversations that leave the mark of Calvin—and we pray, the mark of Christ—on every graduate.

These conversations take time. To have them, faculty must know their students and come to understand their strengths and weaknesses. An education with this level of attentiveness and depth has a cost. It comes with a price some may not be willing to sacrifice for, but I am convinced that students and parents will continue to seek it out. And when they do, Calvin College needs to be found worthy of the honor of educating the next generation.