

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY: The Grand Valley Advantage (Teaching, Learning, Connecting)

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September 2015



Highlights

The 2014-2015 academic year is in the books. From many respects, we were able to continue the momentum of the years past and look ahead as I start my 10th year as your president.

The past year was highlighted by the completion of our 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. It sets Grand Valley State University apart from others with our intentional focus on student success. Many universities and colleges across the nation embrace this concept, but at Grand Valley we breathe it every day with every student. I am proud of the work done by Julie Guevara and her committee, and the hundreds of participants in this process. Our governance structures added value and our Board of Trustees has endorsed it. Now, the plans from colleges, divisions and units will be refreshed and aligned with the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. We must commit to planning, measuring our results and being accountable.

Another highlight, given our understanding of the fundamental challenges to public higher education institutions, was asking Lynn (Chick) Blue to be the first Vice President for Enrollment Development. Chick knows that each student will be treated individually from his/her first encounter at Grand Valley to after he/she walks across the stage with a degree. We must commit to retention.

A third highlight for me was hiring our Vice President for Inclusion and Equity, Jesse Bernal. He came from California in the dead of winter and provided the warmth of his personality and the fire of his passion for inclusion and equity. We must commit to diversity as an intellectual asset.

Having Chick and Jesse come aboard caused me to rethink how I engage with my Senior Management Team — the group of university officers who have operational responsibility for the university. I concluded that it would be good to expand the purview of the SMT to regularly discuss facilities and human resources because these matters permeate

so much of what we do every day. I have invited James Moyer and Scott Richardson to join what I now call the President's Cabinet; they will retain their current titles and responsibilities while bringing their significant experience to our operational discussions. Scott and James, congratulations and thanks for all you do.

There are many other highlights for students, and faculty and staff achievements within our divisions. Here are a few examples:

As part of an overall review of faculty workload and evaluation process, Faculty Senate established a fair university-wide process and instrument for students' evaluation of their courses — a project that was many years in the making and required skillful leadership in the senate. The academic programs have made progress in incorporating significant international content in their majors to continue to supply students with a relevant and current global education. Gayle Davis and Karen Gibson's collective leadership, through shared governance model, continues to contribute and enable our core business.

Our efforts in student affairs enable students to connect with each other and become Lakers for a Lifetime. Bart Merkle, Andy Beachnau, Troy Farley and their staffs accomplish so much and are critical to retention.

There are a myriad of activities for students, demonstrated by 360,000 visits to the Campus Recreation Center, or the 1,000 club sport participants. Our internship program is the best in the state with 7,000-plus appointments.

Despite the downturn in the number of high school graduates, Grand Valley has received a record number of applications from prospective first-year students. More than 19,500 FTIAC applications were received and processed for the fall 2015 semester.

Grand Valley has become a "Success College" in the Phoenix Pact program of North Lawndale College Prep, a public charter school in Chicago. Chick Blue, Jodi Chycinski, Michelle Rhodes, Sherill Soman and their staffs are due the credit.

Our student athletes and coaches continue to be conference and national leaders. Grand Valley has been awarded the GLIAC Conference all-sports Presidents' Cup for the 17th consecutive year and the 10th (in 12 years) national all-sports Division II Learfield Sports Directors' Cup. Athletic Director Tim Selgo is the top in his field, the best AD in the United States.

Grand Valley has opened the new bookstore and marketplace complete with an Apple store. The P. Douglas Kindschi Hall of Science, a building that we will all be proud of, is operational. We also have completed expansion of dining options on north campus, nearly completed a dining expansion in Kirkhof Center, and have started construction of additional housing and honors classrooms. Grand Valley has received a stable outlook and an A+ rating from Standard & Poor's, noteworthy in the economic environment and challenges facing higher education. Jim

Bachmeier and his entire staff continue to enable our mission in creating the learning environment for the relevant programming important for current and future generations of students.

Grand Valley is first in the nation to receive Charter School accreditation by AdvancEd. The university continues its Enterprise Risk Management process to evaluate and prioritize risk. The university has upheld its academic integrity by successfully defending legal challenges regarding academic dishonesty and academic standards in admissions. Institutional integrity is our collective fiduciary responsibility; Tom Butcher, thanks for continuing to remind us of this.

Institutional Marketing has received peer-reviewed awards for the current “Find Yourself Within” campaign, for graphic design and for web presence. University Communications’ video production, sports broadcasts and webcasts are the standard against which other schools measure themselves. Our public television and radio ratings are at an all-time high, in terms of viewership and listenership. WGVU is supporting a new K-12 classroom education initiative by partnering with PBS and our College of Education.

The governor and legislature again recognized Grand Valley as the state’s best performing public university. While the incremental funding increase was modest (but welcome), the confirmation, by state government, of Grand Valley’s high quality is of significant value to the university’s image, an outcome that helps drive enrollment and positive news coverage. I want to thank Matt McLogan and his staff for these accomplishments.

Karen Loth and her staff have had a remarkable year. This year, more than \$16 million in private gifts was given for scholarships, capital projects and academic programs from 15,615 donors supporting the university. Alumni giving saw an increase in both donors and dollars, faculty/staff giving is at 54 percent, and retiree and parent giving also increased. The number of private scholarships is now at a record high of 400; total membership in the Gillett Society (those who have included Grand Valley in their estate plans) is 335; and lead gifts are being secured for priorities of the university. The 2015 Enrichment Dinner celebrated generations of many supporters of Grand Valley who are shaping the future for our students and communities through their gifts.

Disability Support Resources has had a very successful year with increased services to students, faculty and staff members. In Inclusion and Equity, Theresa Rowland has been appointed as GVSU’s first full-time Title IX Coordinator. In her role, Theresa has led enhanced efforts to eliminate sexual violence on campus through policy, awareness and education. University-wide training to support gender equity and Title IX efforts will be available this fall. In late fall, the university will conduct its fifth campus climate assessment. We want to hear from you: What’s going right and what do we need to improve?

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Everyone's voice matters. I particularly want to thank Wendy Wenner for helping maintain the division during this past year of change and transitions. Jesse Bernal and everyone in the division will guide actions to create an even more welcoming and inclusive living, learning and working environment.

Pat Waring is an extraordinary advocate for the university in her community relations activities and when representing Grand Valley to the west side and Grand Rapids communities. Her reach now extends to Muskegon and Detroit campuses. In addition, she is regarded as the resource for the campus on protocol for those planning Grand Valley events. The 2015 Fall Arts Celebration is coordinated by the Office of the President with assistance from faculty and staff members. This year's schedule includes distinguished lecturer Kip Thorne, the most influential scientist of our era and consultant to the movies "Interstellar" and "Contact." Teri Losey gives of herself to this effort and her leadership to our Board of Trustees as the consummate Board Secretary. She is recognized nationally for her work in this area.

A Look Ahead

Now take a look ahead with me. Challenged by our board to describe what differentiates Grand Valley from others, I asked our Senior Management Team to answer, "What is GV magic?" (from Tom Butcher); and asked University Development to make the case for current and future investments to desirable donors on their support for our students and our university.

"The Grand Valley Advantage ... Why Grand Valley?" (Teaching, Learning, Connecting ... TLC).

The Grand Valley Advantage

The simple answer is that we are Michigan's most student-centered university, committed to teaching and learning, and graduating an exceptional talent base for Michigan. Our laser focus on students results in a distinct advantage, which brings tangible benefits to everyone.

For our students ... Grand Valley is the very best learning environment ... personal, caring challenging and transformational.

For our community ... Grand Valley is the consummate partner, graduating exceptional alumni, in the areas of highest need, and extending a hand to help our communities thrive.

For our donors and investors ... Grand Valley delivers, consistently performing at the highest levels, while knowing how to stretch a dollar.

That is the essence of the Grand Valley Advantage.

What is the Grand Valley Advantage?

Universities are complex systems in which many objectives can be accomplished and many paths followed. We believe that the best research and scholarship is done in a holistic environment in which undergraduate and graduate-level research is interwoven with student learning. By committing to this holistic model and narrowing our strategic focus intentionally to student success, we are recognized as a national model for excellence in teaching and learning.

For students, the Grand Valley experience remains that of a “big university with a small college feel,” where we provide students with personalized attention and customized services, while maintaining an enrollment of 24,000-26,000. Because we have the academic resources of a large university and a commitment to individual student success, Grand Valley’s learning experience is personal, challenging and transformational.

For the region, state and communities we serve, Grand Valley is seen as an economic engine and an ongoing resource for exceptional young leadership and talent to fill the employment pipeline for today and tomorrow.

Why does it matter?

In his book “Good to Great,” Jim Collins describes the “flywheel effect” as that one point of focus in an organization that drives momentum and success. Teaching and learning excellence is the “flywheel” that drives our contribution to West Michigan, our state and our world. We have been committed to the four “Rs” of effective teaching and learning — relevance, rigor, relationships and return on investment — for decades. The outcome of this intense commitment is evident in the momentum at Grand Valley today.

They start. Talented and committed high school students are increasingly attracted to universities that put them at the center and provide them with the best learning environment and the best teachers in their fields. Grand Valley’s academic profile for entering first-year students continues to rank among the highest in Michigan. Our typical first year student’s GPA is 3.5, with ACT scores competitive with Michigan State University and Michigan Technological University. Grand Valley welcomes students of all backgrounds, taking into account both a prospective student’s academic abilities and personal attributes that we know are markers for success in higher education. More and more of these high-achieving students are citing Grand Valley as their first choice and applications to Grand Valley set new records each year. In fact, Grand Valley has a 62.5 percent increase in enrollment in the past 15 years, the highest increase among public universities in the state.

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They stay. Students respond extremely well to innovative and outstanding teaching, leading them to explore new directions, find their niches, and develop competencies and skills for life and productive careers. Their many talents emerge under the personalized attention and services they receive from faculty and staff members; this results in retention and graduation rates that are among the highest of Michigan's public universities.

They succeed. Working side-by-side with faculty members, these motivated students bring an abundance of intellectual resources to our community and provide countless hours of service both in West Michigan and in their hometowns. One measure of student success is the pass rates for professional licensure and certification examinations. Grand Valley graduates regularly exceed the national benchmarks for these tests with pass rates from 90 to 100 percent, often on their first attempt.

When they graduate, these promising young professionals who have been held to the highest standards of excellence in their studies, become the most gifted leaders for our communities and our organizations. Ninety percent of Grand Valley students are employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation and 86 percent of them stay in Michigan to contribute to our region and our state.

Grand Valley alumni are lifelong learners with the perspective of global citizens and they are rapidly taking their place as leaders for our region, our state and beyond. Their success inspires the next generation of young leaders to become Grand Valley students. This year Grand Valley hit another milestone as the alumni base grew to 100,000 graduates. The majority of Grand Valley alumni remain in Michigan to actively help build our state. Nearly half of them graduated in the past 10 years and are beginning to take their place as leaders in our communities.

How do we define success?

Grand Valley is committed to providing an exceptional return on investment for all of our stakeholders, and to being transparent with our progress. We are continually monitoring our success based on performance metrics that are published annually in the Accountability Report. The state of Michigan and national ranking systems consistently rate Grand Valley as the highest performing public university in Michigan, and as one of the highest performing universities of our kind in the country.

Among the metrics that we use to measure success are the following:

- Graduation rate ... third highest in Michigan at 70 percent
- Enrollment ... fastest growing in Michigan with 62.5 percent growth in the past 15 years
- Student debt ... of those graduating in four years, 33 percent have no debt

- Degrees awarded ... second highest growth in degrees awarded with a 24 percent increase in the past 15 years, including STEM fields and health professions
- Talent engine ... nearly 90 percent of our most recent graduates are working in Michigan or attending graduate school in the state
- Economic engine ... \$730 million and 10,707 jobs in West Michigan alone.

How do we do it?

Grand Valley's student-centered model is infused with the ethos of the community that founded it, and remains true to West Michigan inspired values and the intentions of our entrepreneurial founders.

Excellence. Nothing but the best is good enough for West Michigan and Grand Valley reflects that overall drive for excellence in all we do.

Integrity. As a university we teach and value honesty, fairness and openness. Our word is our bond with students and with the communities we serve.

Inquiry. Initiated by our founding leaders, Grand Valley continues its long history of encompassing liberal education and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge to improve the human condition and our students' understanding of the world. This approach to a well-rounded education has never been more important as we prepare students for an increasingly complex, changing and interrelated global economy. Students and faculty members work closely together to advance scholarship and knowledge in their fields and curious minds are cultivated and recognized in an intellectually stimulating environment. Beyond their field of study, students are asked to think deeply about overarching societal needs such as sustainability and ethics, and gather knowledge about skills that transcend all fields such as macro data analytics and entrepreneurship. Design Thinking enables the best in inquiry.

Inclusiveness. We recognize the changing demographics of students and the world they will serve. Therefore, we are dedicated to anticipating, adapting and meeting the needs of emerging constituent groups, engaging and supporting them as members of our community. We are also dedicated to ensuring that every undergraduate and graduate student at Grand Valley goes into the world with excellent cultural competencies and a global perspective.

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Community. We were created by the West Michigan community and have always been mindful of our role and responsibility to collaborate and serve within it, contributing both resources and inspiration. This commitment is central to the learning experience of our students as they strive to shape their communities after graduation. When Grand Valley can partner with community members to enhance the quality of life in our region and our state, we will be there, and so will our students.

Sustainability. It is no small task to be unfailingly student-centered and

provide an innovative and excellent learning environment, while keeping tuition in check and sustaining day-to-day operations. True to our West Michigan roots, we pride ourselves on being excellent stewards of the resources entrusted to us and strive to be as efficient and effective as possible in all we do so that we may deliver on our promise to students.

Innovation. We were founded by entrepreneurs and proudly retain the spirit of innovation in all things. We foster a culture that encourages new ideas, creativity in all its forms, and novel approaches to answering the most important and challenging questions of our time and those we may face tomorrow. Innovation at Grand Valley is a constant search for ways to better prepare our students for the future.

What's next?

The model for higher education is poised for a revolution and we will be at the forefront of thoughtful and intentional innovation in teaching and learning. Remaining student-centered and true to our values in this period of tremendous change will require the time and resources to experiment with new programs, technology and ideas while staying conscious of our students' increasing need for easier financial access to the Grand Valley learning experience.

Our strategic plan calls for the following:

- Commitment to attracting the best and brightest students through a rigorous and challenging curriculum that is constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of employers, the workplace and the world.
- Increased scholarships and financial aid to expand access to a Grand Valley education to all qualified students.
- Innovation in our use of state-of-the-art instructional method and technologies.
- Increased community-based learning and civic engagement opportunities for students, faculty and staff.
- Increased attention to the needs of first-generation and non-traditional students.
- Continued innovation in expediting students' time to graduation, including incentives such as our Grand Finish tuition discount.
- Increased outreach to the communities we serve through community-based student learning experiences and faculty and staff engagement.

In summary, it is all about connecting and caring.

What do we need?

To contain tuition increases and remain one of the nation's best college values, with no change foreseen in state funding, private funds are continuously needed. These funds create the additional resources necessary for innovation and improvements in how we teach students, and in the learning environments we create for them.

Our ability to achieve our full potential as a university is dependent on growth in the following areas that private funds support.

- Scholarships. Creating more scholarships to help us balance the cost of innovation with the price of tuition and giving all students equal access to Grand Valley's exceptional teaching and learning environment.
- Capital Investment. Expanding our programs to fill the highest needs in the communities we serve and providing enough physical space to accommodate student demand for these majors.
- Academic and program support. Enhancing programs to meet the evolving knowledge and skills needed by our graduates in a changing world. Examples include:
 - Assistance with the ever-increasing cost of instructional technology to keep up with learning innovations;
 - Attracting and retaining outstanding faculty members who are both experts in their fields and dedicated to teaching;
 - Providing more high impact, experiential learning opportunities within our programs and curriculum that foster learning at a deeper level, maintain program relevance to current and future market needs, and better prepare students to take their place in the world.

Conclusion

We are Michigan's model public university expressly and primarily dedicated to student success. Because of our intentional and strategic focus in this area, we are becoming well-known for teaching and learning excellence. We remain committed to our historic mission and core values, which are deeply embedded in our history and our roots in West Michigan. Because student success is the "flywheel" for our contribution to our communities, we will perpetuate our value well into the future. We will grow into our potential as one of our region's and our state's best assets. We are all in this together. And we will accomplish all of this and more because we are Grand Valley State University and this is a magical place. We have the Advantage ... TLC.

