

ACHIEVING:

# Getting it Done

by Thomas J. Haas, President

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Allendale, Michigan

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# Introduction

In gathering for our time together this morning, most of us got here by walking from our respective offices. In my case, driving was very helpful. (Have you seen the fence around the empty, impregnable Zumberge Hall?)

In any event, being here on this beautiful summer day reminds me of the official motto of the State of Michigan: if you seek a beautiful peninsula, look about you. Today, on this spectacular campus, permit me to paraphrase — if you seek our state's most beautiful university, look about you.

The ravines, woodlands, landscaping, and natural beauty of our Grand Valley home have been enhanced by the new Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons. The soaring architecture of this unique building enhances its function and reinforces the view that learning and study, our students, are the center of our universe.

To Kate Pew Wolters, business leader of the year and trustee extraordinaire, who with her family made this building possible, thank you!

Today we start a new academic year. I've come to especially appreciate this first day because it offers the opportunity to reflect on our successes and to look forward together.



## Best in Class Performance

Last year, more than a decade of state budget cutting came to an end.

And while the money taken away has not been restored, some new funding has trickled in. By awarding these funds, state policy makers developed an allocation model built around institutional improvement, performance and achievement.

How'd we do? Well, this year Grand Valley received the largest percentage increase awarded to any campus. While the dollars were small, the point made was big.

This was in recognition of our Best in Class performance: academic quality, efficient administration, the strength of our financial aid program, our superior retention and graduation rates, and our below-average tuition were recognized and rewarded. Of course, it is the skill of our faculty and staff members and the success of our students that make us Best in Class. Others are recognizing Grand Valley as well with the announcement from the Princeton Review naming us one of the *Best in the Midwest*. And so, to all of you, please accept my thanks and my admiration for jobs well done. I am proud to be your colleague.

In the last few weeks — just in time for fall semester — we've opened two significant enhancements to our facilities: the library and the L. William Seidman Center in Grand Rapids, home to the Seidman College of Business. I think I can safely say that no other campus in Michigan has comparable structures. Jim Bachmeier, James Moyer, and their colleagues are due special thanks for jobs well done. I need to also thank our dean of libraries, Lee Van Orsdel, for her leadership.

We continue to invest in our future. We've broken ground for a new laboratory science building in Allendale, which will, when it opens in 2015, allow us to increase capacity in high-demand STEM-H programs. And, for the first time in a decade, we're receiving state capital outlay assistance to pay for part of this new building.

We've started new academic programs in speech language pathology and public health. And we maintain our emphasis on liberal education as most of the skills demanded in the workforce and required by employers are found there.

Our campuses are more diverse than at any time since the passage of Proposal 2. Our Admissions team members, supported by Jeanne Arnold's Inclusion and Equity staff, are elemental to this success.

While Grand Valley was named *Best in the Midwest* by the Princeton Review, and again, we were designated one of *America's 100 Best College Buys* — the only Michigan school on the list.

Enrollment has held steady by design. In 2012 we received a record number of applications and enrolled a record number of first-year students. Chick, Jodi, Michelle and their staffs deserve our recognition.

We successfully raised the funds needed to expand the Annis Water Resources Institute in Muskegon, part of \$10.3 million received last year from donors who support our endowment, scholarships and annual operations.

We've opened an outreach center in Detroit, our state's largest city and hub of the region that last year produced nearly 40 percent of our freshman class.



Our library faculty and staff members were the recipients of an Excellence in Academic Libraries Award from the Association of College and Research Libraries

The Charter Schools Office's efforts in closing the achievement gap led to Grand Valley being the number one authorizer in the state.

Grand Valley State University is home to the first W.K. Kellogg Community Philanthropy Chair in the nation.

Many faculty members continue to excel in the classroom and in their scholarship and research. I enjoy reading the myriad of sabbatical reports. Dr. Sylvia Mupepi, of the Kirkhof College of Nursing, has been selected for a Fulbright Award to Ghana for this academic year. The competition for a Fulbright is intense and all of us at Grand Valley share in the pride of her appointment and the other Fulbrights from Grand Valley. Last year, Grand Valley was top in our peer group for Fulbrights in the nation.

And our students excel and then go on to distinguish themselves. A top student in trumpet performance, Hunter Eberly, was named principal trumpeter in the Detroit Symphony. There are many others and I am proud of each of them.

## Relevance

It is critical for higher education institutions to act with integrity in carrying out their respective missions. Two years ago, I initiated some restructuring with an eye toward the integrity of the university, which is why I reorganized risk management, compliance and legal affairs under one umbrella. This has caused us to initiate Enterprise Risk Management across the university and to examine our reputational and legal risks more intentionally and proactively. From what I have seen and heard, I am very pleased with both the quality and the integrity of Grand Valley.

In short, we have been following my old Coast Guard mantra: do the best you can with what you have. And we have been doing really, really well. We are getting it done.

But we cannot pause. The road ahead is likely to be rough, and I don't mean just because of the condition of Michigan's highways. Maybe I should stick to the Coast Guard metaphor of rough seas, as we are, after all, Lakers. Rather, we face new challenges in higher education. The value of a degree is in question and our relevance in producing them is being debated. We must anticipate them, and manage for continued success. We will again adapt.

It may not seem possible, but we are nearing the end of the Five Year Plan that was put in place in 2010. Julie Guevara, associate vice president for Academic Affairs, is our captain and she is already at work on the elements for 2015 and beyond. Each member of the Grand Valley family — faculty and staff members — will be part of the process as we set the course for the rest of this decade. We will also have the voices of our Board of Trustees, students, donors, alumni and others in the community at the table. This will be our template, and inform our decisions, in order that we manage what we can control, so that we are better able to deal with events we cannot control.

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First, and I've already touched on it, no public university in Michigan is as enrollment-dependent as Grand Valley. Grand Valley receives the least amount of per-student funding in Michigan, and nearly the lowest in the nation. Steady enrollment is essential to our financial model. And also to our collective presence here: stable enrollment and stability in campus employment are one in the same.

Ninety-four percent of our students come from Michigan, and Michigan is producing fewer high school graduates. In a result that should surprise no one, the higher education market in Michigan is intensely competitive, no more so than right here in West Michigan.

Therefore we must promise what we can deliver and deliver what we promise. Students will vote with their feet if we fail to meet expectations. Enrollment is job one, and it must be on everyone's radar. Grand Valley is providing the best faculty and staff members and facilities. We have a pool of students who are also talented and among the best in Michigan. We have donors and employers who have confidence in Grand Valley to get it done — shaping our future with talented alumni. Admit. Retain. Graduate. These are the elements of stability.

While high school graduates are fewer, smaller universities need not be the automatic result. That's because not nearly enough Michigan high school graduates are presently choosing college. Our going-to-college rate is a national embarrassment. Many high school graduates can succeed in college but may not be getting enough encouragement to apply.

I've never said that everyone ought to get a four-year degree. But I do think that everyone should do something after high school — be it college, community college, military or civilian service, technical or vocational education. And for those who want to attend a four-year college and meet our qualifications, Grand Valley is ready, willing and able to welcome them, and help them succeed. Our state and nation needs educated citizens.

How do we define success? Here's one way: there are tens of thousands of unfilled jobs in Michigan for which a four-year degree is required. We know that a well-educated population means a more prosperous state. We need to step up our partnerships with students, parents and job providers so that we are all on the same page. College equals prosperity. And we want the next generation to find it at Grand Valley.

## Affordability

Yet I cannot in good conscience talk about attendance without also discussing the cost of attendance.

Michigan's policy makers say that higher education is a priority. But state funding does not match those words.

For most of the 20th century, taxpayer support for higher education was robust, with the state providing up to 75 percent of the cost of operating the universities, with students paying around 25 percent. In the last 25 years, those percentages have reversed, at best. Here at Grand Valley, students pay 85 percent and taxpayers 15 percent.

As the cost of operating the universities has shifted from taxpayers to families, students are forced to fill the gap with loans, work and part-time attendance.

Because Michigan is a low-college-participation state, lawmakers have been able to cut higher education funding without political repercussion. Many seem to have the view that because college graduates will earn a million dollars more in their careers than non-graduates, cost shifting is OK.

I could not disagree more. Such a policy is not just unfair, it is irresponsible and unsustainable. A degree from Grand Valley is a public good with benefits not only for the individual but for vitality of the state.

President Obama has challenged us to drive down the cost of attendance, not least because Americans now hold more college debt than credit card debt. That's the unsustainable part.

And the president has leverage because the federal government controls student loans.

For years, the states have been cutting, tuition has been rising and students have been borrowing. It's an insidious cycle and I think its days are numbered. And the president holds the trump card. To those states that keep cutting higher education funding, he has threatened disqualification. When students can't borrow, the system will cease to work.

Let me make this clear: We cannot stand by, waiting for disruption. We must be on offense, not defense. The best way to reduce cost is to support timely progress to graduation. We must accelerate attainment. We even reward it. The number of students eligible for the Grand Finish scholarship has doubled in just one year — meaning that more of our students are completing their degrees in four years. It's worth remembering that 40 percent of our students who complete in four years or less graduate with no debt.

For those students who cannot afford the traditional four-year residential model, we must offer additional alternatives that shorten the time to graduation, because that is the best way to reduce the cost of attendance. Grand Valley has been a pioneer in such efforts, but we need to do more.

We must step up our partnerships with high schools and community colleges. Robust advanced placement with dual enrollment can shave a full year from the journey. That's a cost saving of 25 percent.

Community college attendance for the first year or two produces significant savings. Grand Valley was the first university in Michigan to formalize a 2+2 program, and it remains an important tool. We can then bring in more transfer students. Year-round enrollment is another cost saving technique. Seventy-five percent of Grand Valley's programs can be completed in three years of continuous enrollment.

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I asked the provost to review prerequisites and she and her team eliminated more than 300. We should be open to more fine-tuning. Rigor belongs in the classroom, not as a bar to timely graduation. Where it makes academic sense, we should be open to course substitution and flexibility. The Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies has given us a commendable model. We must also expand our graduate school options, especially in health professions, and keep our graduate students on track for graduation as well.

## Adaptability

These important advancements may be happening in tandem with what's occurring on the Internet. Online course availability is growing by leaps and bounds. The speed of growth has spawned its own acronym: MOOC, massive online open courses.

In Michigan we have seen disruptive technology first-hand. Horse and buggy manufacturers went out of business when the horseless carriage arrived. Flint and Detroit grew rich on domestic auto manufacturing and rendered poor by its contraction. The telegraph and telegram were made obsolete by the telephone and email. Residential landline telephones are disappearing at a rate of 25 percent a year now that wireless service is widely available. The laptop has killed the typewriter. The smart phone may yet kill Kodak.

Creative disruption is on full display. When something can be done, it will be. How will higher education adapt?

The question is how, not whether, we integrate this new delivery mode. How we do it is among the most significant challenges we will face this decade. We must proceed carefully, but we must proceed. Will MOOCs mean enhancement, disruption or destruction? The outcome, I suggest, is in our hands.

At the moment, there is little consensus on how colleges handle MOOCs because so few of them come with academic credit. You may take a Harvard professor's MOOC, but you don't get Harvard credit. At least, not yet. Colleges, students, parents, employers and accrediting agencies are all going to want to be part of the credit discussion. Sooner or later, it will sort itself out because the users of higher education — who are also the revenue source for higher education — will demand it.

My view is that MOOCs will first have an impact on advanced placement and on competency. Students will come to us with some requirements fulfilled and with skills in particular fields. We will need to determine how this fits into the Grand Valley experience.

Perhaps over the long haul, MOOCs can help reduce the cost of attendance and shorten the time to graduation. If so, they'll fit right in with what the provost and I have been working on for years, ensuring that Grand Valley's programs are affordable, accessible and relevant. All this is consistent with the leadership and views of our Board of Trustees, which expects accountability, fiduciary responsibility and high quality.

MOOCs may be a delivery disrupter, but what's coming next, with or without MOOCs, is competency-based learning. In fact, it's already here. The Higher

Learning Commission has endorsed it and a number of schools are using it, with public universities in Arizona and Minnesota taking the lead.

Taken from the Higher Learning Commission, the North Central Association, *"institutions are outlining the structure of competency based or direct assessment programs and established clearly defined competencies related to the program and learning outcomes that students must attain to be awarded the credential."*

The academic program has a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, and the institution has a mechanism for monitoring student progress toward acquisition of competencies. Competencies required for the program are not only through individual units but also build a unified body of knowledge. No credit hours, but competencies might be the new paradigm.

## Getting it Done

Many are saying nice things about Grand Valley, our students and all who are contributing to our mission. We are seeing our reputation as an institution of great value improve year after year. We have momentum! I again challenge all of us to get it done as we strive to be the premier comprehensive university in the nation. Grand Valley State University will be defined by our relevance, rigor, and return on investment. It's my three Rs along with two more: relationships and reach-forward.

We are now more than halfway through 2013 and 2014 is just around the corner. I'm starting my eighth academic year, surrounded by skilled faculty and staff members, whose friendships I treasure, and talented students later this morning at Convocation. We have a committed Board of Trustees and a confident community proud of Grand Valley. Time flies, but at Grand Valley, four things have not changed: student-centered, quality, inclusion and adaptability. These are core values, not conveniences of the moment. They are at the heart of our performance. Keeping them front and center will keep us Best in Class.

GVSU is achieving — and getting it done!

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