

# Faculty & Staff Address

## August 26, 2016

---

Good morning and Happy New Year! It is our tradition to start the new academic year together, and I want to start by saying thank you.

You are seeing the term “Laker Effect” in our advertising and in our promotional materials. And what’s really fun is that students adopted it quickly. You can see them wearing the Laker Effect T-shirts and you can read their tweets about the Laker Effect — what it means to be a Laker and the effect we, as a large, campus community, have on those around us and in the communities in which we live.

All of us help define the Laker Effect each day in our work, and I see the effect you are having on our students and in the world, and I want to begin today with a big thank you!

I’d like to welcome our Board of Trustee members, Victor Cardenas and Megan Sall; and special guests Ella Fritzemeier and the Student Senate cabinet members; Karen Gipson, chair of University Academic Senate, other ECS and UAS members; and Michael Tappy ’78, president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors, who are joining us today.

I would like to recognize new leadership and new roles on campus. Jim Bachmeier, who has provided years of service as vice president for Finance and Administration, will pioneer a new leadership role for the university as associate vice president for Strategic Initiatives, and Scott Richardson has accepted responsibility as the acting vice president for Finance and Administration. Congratulations and thank you for all you do.

This year we are moving ahead with new leaders in some key positions at the leadership level. We said some goodbyes, and some hellos. We said goodbye (although they will always be part of the Laker family) to Tim Selgo, director of athletics; Bart Merkle, dean of students; Elaine Collins, dean of the College of Education; and we are preparing to say goodbye to Lee VanOrsdel, dean of University Libraries, who is transitioning into retirement this year. Each served the university with distinction and we owe much of our success to them. Please join me in thanking them for their service.

We say hello to Keri Becker, our new director of athletics; Eileen Sullivan, our new dean of students; and Barry Kanpol, our new dean of the College of Education. Welcome to your new roles in our Grand Valley family.

Looking forward, we know that this will be Gayle Davis’ last year with us as our provost. It has been my pleasure to work with Gayle. We will be hard pressed to find another person with her level of integrity, commitment, and understanding of our university and our students. Please join me in helping Gayle launch her last year at Grand Valley. A search committee has been established and is being co-chaired by Jon Jellema and Teri Losey. We will keep the campus community engaged in this important process.

I can't possibly mention all of your good works today, so let me cover some of the highlights from the past year. It was a record-breaking year at Grand Valley State University.

I'm pleased to report that total enrollment remains strong. Last year's total enrollment was 25,325, with 4,155 first-year students. There also were a record number of students of color on campus 4,136 (16.3 percent), international students (434), and students living on campus (6,223). It's early to give an actual number for the coming year, but I expect our enrollment to be stable.

We are growing because we continue to excel at attracting and retaining students. Of all the rankings and recognitions we receive, I'm especially proud that Grand Valley was recognized by *Money Magazine* as only one of 14 universities in the U.S. as a "Value Institution."

This recognition comes because we are not only increasing retention, but we are reducing the achievement gap between majority students and students of color. This is critical to our institution's future, but also to this nation's future.

While we are making progress, I know we can close this gap completely and advance every student in the process. You'll be hearing this recurring theme throughout the coming year and beyond. We are also paying attention to the demographics of the incoming cohorts of 18-year-olds and graduate students, which will be significantly more diverse than previous generations.

Another indicator of our success in serving this student population is the recognition we received as an Access Improver by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP);

"We have found that your institution not only enrolls Pell students over its predicted rate, but has also experienced an increase in Pell enrollments over the last five years that exceeds the national average."

I'm pleased to report that our culture is evolving to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student and faculty/staff community, which also helps with retention. Our fifth annual climate assessment had the highest response rate in its history, higher than the average for universities. We have room to grow, but we are seeing significant improvements in the reporting of fairness and equity in hiring and promotion, and in the overall diversity of our communities. It is our goal to meet, and where possible exceed, compliance standards for all segments of our community, so that everyone feels welcome in the Laker family. This year we went beyond compliance in both our gender equity and ADA standards. This is a reflection of our ongoing commitment.

Students and alumni often credit their success to specific relationships with our outstanding faculty. Our primary student experience is created in the classroom by the very best teaching

faculty in the state. Each year the best of the best receive faculty awards for achievements in service, advising and outstanding teaching. We are so proud of Dr. Matt Boelkins, who was named Distinguished Professor of the Year by the Michigan Association of State Universities.

In 2015, we created the Internationalization Award to recognize faculty members who make significant contributions to advance global learning. This is a fitting addition because our strategic plan calls for increased global competencies across all disciplines. Jim Goode, professor of history, was the first to receive this award. His leadership in establishing the Middle East Studies program and hosting the Model Arab League on campus contributed to the richness of our learning environment. Matt and James are just two of many faculty members who deserve recognition. I'd like the faculty in the room to stand. Let's take a moment to appreciate these dedicated individuals as a group.

While we continue to help students start and stay at Grand Valley, we are also helping them succeed. We continue to be a significant talent engine for this region and this state: 94 percent of our graduates are employed or attending graduate school, and 85 percent of them stay in Michigan to start their careers. I like to say we're in the talent development business! )

Our students will also benefit this year from new construction and renovations in housing, recreation and performing arts. My special thanks to everyone who works so hard to keep our facilities among the finest in the region and the state. Facilities contribute greatly to attracting and retaining students.

Athletics is another example of our success. We should never take for granted the excellence of our programs, our coaching staff and our student athletes who once again won the Division II All Sports trophy, called the Directors' Cup, for the 11<sup>th</sup> time in the past 13 years. And, these students are practicing and competing while achieving an average GPA of 3.14. Go Lakers!

While we are doing great work for students, we are also connecting with the West Michigan community and beyond in a wide variety of ways. The first full year of the College of Education classroom partnership took place in 2016. WGVU was chosen by PBS to be the flagship station to roll out this new initiative to expand the use of PBS broadcast material in K-12 classrooms. Our model is the one PBS now recommends to all stations.

One of the highlights of our community relations activities this year involved a large team from University Counsel, Finance and Administration, and Pat Waring from the President's Office. This team worked closely with the City of Grand Rapids and the Belknap neighborhood to create two Memorandums of Understanding to help develop a pathway for the expansion of our health campus. This was no small feat and will greatly benefit our nursing and health professions majors and the patients who will receive their care.

The community and our alumni continue to support us. University Development reports that \$13.3 million was committed from 15,206 donors this year. That would not be possible without the hard work of Karen Loth's team, including Scott Blinkhorn, Dan Hurwitz and Jen Wardrop.

Much of the good work that moves us forward is done without fanfare, outside of the spotlight, and I'd like to highlight a few examples of these. University Communications has received more than two dozen peer-reviewed public relations awards this year, a new record and the envy of other universities. The Division of Inclusion and Equity created a Social Justice Education unit that will involve faculty members to the campus community in a deeper understanding of social justice research and issues. Part of helping students succeed is offering them life skills through programs like our financial literacy program, MoneySmart Lakers. The Provost's Office has had significant change this year, with seven new members joining the leadership team to move us forward with fresh new perspectives.

And now back to the Laker Effect. The Laker Effect image campaign was a collaborative effort between University Relations, University Development, and Enrollment Development. Led by Rhonda Lubberts and her Institutional Marketing team, it has become a statement about who we are, what we value and the effects we have wherever we go. Sure, it's a clever play on the weather term, but it's so much more than that.

The basis for the Laker Effect concept is our 2016-2021 strategic plan, which specifically states our values and our goals for the future. The plan calls for us to retain our focus on students and our values as a liberal education institution. It also calls for us to reach for higher ground. It pushes us to "take it up a notch" in areas like experiential learning and competencies, interactive teaching, integrating technology, global competencies, inclusion, enrollment development and retention, and student success.

The Laker Effect is about our collective impact on the world ... all of us as the Grand Valley family. It's about our West Michigan roots, our passion for learning and our creative spark. It's about caring for each other and serving our communities. Because together we are a force for positive change unlike any other.

I see our collective Laker Effect as three waves or circles. The first circle is our current students. They are just beginning to explore the effect they will have on the world. With our help, Grand Valley students are inspired to serve, lead and make a difference.

The second circle is our alumni. More than 104,000 Grand Valley alumni are transforming their professions, leading the way in business, nonprofits and government, and paying it forward by helping the next generation of Lakers.

The third circle is our community. Our Grand Valley family is growing. Everywhere you go in West Michigan you see touches of Grand Valley. We are connected in a network of students, faculty and staff, alumni and community members who are doing amazing things together. Our Laker Effect has become part of what makes West Michigan special. These circles keep expanding throughout our region and our state.

I encourage you to take a minute and reflect on what this means to you by viewing the Laker Effect [video](#).

As I mentioned earlier, our strategic plan includes some real "stretch" goals, which we refer to as our "margin of excellence." These come at a cost that must not be passed on to our students and their families through tuition. That is why we are beginning another comprehensive giving campaign this year, continuing on to 2021. We have done great things together, but we cannot rest.

Change is relentless and there is more we can do for our students, being mindful of the challenges ahead.

More specifically and to help us meet our challenges, we are looking to increase donor funds in three areas.

- Opportunity, which includes funding for more students to come to Grand Valley and stay here. This will be done primarily through scholarships targeted to increase both access and affordability.
- Achievement, which includes funding for programs that help us retain students in the areas of student success, leadership development, and experiential learning.
- Relevance, which includes funding to keep our programs relevant to student and employer demand. This will be done through capital projects like the expanded health campus, academic programs and centers, and endowed faculty positions.

I've given Karen Loth and her team some lofty goals. But they can't do it alone. I want to say up front that we can't get to the next level by 2021 without more donor support, so this campaign is my priority and will be everyone's job. Please continue delivering on our promise to donors to do our very best for every student.

Educating students and supporting them through their college years is noble and it is what we are about. A concise phrase for our mission comes from Barbara M. White, former ambassador and president of Mills College:

*The basic purpose of a liberal education is to liberate the human being to experience his or her potential to the fullest.*

We are unleashing human potential each day we work at Grand Valley State University. Henry Adams reminds us "*To teach is a way to change eternity.*"

As we head into another academic year, it is exciting and meaningful to fully embrace that idea and mission as we work with our students.

I'd encourage each of you to consider what your personal Laker Effect will be this year. What can you do to keep the momentum going, or to expand it?

Once again, thank you for all that you do to contribute to our Laker Effect. Have a wonderful New Year and Go Lakers!