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Faculty/Staff Address

August 24, 2018

**Leading Change: The Lakers’ Effect**

Good morning! The excitement has been building, and here we are, ready to start the new academic year. There’s something thrilling about beginnings, and each fall semester represents unique beginnings for everyone gathered on campus today.

My message will contain ideas and news that showcase our vision for an even better Grand Valley State University.

It will cover our values of **relevance, integrity and service**, exemplified by stories of the work we are doing and how we are striving to make our campus, our community and our world better.

I want to share the **challenges** we face and emphasize how important each of you are to Grand Valley’s future.

But, I can’t get around the fact that this beginning also represents an end for me. This is the last fall address I will give as president of Grand Valley. As you know, I will retire in June and enter the next phase of my life.

**That is a fact, but it is not a limitation.**

I have as much energy and excitement about what we can do for students as I ever have.

My goal during this address is to **thank you, excite you, and set the course** for the opportunities that are before us as an institution of higher education, an institution that exists for the greater good of the individual ***and*** society.

**It is not an “either/or” but a “both/and.”**

Thank you to the members of our Board of Trustees who are joining us today and join us always in our steadfast mission to educate and to contribute to the region. We are fortunate to have these accomplished men and women donate their time, their energies, and their boundless talents to Grand Valley.

Also with us are members of our Faculty Senate and its chair, Felix Ngassa, and student senators, led by President Rachel Jenkin.

Thank you to the members of my cabinet who bring such precision and integrity to their decision-making in their roles at this university. I am appreciative of their depth of experience and their commitment to our campus community. Teri Losey and Rachel Siglow in my office have been the MVPs over my entire time at Grand Valley State University.

I have always let you know that my lifelong partner is essential to my work. My wife, Marcia, is dedicated to our mission and to her role as First Lady. She joins us today, as she has for so many special occasions here on campus.

For the last dozen years, Marcia and I have followed a deeply held belief of ours: **Be good stewards.** Leave the university better than we found it. We followed tremendous leadership and have endeavored to capitalize on the opportunities we have had during our time here.

I want to share a quote from the past about our great university:

**“Some truths never change. What you find at Grand Valley … is true to its foundations. We are a teaching and learning community. Students are at the center of our work. What a powerful charge in our mission statement — shaping students’ lives. That to me is such a tremendous challenge and obligation, to do right by that goal. We have to ensure that we are always improving the intellectual stimulation, the activities, and the abilities to provide direction for our students in a positive way. They will then leave Grand Valley continuing to adapt, to lead and to shape their societies. This is the essence of lifelong learning. What makes our liberal education commitment so relevant is that it equips students with the ability to adapt and to know how to think.”**

That comes from the very first address I gave at Grand Valley at my investiture in 2006.

We have our roots. We are steady and adaptable, stable and entrepreneurial.

As the French poet and novelist Victor Hugo advised, **“Change your opinions, keep to your principles; change your leaves, keep intact your roots.”**

Grand Valley State University has strong roots. They extend beyond the reach of any president, board member or employee. We are facing a number of changes in the next few years, and this may cause some of you concern. Set any concerns aside, as each of you, in your own areas of influence, begins to expand your own leadership.

As you know, there’s no shortage of books and theories on leadership. A constant among them is to disabuse us of the idea that leadership comes from the top of an organization or institution. It’s not true and it most certainly isn’t true at Grand Valley.

Leadership author and teacher John Maxwell put it this way: **“Leadership is a choice you make, not a place you sit. Anyone can choose to become a leader wherever he or she is. You can make a difference no matter where you are.”**

It is critical that all of us understand this principle as we face the retirement of people in key roles here.

Longtime head of Human Resources, now Vice President for Administrative Services, Scott Richardson will be retiring in June. And Vice President for Enrollment Development Lynn (Chick) Blue announced her retirement after five decades of service but has not identified the exact date she’ll retire. We’ve decided she’s taking this Laker for a Lifetime thing a bit too literally!

And we’re glad she is. Chick has set an example of what it means to be student centered. She started her job here with one filing cabinet that held all the records of our students. She’s been innovative and smart as we’ve grown and become known for exceptional service. Chick has retained her heart for students and has made sure everyone on campus knows we are involved in recruitment and retention. Thank you, Chick, for your exemplary service to our university and our students.

Scott has spent 41 years working hard for our community, leading Human Resources for 38 of those years. He created a climate that focused on the importance of all of you — the people who make this place not only run, but excel. Under Scott’s leadership, we created initiatives that speak our values of respecting the whole person, recognizing that taking care of your lives outside of work is the right thing to do for you, your families and, ultimately, for the university. Thank you to Scott for his leadership.

This is a time we need everyone to lead.

Each of you: lead in your areas. Effect positive change. Higher education is changing and Grand Valley needs to grow and change, too. We’ve always risen to the challenges we’ve faced as an institution. Part of our success has been we put the right people in the right jobs. One can call it part of the “Grand Valley Magic,” or one can recognize it as a strategy.

In a 1962 address at the University of California, Berkeley, President John F. Kennedy said:

**“Nothing is more stirring than the recognition of great public purpose. ... In a time of turbulence and change, it is more true than ever that knowledge is power; for only by true understanding and steadfast judgment are we able to master the challenge of history. If this is so, we must strive to acquire knowledge — and to apply it with wisdom.”**

We have a great purpose. And we must innovate with knowledge and wisdom.

Provost Maria Cimitile is beginning her second year in that role. She is continuing our commitment to shared governance, and she’s being responsive to the changing needs of our students. We are carefully choosing how we deliver education as online learning becomes more vital for our students.

Grand Valley will not lose its “high touch” practices as we smartly utilize the “high tech” methods at our disposal.

One of Maria’s stated goals is to innovate, and she is developing and testing new ideas regularly. Ideas are welcome! It is going to take all of us working together to meet the challenges we have as a public university in Michigan. Never compromise on quality is her mantra.

Whenever we talk about challenges, we must talk about funding. This spring, we welcomed Vice President for Finance Gregory Sanial to campus. Greg comes to us after a distinguished career in the Coast Guard, finishing off as the Coast Guard budget director ($11 billion in assets). He is ready (*Semper Paratus*) to lead us. When I retire, you will still have a retired Coast Guard captain on staff.

He attended his first Board of Trustees meeting in July when the trustees reluctantly voted to raise tuition. One of our values is to keep a Grand Valley education affordable. We are obligated as a public institution to be good stewards of our resources. We work diligently every year to keep our quality high and our tuition as low as we can. We are one of the most affordable universities in the state, even though we receive the second-lowest appropriation per student from the state.

Greg shared these facts with trustees:

**• If we were funded at the state average per full-time student, we could cut tuition by 18 percent.**

**• State aid for Grand Valley has declined more than 58 percent in the last 30 years.**

You get the idea. The real magic comes from providing a quality education with the resources we have, doing the best we can with what we have. Not only are we providing quality, we’re graduating students in record numbers.

The university awarded the most degrees in its history during 2017-2018. We awarded the most bachelor’s degrees and the most doctoral degrees. Nearly 900 students of color earned degrees — that’s also the highest in our history, both in number and in percentage.

These records come as welcome news as we know our high school population in Michigan has dipped, and so have the credit hours students are taking. We are meeting this challenge in a number of ways, including with stellar recruitment of first-year students.

Congratulations to Chick, Jodi Chycinski and our admissions staff, Michelle Rhodes in Financial Aid, and Sherril Soman, our former Registrar, now Dean in the College of Education, as well as to everyone who helps turn visitors into Lakers for a Lifetime.

We will dedicate the **Arend and Nancy Lubbers Student Services Center** named for President Emeritus Don Lubbers and his wife, Nancy, later today. The building and the addition of the Laker Experience Suite provide a first-rate introduction to our campus for students and their families who are visiting campus.

Naming the suite after Don and Nancy is fitting following their dedication to our students, totaling more than three decades as president and first lady and the nearly two decades since their retirement. We thank them for their generosity and service to our students and the Grand Valley community.

**“Solving the world’s biggest problems takes ensembles, not soloists.”** That comes from academic and business leader Jeffrey Walker, a philanthropist who founded The Generosity Network.

Teams achieve what individuals cannot.

We saw an opportunity and a need to increase our enrollment in the spring/summer session. We had deans working to schedule needed classes and faculty offering online options. We created a social media blitz, including animated videos, which reached more than 100,000 people. Everyone working together brought a **4 percent enrollment hike** for spring/summer.

Teamwork is essential, and we’re at it again for fall and winter semesters. We have teams working hard on bolstering our student success efforts to help retain students.

We have a new initiative this year involving faculty-mentors and first-year students. It’s called the **Student Success Partnership Network.** The goals are to connect faculty with students from their first days on campus. We are actively inviting faculty to participate in our retention and student support efforts. There is also a peer-mentor component to the program.

We are excited about this mentoring opportunity for faculty, and by the end of the academic year, we can report to you about how the relationships are working for both faculty members and students.

We are committed to student success.

Retention and student performance are improved when students can concentrate on their studies. We know that. That’s why we increased our financial aid budget by $5.1 million this year.

We are able to do that by expanding our team beyond the campus and into the larger community. Our history shows the power of private-public partnerships.

Bob and Ellen Thompson from Detroit are part of the Grand Valley team. They believe in us to pilot scholarship programs that help students from hard-working families who cannot afford to send their children to college. We piloted the **Thompson Working Family Scholarship program** in 2011. It has expanded over the years, and now we’re piloting the Thompson’s **Achievers program.**

Achievers targets returning students who didn’t qualify for the Working Family Scholarship as first-year students, but had a successful year and could use the scholarship to finance the rest of their degree. The new cohorts of first-year, transfers and achievers will receive more than $1 million from Thompson scholarships this academic year.

Those private dollars combined with our excellent teaching are changing lives.

Vice President Karen Loth and her team are leading us in our $85 million **Laker Effect Campaign** that will finance scholarships for our students, academic programs, student-success efforts and capital projects.

We have raised 80 percent of our goal, and it pleases me to share that more than 50 percent of our faculty and staff give back to the university. That is well above the national average and makes me proud of what that represents. Those of us who know Grand Valley best support it financially and trust that our investment is for the good of our students and for our collective futures.

Thank you for believing in our mission.

We now have more than 500 donor-funded scholarships that are improving access and affordability for students to attend Grand Valley and attain a degree.

Thanks to the generosity of 1,100 donors, we opened the game-changing **Raleigh J. Finkelstein Hall** on our Health Campus downtown. We began holding classes there in May and held a dedication in July. Students and faculty are finding intensive, interactive learning spaces. They now have areas that are designed to make it easy for health teams to work together.

We have a third building under construction on our Health Campus. Trustee John Kennedy and Vice President Matt McLogan worked with state lawmakers to secure $29 million in state funding for the **Center for Interprofessional Health**, which will join Finkelstein Hall and the Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences in allowing us to meet the growing demand for our nursing and health professions programs. The state understands we are providing much needed talent to work in the health care fields. We will have the formal groundbreaking ceremony for the building at 333 Michigan Street in October. Matt has put in thousands of miles back and forth to Lansing and Washington, D.C. His character and sharp mind continue to be remarkable assets as we negotiate these challenging political and financial times.

Our General Counsel Tom Butcher was indispensable in his role in securing all the land needed for us to expand our campus in downtown Grand Rapids. We recently announced the affordable housing project that will also be part of our campus, and I’d like to recognize Pat Waring and Brian Copeland for their work with the city and the people who live in the surrounding neighborhood. The project has been cited as a model for development within the city. Tom is also leading the way with Charter Schools and Enterprise Risk Management.

I want to acknowledge the impressive team in Facilities Planning who make these buildings move from dreams and paper to reality. James Moyer has supervised the building and maintenance of this campus for more than two decades and he’s just handed off the baton to Karen Ingle.

James represents the very definition of stewardship and Karen has ably begun her tenure in Facilities Planning.

Facilities Planning has joined forces with the Padnos College of Engineering and Computing to provide innovative opportunities to students that benefit our community partners.

In addition to classes and lab spaces for our health professions, the Center for Interprofessional Health will house the **Applied Computing Institute.** The ACI will support the rapidly growing enrollment we’re seeing in the computing fields while providing a more immersive experience for our students.

Enrollment in engineering is also growing. Dean Paul Plotkowski has been planning the **Innovation and Design Center,** which will open in January in the Ferris Coffee and Nut facility on Winter Avenue. This facility will provide support for project-based learning, the power mobility lab, the product design lab and digital design studios. We’ll expand our K-12 outreach program and our applied research and development programs that support our community and industry partners with programs like FIRST Robotics.

Our expansions and improvements are not simply due to new buildings. We are innovating in many areas, in our academic programs and from sustainability to inclusion and equity.

And to help us tell our story are Associate Vice President Mary Eilleen Lyon and Associate Vice President Rhonda Lubberts and their staffs, consummate professionals, who understand our brand and share our stories, bringing Grand Valley State University to life across the region and world.

**The Johnson Center for Philanthropy** recently appointed former Aquinas College President Juan Olivarez to a three-year term as the Distinguished Scholar in Residence for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to advance the center’s work on improving inclusive practices in the nonprofit sector.

Vice President Jesse Bernal confirms our commitment to inclusion and equity has never been stronger. We have redoubled our efforts to end sexual violence in all its forms. In the last year, we dedicated additional resources for increased training, partnered with local law enforcement and landlords to enhance safety on campus, and we added a deputy to the Title IX staff. We have also increased victim/survivor services in the Gayle R. Davis Center for Women and Gender Equity.

We have formalized focused groups to hear and respond to underrepresented employees. Our next campus climate assessment is scheduled for November 2019. We have launched an inclusive leadership development program, and we have a task force reviewing policies and practices to increase representation.

These efforts are embedded in our strategic plan. You knew I’d get around to talking about our strategic plan! And that leads us to accreditation.

**The Higher Learning Commission** will be visiting campus November 5-6 to reaffirm our accreditation. This is a regularly scheduled visit that happens at the end of a 10-year review cycle.

Chris Plouff in the Provost’s Office has been reaching out to many of you, making sure we are ready for the visit. Strategic planning, assessment and accreditation are all integral to Grand Valley maintaining the education integrity we promise our students, their families and the state of Michigan.

Our goal is to exceed the levels of quality prescribed by national and regional accrediting bodies. Again, a chance to lead where you are so we’ll be more than ready in November.

We have talked about the business of education, now we must talk about the **heart of education**, the heart of what we call **the Laker Effect.**

Here are but a few examples of the kinds of students and graduates who are spreading the Laker Effect across the globe.

Professor of Geology Peter Wampler took a group of students to Haiti this summer to complete multiple service projects. They provided local residents with 150 water filter systems that will provide clean water for a family for 20 to 30 years.

Ben Eastburg, a business and pre-med major, found a way to get two unused medical machines from a clinic here to a rural clinic in Nicaragua.

Jordan Vanderham, a product design and manufacturing major, won five entrepreneurial competitions last year for his Orindi Mask, a mask that helps outdoor workers and asthmatics by warming and humidifying the air they breathe. He won nearly $100,000 and started his own company.

A group of engineering students partnered with Beaumont Health to create a “cough assist device” to clear the airways of those with muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis, while engineering and Cook Leadership Academy alumna Kathryn Chirstopher co-founded a medical device startup company that provides an innovative sit-to-stand device for critical care patients.

Uyen Pham’s research proposal to look into bacterial resistance to antibiotics was accepted at a prestigious undergraduate research competition held in Washington D.C., and then she was invited to participate in a summer undergraduate research program in Switzerland.

And alumnus Ethan Mulnix is working with weather chasers around the world to advance severe weather warning systems to help protect people from storms.

As Dean Fred Antczak noted: Our students in the liberal arts and sciences are lending their expertise and enthusiasm to projects at museums, libraries, zoos, theaters, concert halls, hospitals and places of worship.

With our liberal arts foundation, the Laker Effect can be felt in any field in any place around the globe. As the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said: **“Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.”**

So we fully embrace another year in service to our students and the lofty goal of educating students to shape their lives, their professions and their societies.

We are responsible and compassionate stewards — leaving each person and place better than we found them.

Author James O’Toole, who works in the field of ethical leadership, wrote:

**“All moral and effective leaders so illuminate their followers’ better sides, revealing what is good in them and thus ultimately giving them hope.”**

We could say the same for teachers — revealing what is good in students and giving them hope — giving all of us hope.

**Education always sparks hope for the future.** I am very hopeful for the future of Grand Valley. We are all leaders and we are all Lakers.

Now, as Captain Jean-Luc Picard, from Star Trek “The Next Generation” would say, “Make it so.”

Thank you for listening today and for the good work you do for Grand Valley State University.