Good morning,

It is my great honor and pleasure to welcome all of you to a new year at Grand Valley. I would like to especially welcome our incoming freshmen and all our new and returning students. I am speaking on behalf of the entire faculty when I say we are thrilled to see you here because you are our future thinkers, creators, entrepreneurs and leaders in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected but at the same time increasingly competitive. We are enthused and ready to educate and guide you into your chosen professions, and in turn, we entrust you to lead us to brighter futures.

That sounds like something a professor would say doesn’t it? Ok, I’m going to give away my punch line right away, two words: THINK BIG!

I was flying across the Atlantic two days ago. I was half asleep and half watching an in-flight movie, when I heard George Clooney’s character say something that made me sit up and think of you. I’ll paraphrase but it was something like this: Adults watch the Olympics because they admire amazing athletic feats, get engaged in national rivalry and are inspired by the physique of the athletes. Children love the Olympics because they like to watch the Olympians realize their dreams. I know we are all adults but don’t let go of your dreams! Don’t lose the wonder, the curiosity and the energy of your dreams! They will keep you young, they will keep you capable and they are the single most potent fuel for your achievements.

Please indulge me for a minute and think about your hero, the one person whose accomplishments leave you wondering if this person had super-human talents. Maybe this person is Mozart, or Einstein, or Martin Luther King Jr.... Maybe she is an Olympian gold medalist, or Meryl Streep or Maya Angelou... Or maybe it is your mom or dad...
No matter whom you are thinking of, I assure you of three things: [1] they are not superhuman, [2] they didn’t get to where they are by chance, and [3] you have the talents to exceed their successes if you dedicate yourself to the task.

How do I know this? There is an enormous body of historical, psychological and scientific research which shows that though people may be born with various innate abilities, it is almost never those with extreme talents who become the greatest achievers. The best of the best are almost always those who chose to work hard at things that are seemingly impossible for them, not things that come easily. These are the folks who take pains to work on their challenges because they have found something they love, something they have true passion for.

If you are willing to dedicate yourself to something you are passionate about, to work hard at things that you may think are beyond your abilities, and to accept challenges, you too will become world-class and achieve greatness in whatever you choose to do. And I emphasize whatever your endeavors may be.

Your dreams are your fuel but the road to achieving greatness has some reality checks too. The average life expectancy for my generation is about 85 years; the average life expectancy for the new college student is probably closer to 100! That’s a lot of time! And in that time it is inconceivable that you will have just one career. You will likely have 2-3 careers, maybe more. That means you have to know a lot about a lot of things. It also means you are going to have to impress a lot of employers.

Another reality is that there are over 7 billion people in the world, and anyone who is literate and has access to the internet can Google! Knowledge is simply out there for the taking. Then why go to college,
you might ask? There are many reasons but I will highlight two practical ones: [1] because you need to set yourself apart from all the other folks who are contending for the job you want. And [2] because when you go to your job interview, they will ask you what you are bringing to the table that isn’t just a click away for the employer – because remember, they can Google too. In today’s world, the only thing that will set you apart from all others is your ability to think critically, analytically and often. In other words, it is your ability to create new knowledge. Our mission as your professors is to teach you how to do just that. The knowledge on Google is only new if you create it and put it there!

The only way to achieve that feat is by having a broad base in liberal education; to not be myopic in your chosen field but to strive to learn as much as you can about everything. Leonardo da Vinci described liberal education quite eloquently when he aid “to develop a complete mind study the science of art. Study the art of science. Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else.”

Please take full advantage of all the resources and programs at Grand Valley. Find your passion and do NOT waste a single moment in seizing opportunities to partner with your professors on scholarly research and creative projects. Get quantitative, learn a foreign language, take advantage of our study abroad programs and see the world! Take chances and open new horizons for yourself by taking classes in subjects you don’t find interesting as well as those dear to your heart. And always remember that the faculty at Grand Valley are at the top of their fields, and are ready and eager to guide you into realizing your dreams. No goal is too lofty. So THINK BIG!

I wish you a happy start to a new year at Grand Valley. To the returning students: Welcome back, we missed you! To the new students: Welcome home!
Thank you!