



**Natalie Cleary**  
**President of Student Senate**  
**Fall Convocation**  
**Friday, August 26, 2011**

Let me first start by saying WELCOME! It is my pleasure to welcome the class of 2015 to Grand Valley!

I want to first thank board chair, Noreen Myers and the rest of the board of trustees for their dedication to our university. I also want to thank President Haas, Provost Davis, and the entire senior management team for their commitment to making this university one we can all be proud to be a part of.

I am honored to serve as president of your Student Senate this year.

Today, as I look out at the newest class of Lakers, I couldn't be more excited for what your future holds!

Right now you are standing in the doorway to the next chapter of your life. Here at Grand Valley you will meet new people, experience new challenges, and be exposed to new opportunities.

If there's one thing I want you to remember from me today, it's: "Leave the door open".

I mean that first in the literal sense. When you go back to your living center today and you're sitting in your room, leave the door open.

Some of you may be living with a complete stranger, who might become your best friend. Some of you might be living with your best friend, who might become a complete stranger!

Either way, you're all new to Grand Valley and you all have the opportunity to make so many new friends. By leaving the door open to your room, you'll encourage new people to stop by and say "hello" and introduce themselves. Stop in and introduce yourself when your neighbor has the door open!

There are a lot of ways to start getting to know new people. Tonight go to Late Night at Kleiner and ask your neighbors to join you! Get to class a few minutes early and say "hi" to the person sitting next to you.

I'm also talking about leaving your door open in a metaphorical sense, too. You are leaving much of the familiar... your home... your community. You should leave yourself open to the new ideas, customs, religions and viewpoints you'll find here on our diverse campus!

That doesn't mean you'll reject all that you know... even though that could be your parents' biggest fear! You won't. You'll just expose yourself to the new... consider... and become an independent, critical thinker.

You are now a member of our great Laker community. Be open to experiences on campus and off that will educate and shape you.

Leave the door open to new career paths.

I have had about 10 majors since freshman year. I've been a business major, international relations, education, English and pre-med. How many of you are pre-med? ... So was I for about five days. Now I'm starting senior year and will be graduating in April with a degree in political science. So if you have a major in mind, or if you have no idea what you want to study, keep an open mind and don't be afraid to explore new disciplines.

I have taken classes I thought I would not like, and have ended up loving them. That's the beauty of a liberal education and the philosophy at Grand Valley. You are learning how to learn, in the classic sense. It is a privilege to be taught by Grand Valley's faculty. These are people who are dedicating their lives to working with you and me... students who are fortunate enough to be able to be pursuing a college degree.

Four years ago, I sat where are. I was involved in high school and wondered what I would do at Grand Valley to belong... to something.... To make this big community seem a bit smaller. I joined Student Senate. I also took a job in the Office of Student Life. Both of those opportunities have changed my whole experience at Grand Valley.

Eventually, I joined other organizations on campus as well. I found people and avenues that made me grow and become part of this great community we are welcoming you into today.

There are close to 350 student organizations here. There is something for you. Find your place. If you're not a "joiner" of formal groups, there are always informal groups... in your living centers, in your classes... the point is, find a way to connect.

Professors will help you connect; advisors will help you connect. You'll be invited to take part in MapWorks – Making Achievement Possible. Grand Valley really will support you in your academic work. Keep the door open to help if you need it!

Watch for other invitations as well: the first football game is next Thursday night... watch for Family Weekend, Homecoming, Sibs and Kids – there's plenty of time to see your family! There's Laker Weekends, Battle of the Valleys, Presidents' Ball, speakers, comedians and church services. We have it all here! And we are so glad you chose to join us!

Keep your doors open, and know that my door is always open to you. Welcome to Grand Valley and Go Lakers!