

Thomas J. Haas
Convocation Remarks
August 23, 2013

Board Chair Shelley Padnos, Trustee Wolters, Mrs. Brooks, Provost Davis, the Senior Management Team, distinguished faculty and staff members, students and guests:

Welcome to the official beginning of the academic year at Grand Valley State University! Fifty years ago today, President James Zumberge (our first President) welcomed the first 226 Lakers. Now we are welcoming you, more than 4,000 strong — things have changed but our values as Lakers have stayed the course over the 50 years. You, every one of our students, come first!

We have two of those pioneer students with us in the audience today. Please recognize Mary Ohm and Bill Kaluske; they are sitting with my wife, Marcia.

We're so pleased you are members of our community. We have much to do this year, and all of you will contribute ... all of you will grow ... and all of you will achieve. Our students, **you**, are why Grand Valley exists!

I want those who are entering your first year of study at Grand Valley to look at the faculty and staff members who have gathered today to welcome you, and who have dedicated their lives to educating you.

They are accomplished in their respective fields, and they want to ignite passion inside of you to be open to learning in a way that you may not have experienced before coming to the university.

Lakers are learners ... lifelong learners.

You know by now that Grand Valley has liberal education as its cornerstone ... that we want a diploma from Grand Valley to signal to employers and to the community that you are a critical thinker ... that you value diversity of thought ... that you understand the complexity of the world and the value of teamwork.

In an essay called “The Great Conversation,” Robert Hutchins tackles what it means to be a liberally educated person, stating:

“The aim of liberal education is human excellence, both private and public.”

Hutchins was president of the University of Chicago and dean of the Yale Law School. Let me paraphrase his thoughts to illustrate the depth of thought and skills we’re cultivating in our academic work at Grand Valley.

Liberally educated people have a mind that can operate well in all fields. They may be a specialist in one field, but can understand anything important that is said in any field and can see and use the light that is shed upon their own. And they have the heart to lead and serve.

It's important to shine a light on the truth to optimize learning and growth. When you are open to learning you open a door to the possibility of great achievement.

Nelson Mandela believed that "**education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.**"

You can change the world; you can change **your** world. You will be leaders in our world. The university is a place to learn skills and acquire the knowledge to have a positive impact in your fields and your communities. And you will develop your character while you are at GVSU.

You are the first class to be able to take advantage of our beautiful new Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons for all four years of undergraduate study. It's a model for 21st century learning and you'll be able to fully utilize the specialized spaces and features like the Knowledge Market, where experienced students, your peers, will help you advance your own skills when you need some direction.

It is named for Kate Pew Wolters' mom. I recognized Trustee Wolters as one of the members of our Board of Trustees. Trustees are people, who, through the years, have provided leadership and service to Grand Valley. Ms. Wolters and her dad went above and beyond with making our new and innovative library a reality for you and generations of Lakers who will come after you.

Thanks again, Kate.

It's beautiful and it's functional. The Mary Idema Pew Library contains unique opportunities ... some that take you beyond *learning acquisition* ... to *learning creation*. If you haven't been inside yet, I encourage you to take that first trip. I call it the "first" trip because you'll want to take many more. It is where ideas will collide. It and all the resources we have at Grand Valley will help you know, apply the knowledge and achieve.

So, we have the "L" in Lakers standing for "learning and leadership."

The "A" is for "achieving and applying" and the "K" is for "knowing."

You'll find I like these word plays!

After "K" comes the "E," and let me tell you how Lakers excel.

We're a public university, as you know. But did you know that the governor and lawmakers have looked at our performance and we came out on top?

Best in Class goes to Grand Valley State University.

You should be pleased that your university excels in retention and graduation rates. We pay attention to strong finishes, as well as strong beginnings. Grand Valley will reward you for

progressing toward earning your degree in four years with the Grand Finish grant. Make it your goal to earn that \$1,000 grant your senior year.

We excel in the classrooms and in athletics. We have many championships in the record books. This past spring, we captured our 15th straight GLIAC President's Cup — our conference's all-sports trophy. It was also the 12th year that Grand Valley achieved the number one or two spot in the nation for Division II. Lakers are champions!

I would say that's excelling!

To round out the values of "Lakers," let's talk about relevancy and service ... "R" and "S."

Our academic programs are designed to be relevant for you and employers. You're interested in personal growth and intellectual challenges, but you also look forward to vibrant careers.

Employers have come to rely on Grand Valley to produce graduates who have worked with renowned faculty who lead in their disciplines ... and who will give you the time it takes to ensure that you succeed. I suggest you look to an international experience or an internship.

Grand Valley prides itself on quality relationships that will make a difference in your achievement.

You will create relationships with many. Reach out to know others. Be inclusive because we learn so much from people from different backgrounds, geographies, and experiences.

We just opened the new L. William Seidman Center to house our Seidman College of Business and community outreach centers in downtown Grand Rapids. A new field station was completed as part of the Annis Water Resources Institute in Muskegon. It is attracting world-class researchers and providing unique internships for undergraduate students.

We're building a new laboratory science building in Allendale.

Nearly 90 percent of our recent graduates are employed or in graduate school.

Indeed, Grand Valley is relevant.

And you will create relationships with others that will last for a lifetime.

Lakers give back. They serve.

We have more than 300 student organizations on campus ... many have service projects as a central piece. We have an alternative spring break ... more than 100 Lakers fan out all over the country to make a difference in the lives of people in need. Student-athletes are contributing to Make-a-Wish and thousands of other students, in a myriad of ways, are improving the quality of life of others.

All of the things you've been hearing about at orientation, at Transitions and here at Convocation are giving you some ideas of what it means to be a **Laker for a Lifetime**.

This is a critical moment in your life. This room contains friends you don't know yet and mentors who have not been revealed.

How exciting.

We're excited you've joined our community. Thank you for investing in yourselves. You know what Benjamin Franklin said, "**Investing in knowledge pays the best interest!**"

So much lies ahead. The faculty and staff of Grand Valley are ready for you. We're thrilled you've chosen our campus community.

So, LAKERS ... "L" for learning and leadership, "A" for applying and achieving, "K" for knowledge and knowing, "E" for excelling in the "R" for relevant and rigorous plan of study and co-curricular experiences, and sustained relationships. All this in order to "S" serve and succeed!

Stay informed ... get involved ... and give back. This is going to be a grand year ... and there is no better way to conclude as to say:

Go Lakers!