

Convocation 2014
President Thomas J. Haas

What a great day! This is the formal beginning of our academic year when we get to welcome all new, and returning **Lakers for a Lifetime!**

Convocation is a symbolic rite of passage into college, and more importantly it demonstrates our commitment to our student success!

First-year students have been waiting for their great college experience to begin. Well, so have we!

We'll talk about college life and, most importantly, we'll talk about education, leadership and lifelong learning.

Let me introduce to you some of the people who join us today to welcome you to Grand Valley State University.

We welcome board member Shelley Padnos and honorary life member Donna Brooks.

I also want to welcome Provost Gayle R. Davis, the members of my senior management team, distinguished faculty and staff members, many alumni and community members and all of the students and guests who have joined us for the beginning of another exciting year on campus.

I know one group that's especially excited to see you: members of our esteemed faculty.

Students, I want you to look at the faculty. You won't see them in their academic robes all the time, but you will see them, and they will be critically important to the experiences you have here at the university.

Appreciate that these people, who are renowned in their fields, have chosen to teach — to teach you and challenge you to learn — and in doing so, they will change your lives.

That is a lofty goal, isn't it? But it is our core mission to educate, and education always initiates change.

Columbia University Professor Andrew Delbanco writes frequently about the mission of colleges and universities. He talks about the idea that students can be transformed to lead lives of meaning and purpose.

He writes:

“At its core, college should be a place where young people find help for navigating the territory between adolescence and adulthood. It should help them develop certain qualities of mind and heart requisite for reflective leadership.”

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Earlier, I talked about those of us who work at Grand Valley having a lofty goal. We recognize that you, the students, have lofty goals as well.

You must **learn** and you must **lead**. The Irish poet William Butler Yeats put it this way:

“Education is not the filling a bucket but the lighting of a fire.”

Your passions will ignite your fire, whether you study business, engineering, one of our health professions, liberal arts or any other discipline or area of study we offer. You must find your passion; find your fire, so you will contribute to our campus life and to your communities and to your professional areas.

This is not a passive gift. You must grab knowledge and opportunities with both hands. Get involved in the life we offer on our campuses. We have theater, dance, lectures, the Fall Arts Celebration, and all our athletic events and intramural opportunities.

I can't even list all that is available to you.

You've already been investigating and hearing about clubs and events; you might even have your list going of what you want to check out, where you want to join.

That's great, but be sure to keep an open mind. You'll learn about new opportunities every day. And you will meet new people and friends along the way.

We have more than 300 student organizations on campus. And many have a focus on service to others on- and off-campus.

You have many people who will help you on campus, from our wonderful students and staff who work in our living centers to the people in charge of our student life activities to your professors and academic advisors.

Look for opportunities to get involved in a research project with faculty. That is a possibility as an undergraduate at Grand Valley. Remember, teaching and sharing discovery is the core of a Grand Valley education.

And at the heart of our campus is the Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons. This is the ground-breaking and very popular library that provides students with unique spaces and opportunities for learning.

We have updated and added to our facilities on campus, and I'm sure you've noticed we're building a new Science Laboratory Building.

All of these changes and improvements are to enhance your learning and living experience while you are on campus.

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So many of you have already commented on how beautiful our campus is. And you are right. We appreciate the work of our Facilities staff members who work tirelessly to enhance our experience on campus.

But the best part is, our beautiful exterior leads into beautiful and impressive results. It is what happens inside our facilities that is impressive.

The state Legislature is looking long and hard at public universities for accountability, for access to an education, and, most importantly, for results — measuring student success while at a university, and then as productive alums and citizens of Michigan.

In fact Grand Valley has been judged best in class for a second year. What that means for you is that your university is producing the desired results and is getting the right kind of attention.

We're getting attention because we not only attract you here as first-year students, but we take countless steps to help you stay in school and graduate in a timely fashion with a degree that has value and relevance.

More than 90 percent of our recent graduates are employed or in graduate school, with 87 percent of those employed, starting careers and working right here in Michigan and giving back to our communities.

Area employers know what they get when they hire a Laker. They get a graduate who has been liberally educated and who shows a skill set involving complex thinking and the ability to appreciate others' points of view to arrive at the best result.

Many of our grads have had an internship or international study experiences that distinguishes them from others.

At Grand Valley, we pay attention to strong finishes as well as strong beginnings. Our Grand Finish grant rewards you for earning a degree in four years. Make it your goal to earn that \$1,000 grant going into your senior year. In a way, we have reduced your tuition in the last year as a reward for staying on track.

Some of our students are also athletes, and they are champions and winners in the classroom and on the field.

We just captured our ninth Directors' Cup in 11 years. That means we are the best Division II sports program in the nation! And these superb athletes are training and traveling while keeping up in class. Nearly 70 percent of our student athletes have a 3.0 GPA or better.

You're hearing a lot about what it means to be a **Laker for a Lifetime**. We're excited that you have joined us on this leg of your educational journey.

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Marian Wright Edelman, a graduate of Yale Law and founder of the Children's Defense Fund, said:

“Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.”

Hmm, another lofty goal.

This year we are going to work hard, achieve our goals, and we are going to succeed. This is going to be a grand year! Don't you feel it? I do!

Go Lakers!