

President Thomas J. Haas testimony to House Higher Ed Approps Subcommittee, March 9, 2017

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to visit with you this morning.

I'm in my 11<sup>th</sup> year as president (we don't have term limits!) and I am very proud of the important role Grand Valley plays in Michigan's higher education landscape.

Grand Valley is the fourth largest of the public universities. We enroll 25,400 students at our locations in Grand Rapids, Allendale, Holland, Muskegon, Traverse City and Detroit.

Grand Valley's enrollment has doubled in the past 20 years, a growth rate that exceeds all other universities – and by a wide margin.

Our students come from every county in Michigan and from each of your districts. Of our 25,000 students, 1,500 come from other states and 430 from other nations, adding an important cultural dimension to our campuses.

But when it comes to Michigan, we have kept our eye on the ball. Grand Valley enrolls the second largest number of Michigan-resident undergraduates, exceeded only by MSU.

So, you might wonder, what is it that attracts so many students to Grand Valley?

We say that “Grand Valley is the best place for student success.” And to us, success means graduation.

Grand Valley has the highest graduation rate of all the universities not named Michigan or Michigan State.

Our campus housing, our rich student life programs, and our liberal arts tradition of personal attention, with small classes taught by professors, has never changed. And on my watch it never will. Our ability to be flexible and adapt to what students and employers want hasn't changed either. GVSU is relevant.

Grand Valley is among Michigan's most affordable choices. Our tuition is well below the state average.

And there's a lot of financial aid for students needing it. More than a quarter of a billion dollars in aid was disbursed to our students last year. Nearly a third of that amount was gift aid that never has to be repaid.

That means students qualifying for financial aid pay an average rate that's about \$4,000 less than the posted rate.

Yet tuition is higher than any of us wants it to be. And there's a reason. It's because of the direct tie between state funding and tuition. This chart says it all. Over the past 40 years, the appropriation has dropped from two-thirds of university revenue to 18 percent.

I chaired the Governor's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Commission. Education is a public good.

We are efficient and watch spending with great care. On this chart the red line shows increased operating costs at all Michigan universities; the blue line – showing cost containment – is Grand Valley.

Yet, we still want our students to graduate in four years. And we put our money where our mouth is. We discount senior year tuition by \$1,000 — or around 10 percent — for seniors who've completed 90 credits at the end of their junior year. We call it the “Grand Finish.” And the outcome? Fully one-third of our students graduating in four years leave college with no debt.

These things are noticed. Grand Valley is consistently ranked by US News as one of the top three public universities in the Midwest. We're a great choice for veterans, for transfer students, and for students of color. We've been named one of “America's 100 Best College Buys” for 21 years in a row; no other Michigan campus has that distinction.

Where do our graduates go? Well, actually, they stay here. Of our most recent graduates, 94% are employed, attending graduate school, or both. Of those working, 85 percent are pursuing their careers in Michigan.

Many pursue jobs in health care, no surprise because — outside of physicians — Grand Valley is Michigan's largest educator of health care professionals. If you've seen a nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, physical therapist, occupational therapist, or persons in a dozen other health care professions, odds are they're graduates of Grand Valley.

This focus on health is aligned with our programing in STEM-H – Science, Technology, Engineering, Math – Health.

We also provide a great return to the communities that host our campuses. Last year, more than three quarters of a billion dollars in economic impact in West Michigan was due to Grand Valley's presence. More than 11,000 jobs in the local private sector exist because of goods and services that Grand Valley obtains. This does not include the purchasing power of our 45,000 alumni in the tri-county area.

What makes me particularly proud of all these impacts is that Grand Valley changes lives – the lives of our students and their families.

That's because 39 percent of our students tell us they are the first in their family to attend college. As was I. In fact my parents did not graduate from high school.

Some of these first-gens come to us as transfer students — Grand Valley accepts more than 2,000 transfers every year. Grand Valley invented 2+2 programs. Grand Valley was the first university in Michigan to sign reverse transfer agreements with all 28 community colleges. And Grand Valley has been named to the Transfer Honor Roll, one of just 63 institutions nationwide recognized for ease of transfer.

Let me finish with a comment on performance funding, a concept and construct that I fully support as it demonstrates accountability to our taxpayers — and not just because we have again been recognized as the state's best performing university.

I want to note two caveats to my overall support. First — enrollment isn't a performance factor, and remember that our enrollment has doubled. That's why Grand Valley has been last, or next to last, in per student allocation.

Second — only a portion of the increase in funding is tested for performance. If performance testing means acknowledging actual performance, then base funding should also be performance tested.

Thank you for the chance to be with you today.