

Thomas J. Haas  
Convocation Remarks 2012  
August 24, 2012

Board Chair Shelley Padnos, other trustees, Provost Davis, the Senior Management Team, distinguished faculty and staff members, students, many alums, and guests – You honor us and the newest Lakers with your presence.

Welcome to the beginning of another exciting year at Grand Valley State University!

We are so pleased to welcome all of you. Many of you have long histories on campus ... many others are just beginning to write theirs.

I want to talk to all of our new students who are in a major transition in their lives. With all the questions swirling in your minds, let me offer you some assurances.

Look around. The faculty you see will challenge you for sure... more importantly they will teach you... guide you... and someone here just might change your life.

And, our returning students are exemplary role models and mentors...get to know them, many will become your friends.

Think about that and let's even expand on that thought. Someone here *will surely* change your life.

**That's what teachers do.**

**That's what advisors do.**

**That's what leaders do.**

**That's what friends do.**

This arena is packed with potential ... **yours.**

When you decided to enroll at Grand Valley, you heard the message about educating in the liberal tradition. We believe strongly in that mission ... the mission to pass along the tools and shape your abilities and character that will help you succeed ... the liberal tradition; not to teach you just what to think, but how to think and become a life-long learner.

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically," Martin Luther King, Jr. said. He went on to stress the ideal – "Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

That is one of our goals at Grand Valley... to expand the ways in which you think. The esteemed faculty you see in their academic robes represent years of study, effort and dedication to enriching students, along with enriching their fields.

Our goals include helping **you** reach **your** goals -

- Helping you reach your potential
- Helping you reach and fulfill your dreams

Some of you might be sitting here wondering today what your goals are ... what your potential could be.

First, identify your dreams. The dream of how you will spend your educational and professional lives may be unknown to you... it will be revealed to you in time. There may be a professor who ignites a passion... recognizes a gift. There may be other students who see talents and abilities that you haven't fully explored or nurtured.

Be open to those experiences that may indeed help shape your dreams.

Author Karen Ravn reminds us of this:

“Only as **high** as I reach can I grow, only as **far** as I seek can I go, only as **deep** as I look can I see; only as **much** as I dream can I be.”

Second, use all the resources available for you. We work hard at Grand Valley to make sure that we have the right faculty, staff, and leadership in place to walk with you on your educational journey. We also make sure you have the right facilities.

You will be among the first students to work and learn in a new, high-tech library in Allendale. You can see the construction of the **Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons**, named for the mother of our Board member, Kate Pew Wolters.

It's in the center of campus and will be the heart of much learning in the years to come. The environment will provide you with opportunities that will ensure you can compete globally in the information age.

When it opens next year, it will help you reach your potential.

Grand Valley libraries received the **2012 Excellence in Libraries Award**, making Grand Valley the only university in the country to be so honored.

Another large construction project is taking place on our Pew Grand Rapids Campus. The forward-thinking design of our **L. William Seidman Center** will provide facilities that will help those taking business courses excel and reach ... and perhaps exceed ... their goals.

And whether in business or any other program we want to connect you with the world of work or opportunities to attend a graduate program. Our internships, co-op, and study abroad will help you continue to shape your future.

Higher education, and state support of it, are much in the news these days in our state. Grand Valley has provided an Accountability Report for all to see for many years now, and our performance across the board has had an impact in Lansing.

We also just received news that we will have state assistance to build a new laboratory science and classroom building in Allendale.

The governor cited Grand Valley's performance in the areas of graduation rates and the number of degrees awarded in science, technology, engineering and math ... what are called the STEM fields. I hope that makes you proud! I am also so very proud of what we offer in the arts and the myriad of fields relevant to you and your future.

Welcome to Grand Valley. Opportunities and success are our specialties. We can spot winners. And that's why you were chosen to join us.

Just take a look at the successes in our intercollegiate athletic program, club sports, art and music competitions, undergraduate and graduate research...you name the activity and we can see Lakers. I know I was so proud of the performance of Sarah Zelenka, a Laker Olympian representing not only Grand Valley but our nation in rowing last month.

Which brings me to my third point... keep on joining – join one of the more than 300 student organizations we have on campus. Reach out for new experiences and new friends. Where do you see yourself?

How about the Film and Conversations Club ... The Swing Dance Club ... or the Unicycling Club? And new this year – the Beekeeping Club! I guess you shouldn't really "reach" for that one! The important goal here is to get involved.

This is a pivotal moment in your lives. It will be a wonderful and challenging year.

We are honored that you have chosen to study and live among us at Grand Valley State University... and that you are learning what it means to be – A Laker For a Lifetime!

Thank you, and Go Lakers!