

Convocation August 2010  
President Thomas J. Haas remarks

Trustee Wolters, Board members, Provost Davis, distinguished faculty and staff members, students and guests, welcome to an exciting new year at Grand Valley State University. We are especially honored to have representatives from three of our international institutional partners...University of Cape Coast in Ghana; one of our newer partners from National Taiwan Normal University, and from the Cracow University of Economics in Poland with whom we are celebrating a sustained relationship of 35 years. “Witam” (vee-tahm); “Akwaaba” (Ahk-wah-bah); “Huan ying.” (Hwan-yeeng)

Happy New Year! We are celebrating this morning! To all of you students: we are celebrating your arrival. You’re arriving at Grand Valley at a unique point in your history... and a unique point in the university’s history.

Grand Valley is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. There will be ways for you to take part in the celebration all year long. There will be distinguished speakers and artists from around the world; there will be occasions where we come together as a community to celebrate Grand Valley’s uniqueness and plan for its continued success.

You are now a part of that. You are part of our community, and we are so happy you are. We know you had a lot of choices on where to continue your education, and we are pleased that our rich academic programs, outstanding faculty, committed staff and beautiful campuses have steered you to Grand Valley. We want you to succeed!

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

That quote is credited to Helen Keller; the sentiments I will credit to our founders and all who have come after them to build this comprehensive four-year university that attracts the best and the brightest.

I’m talking about you.

You are joining current students and 75,000 alumni around the world who are making their marks with a Grand Valley liberal education as their foundation. What does that mean? We want you to have the skills and character to make a difference that comes from a liberal education ... know how to think, adapt and lead.

Our history and our current culture are garnering much success and attention:

- Princeton Review calls us one of the “Best in the Midwest.”
- We’ve been ranked in the “Top 10 Regional Public Universities in the Midwest” by U.S. News & World Report

- For fourteen years in a row, we've been named one of "America's 100 Best College Buys."
- We're leading the way in the area of sustainability... and are in the top 25 of the nation's "greenest" universities.
- Our athletic program has been named the top in the nation in Division II for seven years in a row. And our student-athletes attain all that success with more than half of them achieving a 3.0 grand point average or better. Our athletes know about team work.

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Look around you. Whether it's your fellow students or someone in an academic robe... these are the people who will be on your team and who will help you achieve your goals. And we will all celebrate with you at each triumph.

You've chosen an exceptional place to expand your intellect, your character and develop new goals. This is where Grand Valley joins you in shaping your lives... your professions...and your societies.

That's not just a mission *statement*, it is our mission.

There are a myriad of opportunities... a staggering number of new avenues for you to take, but you must be prepared to work. There are more than 200 areas of study here at Grand Valley. Be assured... your classes and your professors will excite you... but they will challenge you as well.

This university was founded 50 years ago with an unprecedented public-private partnership between leaders and believers in West Michigan and the State of Michigan. That foundation, rock-solid with community support, is what sustains our success and growth today.

Partnership and planning have resulted in our beautiful campuses that keep improving. In Allendale, you'll enjoy new housing, dining facilities and new classrooms in The Connection on the south end of campus, along with many other upgrades.

Next month, we'll break ground on the Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons... the building is named for the mother of our Board Chair, Kate Pew Wolters. We are designing the best for you and the generations of students who will follow you. This facility will open in the spring of 2013 and will prepare students to work together and to compete globally in the information age.

The partnerships continue as we move ahead on the new building for the Seidman College of Business on the Pew Grand Rapids Campus. Friends and supporters of L. William Seidman, who spearheaded Grand Valley's founding and was first chair of the Board, are working with the university to build this cutting-edge facility. It will benefit students for sure, and also the city of Grand Rapids.

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To continue our standards of academic excellence, in addition to the new facilities, we've added some outstanding faculty members from all over the world. They join others on the faculty and staff who are committed to your success.

As mentioned in my welcome we have distinguished visitors from other countries celebrating with us. Their presence with us is living testimony to the active partnerships GVSU has with fine universities around the world, providing student exchange and faculty/staff collaboration. More than 130 GVSU students are or will soon be studying abroad this Fall semester, and nearly 700 students are expected to study abroad during this--the 50th--academic year. We will have more than 300 students from around the world pursuing degrees at GVSU with new students from our partner institutions in our audience today.

That success will mean a great deal of work, of course, but we all know that to be consistently effective... we have to make time for some fun. That's right! We know a thing or two about fun here at Grand Valley; we also know we must make healthy choices.

There are more than 260 student organizations on campus, and they always need new members. Student Life has been busy preparing events for you to get to know campus and each other... and there's always the person down the hall in need of a diversion. Branch out.... Extend yourself. Get to know others who are different than you. The essence of diversity and inclusion will enrich your life.

I already told you about the impressive success of our athletic teams... the best overall program in the country, and you can have a good seat for the action. Our football home opener is September 2nd against West Texas A & M. Let's show our Laker pride! I'll be in the stands rowing with our students. "Rowing?" Ask! And our women's soccer team will defend last year's national title!

It's going to be another great year in Athletics... another challenging year in academics... and another exciting year at Grand Valley State University.

As physician, poet and Harvard professor Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The great thing in the world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving."

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We are honored you have chosen us... as we move into our anniversary year... to assist you as you make moves that will change your lives and the lives of those around you forever.

It's going to be a GRAND year!