

**2014 Faculty Staff Address**  
**President Thomas J. Haas**

Good morning! I am pleased to be greeting you as we begin another academic year at Grand Valley State University. It is my ninth fall semester here, and the excitement I feel for what we can do together has never been stronger.

We have challenges to be sure, and I want to share some of them with you today, but more importantly, I want to share with you what we are doing to meet the challenges that face our students and us.

In less than two hours, we will be in the Fieldhouse welcoming a record number of first-year students. They're ambitious and they're motivated, and we must be ready for this cohort and the ones to come.

How are we going to do that?

In many ways our mission of educating students is simple, but as we know all too well, the details are complex.

I'm going to outline for you today some key strategies that will ensure that this institution remains relevant and vibrant for decades to come.

I want to talk about:

- Michigan relevance and global impact;
- A new initiative by the provost that will affect disciplines across the board;
- Enrollment challenges and why we must remain student-focused;
- And, how each of us plays a role in the future of Grand Valley State University.

But first, let's take a moment to celebrate where we are right this moment. We've been judged "Best in Class" for the second year by Michigan's governor and the Legislature.

Governor Rick Snyder is a numbers guy, and he developed a plan in which new funding follows performance. Retention and graduation rates, low administrative costs and the number of Pell-eligible students are factors in state appropriations.

We have been rewarded for your hard work, and I thank you. Because of your performance, we received the first meaningful uptick in state aid in 13 years!

That makes it possible for us to keep tuition lower and help our students. In fact, because of improving state appropriations and donor support, especially by faculty and staff members, we are able to report that the net tuition to students is lower this year than last.

Of Michigan's 15 public universities, just three have graduation rates above the national average: Grand Valley, The University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

*Bridge Magazine* recently published an analysis of graduation rates and said this:

**“If Michigan wants to get more degrees in the hands of more students in less time, college leaders should study what’s happening in Allendale.”**

Take a moment to appreciate the results of your dedication to our students.

Michigan relevance indeed!

We are a major player on the higher education scene in Michigan. But this is not a time to pause; this is a time when we use Grand Valley's entrepreneurial and flexible strengths, when we get creative and remain laser-focused on student experiences, results and success.

One example is coming from Academic Affairs.

Provost Gayle R. Davis is introducing an exciting initiative on campus this year. Some of you have heard of it, all of you can be involved in it.

She is dedicated to exposing students to leading-edge experiences and opportunities that will help them in life after graduation.

She asked:

**“How can Grand Valley stay distinctive so we keep attracting the best and the brightest, and turn out graduates who are ahead of the competition in bringing value to their potential employers and their communities?”**

The answer has deep roots, while still being cutting-edge, and it's called the **Design Thinking Initiative**.

You'll hear much more about this as we work it into our academics and our culture, but let me define it briefly for those who may be hearing of it for the first time.

Design Thinking involves a system of collaborative planning and problem solving with consideration for the people who are impacted by the central problem.

Grand Valley will be able to partner with the many outside organizations who are also working in this area of innovation. We'll be able to serve needs in our area while attracting resources to the university.

**The Design Thinking Initiative** will bring a range of curricular and co-curricular opportunities to our students and faculty. This design approach is in demand by many organizations in our region and around the world.

There will be other opportunities in program design across all the colleges, and we look forward in our continued partnership with faculty governance, the Executive MBA with Spectrum is an example.

Let's talk about our growing **Global Impact**.

Our students studying abroad and international students coming to study on our campus represents another huge area of prestige and growth for Grand Valley.

**The Barbara H. Padnos International Center has some impressive stats for us:**

- The Institute of International Education ranks Grand Valley at number five for the number of students who study abroad.
- There is a possibility of a record number of international students coming to campus this year — that number could reach 400.
- The ELS Language Center has moved into AuSable Hall, bringing more than 100 international students to the heart of our campus.
- Global education is another area in which Grand Valley students will gain distinction.

Mark Schaub, chief international officer, and Carol Sanchez, a professor in the Seidman College of Business, are co-chairing the Internationalization Task Force. They delivered their first report this spring.

**Here is the future of global learning on our campus:**

- There is a newly created Global GV Team that will articulate to each college and academic program the expectations for advancing global learning.
- We know that many of our students won't elect majors that are rich in global learning goals, and so there is an expectation that the General Education Cultures courses will be updated.
- Our goal is to have every Grand Valley undergraduate major provide specific global learning for students.

Grand Valley students will graduate with cultural and global competencies that will set them apart from many of their peers.

We realize that events in one country affect events in other countries, and globally educated students will be better equipped to promote diversity and global responsibility.

Nelson Mandela reminded us **“education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”**

You teach them, you discover with them, and our students will change the world. As technology makes the world smaller, our students’ global impact will be greater.

Now let’s turn to the nuts and bolts of the business of operating a large university. Some of that will be literal when we talk about our facilities, but it also includes our efforts to attract a decreasing pool of high school graduates, and graduate them!

Vice Provost Lynn "Chick" Blue, along with Matt McLogan and Mary Eileen Lyon, offered a story to WOOD-TV. The sum of the piece was Grand Valley is a brain-gain institution for West Michigan and the entire state with GVSU’s retention rate at 71 percent. Three quarters of our students are working in the state. Bill Seidman and other founders would be pleased.

But Chick, who keeps a watchful eye on these trends, shared with university leaders the grim news from an important study of high school graduates: there just aren’t as many of them.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education report predicts that by the 2019-2020 academic year, high school graduates in Michigan will fall 20 percent to below 99,000, and the decline is predicted to continue indefinitely beyond that.

In order for us to maintain the number of first-year students as we see coming to campus this year, with high academic credentials, we must gather even more of the market share both in- and out-of-state.

We must continue to pay attention to our niche position: we are student-centered and provide personal attention from faculty members who care about individuals. This is true whether in undergraduate or graduate programs.

We must do a better job of retaining students who do enroll. We must fulfill our promises to our students and surpass their expectations during the time they are with us.

And we must entice students who might not pursue a college degree if it weren’t for the exceptional experience we offer at Grand Valley. Our intentionality on internships, clinicals, teacher training and other experiential apprenticeships are key to our reputation with businesses and industry.

**Everyone here is a recruiter, and everyone has a hand in retention.**

Where else do we all have a hand? The reality is, we're all ambassadors for Grand Valley. It's all about relationships when they're students, and Vice President for Development Karen Loth will tell us, it's all about relationships when they turn into our alumni.

**"Lakers for a Lifetime"** is not an empty slogan; it's a choice to give back to this university in service and in support.

As you know, we lead nationally in faculty and staff giving back to the university, because we believe in it and we're connected.

We have nearly 100,000 alumni now. But less than 6,000 of them give to the university. We must deepen their connection to this institution.

As public dollars decrease, private fundraising must increase to ensure a quality educational experience for our students and a vibrant working environment for faculty and staff.

In most cases, you will not be directly involved in fundraising, but you will be involved in relationship building. Remember that you are the face of Grand Valley to those you meet.

We're also represented by our physical space. We get a huge boost from the bricks-and-sticks face of Grand Valley. I never tire of someone talking about the beauty of our campuses and, of course, what goes on inside them.

Let me acknowledge the hard work of our Facilities staff led by Vice President Jim Bachmeier, James Moyer, Lisa Haynes and Tim Thimmesch.

This year, we have finished additions to AuSable Hall and Kleiner Commons. Zumberge Hall and the Lake buildings have all undergone significant renovations and expansion.

And you can see as you drive through campus that work continues on the new Science Laboratory Building and the Laker Marketplace.

When you include the Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons and the L. William Seidman Center, that's more new and remodeled space than in any three-year period in our history.

When I came here, I said I would do all I could to help align our facilities with our burgeoning enrollment — **together we are doing it.**

And together we are working on our next strategic plan, the plan that will take us to 2021. Early next year, all colleges and divisions will create their roadmaps to the future. These plans will be fully aligned with the institution's new strategic framework of priorities, objectives and action strategies.

As you know, I have asked Dr. Wendy Wenner to step into the role as acting Vice President for Inclusion and Equity as we continue our search for Dr. Jeanne Arnold's replacement. Jeanne did a wonderful job of setting the foundation for a new division and linking their work into the University Strategic Plan.

I have asked Wendy to work with Julie Guevara, but also review the current Bias Incident Protocol and our policies and practices ensuring a safe place for all to work, live, play and learn.

For example, sexual assault and violence against women and men is never to be tolerated. All of us must work in creating an inclusive learning environment.

We also have to keep in mind that our North Central Association review occurs in 2018, and Julie Guevara and her colleagues in the provost's cabinet have already begun planning for this essential once-a-decade event.

As someone who's been on a number of association teams, I'm confident that we'll be ready, and I'm proud to lead the team. Preparing for the review will be on our plate during the next three years.

As you can see, our plate is full, but not unmanageable. We still have time, talent and resources for contingencies and events that fall outside of our control but never spiral us out of control.

One of our hallmarks has always been flexibility, and that will remain a priority. We will anticipate and adapt.

### **Michigan relevance; global impact.**

These are my guideposts for the road ahead.

By managing our resources in the best possible way, Grand Valley and the communities that host our campuses will prosper.

Our annual economic impact in West Michigan now reaches three-quarters of a billion dollars.

We produce 5,000 graduates a year, and the majority of them stay in Michigan to pursue careers. Employers across the state are recruiting our graduates because they know of their high-quality preparation. And employers from other states are taking notice, too!

By preparing qualified graduates who will enhance and lead their professions and their societies, Grand Valley will have impact wherever our graduates find themselves — even halfway around the world in Palau where alumnus Tommy Remengesau has again been elected president. GVSU has momentum. We are leading. We are shaping our future.

We are involved in the most exciting and rewarding work imaginable, and I'm honored to be your colleague.

Let's have a grand year. Go Lakers!