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Remarks on Pamela Withrow, delivered at Convocation on February 21, 2000

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We are gathered here today to recognize a person who for us symbolizes the best that our state and nation offers in the field of corrections. She has created a new model for warden of a correctional institution. She has done it here, in Ionia, at the Michigan Reformatory. Our focus today is on her and the career she has made for herself, and it is also on the path she followed to that career. As a University we have particular interest in the fact that she was a single mother, raising a family while gaining a college degree. This is a late 20th century path for intelligent, career-seeking women, to make that career for themselves. Our only regret is that she didn’t earn her degree at Grand Valley so we will correct that today by conferring on her our highest honor, a Doctor of Laws degree, for what she has accomplished since graduating from college.

Grand Valley has been long committed to the field of criminal justice. I cannot tell you how many have graduated, but I know our graduates cover west Michigan and beyond in corrections, judicial and law enforcement positions. I am proud of our faculty in the School of Criminal Justice. I am proud of the qualities of the graduates of the School who play more than an important role, they are necessary to the way of life in west Michigan.

This morning it is appropriate for us to honor one of the best in the field. By doing so, we honor our School of Criminal Justice, by associating its values and ideals with those reflected in Pamela Withrow’s career.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, “The contagion of crime is like that of the plague. Criminals collected together corrupt each other. They are worse than ever when at the termination of their punishment they return to society.” That I am sure, was often true. What we are here to recognize today is that life and times can change and we no longer accept Napoleon’s view as inevitable. Pamela Withrow has demonstrated that there can be a better result.

I am pleased now to present to you the Director of the School of Criminal Justice, Dr. James Houston. To him and to the faculty I extend the University’s appreciation for requesting this convocation to honor Warden Pamela Withrow. I extend appreciation also to Dean Jonathan White who has for years guided all of us in building a first rate program and who will present Warden Withrow for the degree.