

Philomena V. Mantella
President's Report
Board of Trustees
April 24, 2020

Opening of meeting:

Thank you, Chair Kramer. As we gather together today to conduct the university's business – not in person, but virtually – we must acknowledge that these are historic times. We are battling a global pandemic and deeply challenging economic conditions. Our commitment to bending the curve and conforming with the Governor's EOs requires us to hold our Trustees meeting virtually for the first time in our history. In doing so, we may be separated for everyone's well-being, but we are very much together in our desire to secure the best outcomes for our Grand Valley learners, our community and our state. We are bound by our desire to create continuity for our students, operate all our services, create networks of support for our community, and to collaborate around decisions to guide our university through these uncharted waters.

A crisis of this magnitude has a way of crystalizing what an institution stands for. What has crystalized for our community is the well-being of our students and community; and the passion for our mission is paramount and can't be derailed. I am filled with admiration for how this community has responded to a global crisis that moved 1.5 billion students across the world to remote learning over 30 days. Grand Valley's 24,000 learners went remote, undisrupted in just four days.

During my President's Report at the end of this meeting, I will discuss what has guided our decision-making, where we are today, and how we are securing our future as a high-quality, high-value institution that keeps students at the center of our work.

Right now, I'll turn it back over to Chair Kramer to conduct the meeting. Thank you.

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Board of Trustees meeting

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

These unprecedented times test our flexibility and adaptability in every aspect of our lives. We must stay productive, positive and healthy. We continue to face daily challenges and decisions around family, livelihood and community and will for the foreseeable future. How are we making these decisions at Grand Valley?

- We lead with our **values**;
- We use the best science and the best of Grand Valley to **mitigate harm** from this unpredictable virus;
- and we **communicate** consistently and clearly to all members of our community.

I am grateful for my senior team colleagues who bring their experience, intellect and integrity to every decision as we wage this battle together.

Let's begin with our values – people first, student centered and mission focused. Our faculty made the sudden shift to teach their hundreds of courses online. Faculty showed their commitment to students and supported each other, meeting challenges head-on at the onset and throughout the term.

Housing, Student Life and Public Safety coordinated efforts and managed an orderly move-out of thousands of students from our campuses in a disorderly time. The execution of the plan was simply remarkable.

Our IT staff placed orders for devices to put into the hands of our students most in need so they could continue their studies. They also did the incredible work of keeping the university systems running with loads beyond what one could imagine.

Through our strong shared governance, the provost, deans and UAS, led by Felix Ngassa and Shawn Bultsma, contemplated and passed sound academic policy to allow students the necessary flexibility to navigate the disruption and reassure them they could effectively adjust to the online medium.

Sensitive to the economic disruption, we immediately offered refunds for the unused portions of housing, dining and parking fees, and disrupted student employment was replaced with hardship grants.

Our Financial Aid office opened their arms wide with a call to students facing any financial hardships and challenges as businesses closed or paused, changing many families' financial picture. University Development made a special appeal to the **Student Support Fund** and more than \$56,000 came in almost immediately, including donations from our faculty and staff. We have implemented a process to give the \$9 million from the Federal Cares Act directly to our students most in need. As of this morning, we have received nearly 4,000 applications for hardship funds after posting it on our Financial Aid site earlier this week.

We created **“Project Reach Out”** – a program to call every one of our more than 24,000 students. It has allowed us to touch base with students and to help them get connected with our resources if they're experiencing challenges. More than 170 faculty and staff have volunteered to make these calls. The personal connection is what sets Grand Valley apart. The outreach effort has been highlighted as a best practice in two national higher education publications.

All support services have continued operating virtually for students – counseling, the library, academic advising and career counseling continue at full force.

Admissions is offering numerous virtual tours and one-on-one meetings to assure prospective students and families can make good decisions on their next steps

We operated at breakneck speed to assure learning continues and our students pressed on with the agility and talent that define Lakers.

We have also not stopped at our own borders. Grand Valley has led in our community response. We met with **Governor Gretchen Whitmer** as we turned over our **Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences** to Spectrum Health – in case it's needed for patient overflow.

The **Padnos College of Engineering** joined an effort to create more than 1,000 face masks to donate to health care providers, and produce from our **Sustainable Agriculture Project** and our food service was donated to those in need. Our community moved swiftly to respond and care for one another. We have activated 10 networks of support in areas of critical need within our community. We tapped the skills and expertise of more than 200 students, faculty, staff, alumni and retirees to prioritize and innovate around projects to include medical supply design and development, grocery delivery to vulnerable populations, supporting K-12 families of highest need with tutor support, and webinars to help small businesses. This is not an exhaustive list of how Grand Valley has responded to our community's needs, but it shines a light on how we embrace our community role.

The Senior Leadership Team holds virtual meetings each day, with reports from the Incident Management Team coming in daily. The incident Management Team (IMT) is led by Public Safety Chief Brandon DeHaan and includes a broad range of expertise – from facilities and student services, to public safety and health, to logistics and communication. The IMT guided our decision-making in our ramp down, and the team is guiding our decision-making as we prepare to ramp up, as circumstances dictate. Right now, we have only critical staff on campus, and I am extremely grateful for their dedication to the university and to the health and safety of our entire community.

We have instituted a broad-based communication effort transparent about both what we know and don't know at given points in time. Virtual town halls and office hours engage faculty, staff, students, parents and supporters with real-time information. We have had 1,800 participants to date and counting.

We are weathering a profound rapid onset disruption well. I am deeply grateful to all Grand Valley community members.

As we look forward, I share with you what Vice President Greg Sanial has repeatedly said – the university is financially sound. We have been able to keep all employees earning their regular salaries or hourly rates, with their benefits intact. We are able to do this because of the fiscal management by my predecessors and their colleagues, many of whom are still working with us today, and members of the **Board of Trustees**, who have always acted in the best long-term interests of the institution.

That said, we are facing unprecedented public health concerns, uncertainty, economic harm and social and emotional fragility as a society. There is great uncertainty in the long-term. Mindful of our learners' needs, the intergenerational nature of Grand Valley, and the public interest, we must take all of these difficult realities into account. There are numerous projections of deep declines in college-going enrollment, economics, state appropriations and endowment performance. There are many institutions sizing their likely deficits and asking their communities to brace for the worst. I can assure you, I see those possibilities and probabilities

quite clearly. I can also assure you that as responsible stewards, we are actively planning for every possibility, curtailing non-essential expenditures and will continue to keep you informed at every turn.

But trustees, colleagues and citizens, we ARE a distinctive institution and there is as much in our control as outside it. It's only reasonable to ask me, "Why can we prevail when many will fall against the weight of this challenge?"

Let me ask you these questions first: What would you consider as a parent, student or adult learner as of utmost importance about your university at this unprecedented time? What assures you the best potential outcome in this new economy? What would you choose in seeking well-being in this uncertain time?

Can I make an investment in education? And if I continue on that path for my long-term well-being, how and where?

Grand Valley is a great answer:

- The cost of a Grand Valley education is among the lowest in the state, while still delivering high-value.
- Grand Valley offers a liberal education creating lifelong agility and a broad range of professional degrees allowing me to make many choices possible in these fluid circumstance
- Grand Valley is large enough for choices and small enough to personalize your journey
- Grand Valley is situated in West Michigan where community is defined by care and commitment to each other.

This is not a marketing message; this is our reality. At Grand Valley, someone knows you, cares about you, and can support you as you shape and reshape your path to respond to shifting realities.

Is all of this not of paramount importance today?

So, our focus is to work toward a **robust fall enrollment**. We are pushing hard, reaching out and removing barriers that may exist from these conditions impacting our students today. There's an old adage that says – you hope for the best and plan for the worst. We aren't hoping, we're *working hard* for the best, while building strategies to address conditions outside our control. We have the talent, the passion and the commitment to excel. We also have the courage to make adjustments whatever we face. We will track our progress and share our results, projections and decisions at our July board meeting.

In summary, our base is solid, our focus is sharpened, our preparation is deep, our fundamental assets are strong, particularly for this moment in history. We are aligned with our communities' needs. The mission remains unchanged; the modalities of delivery of education have become more varied, the urgency more pronounced and the stakes higher.

We cannot afford as a state or a nation to leave those vulnerable to the current conditions behind; we cannot afford to have our talent pipeline disrupted or diminished by talented citizens stepping away from their learning journey.

Grand Valley must and will rise to the challenge. We will make the difficult choices ahead as necessary. We will support our students at every turn to avoid disruption in the very thing that will help them prevail -- new learning and credentials of entry in a tightly constrained workforce. Michigan will get the GVSU talent it needs to address the challenges ahead.

Thank you, trustees, faculty, staff and students of Grand Valley State University.