

House Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee
March 9, 2017
Comments by President Thomas J. Haas
Grand Valley State University

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

I'm in my 11th 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, 1500 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%. I chaired on the Governor's 21st Century Education Commission. Higher education is a public good and wish it were better reflected in the state's investment.

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 a 10% -- 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.