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## The Laker Dream: A Short Guide for Grand Valley Students

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# The Laker Dream

A short guide for Grand Valley Students



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# Chapter 1: An introduction

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## What is this booklet?

That, dear reader, is a wonderful question. This booklet can be whatever you want it to be. It can serve as a step-by-step guideline of things to do, or it can serve as varied tips and tricks. It can be your personal bible, or it can be a last resort. The way you use this book will be entirely up to you. Yet, as you read through, there are a few things you should keep in mind.

### A student created this guide.

Unless otherwise indicated, a student wrote every word in this book. I am a student who, at one point, found myself in the same place you are: confident, scared, worried, or anxious. Please keep that in mind as you read through the information contained in this document. Some of the information has been gathered from official Grand Valley sources and documents, while other segments are based on personal experience.

### This is not an exhaustive guide

At its core, this booklet should be useful. With this in mind, it is not an exhaustive guide for everything that is available at Grand Valley. Some of the information may not directly apply to you, or it may not answer every question you have. Use this tool to figure out what to do next, or use it to figure out how to figure out what to do next.

### What about the 50 other resources that have already been thrown at me?

We'll talk about how to sort through those later on, but consider this book a concise version of all those documents. Too often during orientation students are bombarded with everything they'll need for their time at the university. This booklet is meant to work as a standalone piece: Think of what you

need to figure out and find it in here.

### Who is this booklet for?

It is for anyone that has gotten their hands on it. This project exists solely for the reader. Throughout my career at Grand Valley, I continuously came up with questions that no one had an answer for. I took to the Internet, trying to find a solution, but all I found was a confusing set of webpages with never-ending links. Those sites are still helpful, but you have to know what you want to find. This booklet looks to provide you a simple answer or lead you to a place where you can find it.



### You are not alone

This is the most important piece of information you'll find in this book, and it is also the one you are most likely to ignore. Every student hears the same message throughout their time at Grand Valley, and too often it goes by without making an impact. Remember this: There is no question, doubt, anxiety, or worry you have that has not been shared by another student, classmate, roommate, or friend. Someone else in the university is struggling with the same thing you are. You are not alone in your concerns, and you are also not alone in finding a solution.

# Chapter 2: Participate, participate, participate

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## Saying Yes

Throughout your time at Grand Valley, you'll be presented with an endless amount of opportunities and activities like clubs, organizations, jobs, internships, classes, tutoring, and many, many more. All of this can be intimidating. You don't want to pass up exciting opportunities, but you also don't want to overcommit. That club sounds really good, but what if you don't have enough time or just end up don't liking it?

Fortunately, the answer is simple: Say yes and try. This is something that usually takes a semester or two to master, and it can be difficult to sort through so many offerings. Yet, you will not get anywhere by denying all those opportunities. Take your time, sort through them, and think positively. If it's something you're interested in doing, or you think you might be interested in participating in, say yes. You need to distinguish what you need to get done from what you want to get done and prioritize accordingly.

## Programs & Opportunities

College students have to deal with a long list of responsibilities. On top of the standard mix of social life, classes, and the treasured sleep-time, the university provides plenty of resources for students to participate in. For the purposes of this booklet, we will sort these resources into two general categories: Programs & Opportunities.

### Programs

Programs are organized and structured events hosted by the university or another organization. For example, the GVSU Career Center hosts a variety of events throughout the year. For this booklet, we will consider all those events part of a program. Some

programs, like TRiO Support Services require a level of commitment. Others, like visiting the GVSU Writing Center, can be used as you need them. If you want to find out about these services, visit them!

### Opportunities

Opportunities are more difficult to define because of their inherent variety. Opportunities can include job offers, internships, or clubs. Clubs blend the lines between opportunities and programs: You may commit to going to a club every week, making it a program, by our definition, or you may attend the meetings you find necessary. Opportunities extend beyond the university, and they can often be intimidating. The opportunity to network with a professional or apply for a new job are opportunities that everyone should consider, even if they seem out of reach.

These definitions are not an ultimatum, nor are they created by the university. While many of Grand Valley's programs will fall into our definition, some may not.

## Saying no

This may seem contradictory, but the word "no" is as important to students as "yes." Since there are so many opportunities and programs available to students, one must learn to master the balance. It is okay to feel overwhelmed by the abundance of resources available at the university. As you're sorting through everything, remember this: You always have the ability to say no or to back out of a commitment. This does not mean that you can abandon your commitments, but it does mean that you should feel comfortable telling members of an organization or club if you can no longer make the meetings.

# Chapter 3: Laker Effect

## Grand Valley Uniqueness

As you make your through Grand Valley, you'll start to notice quite a few things about the university. Every little thing you discover will feel like something no one else has seen before. You will stumble onto experiences, things, and people that feel crafted for you in this specific moment in time. To better explain it, I'll repeat some words a friend of mine once said:

*"Grand Valley is crazy, because it feels like a big school where everyone knows one another. There's all the opportunity of a large school with all the intimacies of a small college."*

This is the beauty of what university marketing has deemed "The Laker Effect." Everyone at the university has the opportunity to create their own story, big or small.

## Gathering information

I can sit here and provide the most important dates in a beautiful table. Yet, those things never seem to work. So, this section will focus on greater, more general advice. It will not directly provide the information, but it will tell you how to effectively find it. Nonetheless, there are three main tools you should familiarize yourself with:

**The GVSU Academic Calendar:** A place for all the important dates. Spring break, final exams, and holidays can be found here.

**Blackboard and Banner:** Two of the most important tools during your time at the university. Take a small break and tour both tools. Knowing what they are used for and where things can be found will greatly

speed up your efficiency.

**Email:** Whether it be the university email or your own personal client, get used to checking email frequently. Most of the important communications from the university will come this way.

## Tips & tricks:

### Google it:

This may seem like a joke of an answer, but Google can be your best friend. If you have a question about where to find the academic calendar, the food menu, or the bus schedule, a simple Google search can often lead you to the right place. "GVSU calendar; GVSU Bus schedule; GVSU Dining;" will give you a few links that can provide the right answer. Even more complicated searches like specific departments,

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## Chapter 3 Continued from Page 5

services, or people within the university can be easily tracked down. Never feel like you don't have the power to find exactly the answer you are looking for.

### Ask for it:

If the information is not readily available online, there is a high chance that someone at the university can help you find it. One of the best tools is the GVSU 2020 desk. By calling 616-331-2020 you are put in contact with students who can direct you to the right people. If you are completely stumped, they can provide simple guidance and directly transfer you to the right person. Moreover, don't feel like you cannot contact other people directly. Many students are afraid to reach out to professors, deans, or administrators. You should feel the opposite: These people are at the university to help you. Take advantage of these resources. Ask for their knowledge.

### The Syllabus:

One thing you'll learn during your time at the university is that a lot of the information you need will already be in your possession. The most important tool you will have in all of your classes is the syllabus. While it may seem like a boring document full of assignments that you are not ready to think about, it can be extremely helpful. In many cases, the syllabus provides a complete guideline for everything you'll do in a semester. While you should not be afraid to ask for help, take your time to sort through the syllabus and see if you can find an answer first.

### The Library:

You may have noticed this during a tour or just while walking around the university, but Grand Valley has an incredible library. It's gigantic, full of great tools, and simply marvelous to look at. After

four years of getting lost in it, I still admire its beauty every time I step into the atrium. From the Knowledge Market and the IT Helpdesk to the various kinds of seating available, you'll find something that will help you do better at school. Use it to study, relax, or do group projects. The library is multifaceted, and its services can be molded to fit your needs. Take advantage of it.

### The Professors:

Speaking to professors around the university, there is something different about the Grand Valley relationship with students. When most professors go to an established university, they focus on doing research and developing their scholarly careers. At those institutions, classes are an afterthought. At Grand Valley, professors are teachers first. Their main goal and primary assignment is to make us better students. This is why they are such incredible resources. Students know they can visit their office hours and contact them outside of class because professors care about their success. Value this relationship: Every professor you have—even the ones that seems really strict and angry—care about your personal success.

### Surprises

No matter what happens, no matter how thorough you are, and no matter how well you organize yourself, you will run into surprises at Grand Valley. These surprises add to the mystical elements of college, but they can also be extremely stressful. Whenever you are trying to find the right information or trying to successfully schedule something, be aware of opportunities. You may stumble onto something exciting or something that you had not thought about. These surprises can change your career, and it's hard to see them coming. Keep your eyes open.



# Chapter 4: Dealing with panic

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## Understanding Emergencies

One of the most difficult challenges you can encounter at Grand Valley is the feeling that you cannot handle something. Unfortunately, things that may seem unmanageable will appear in your path. Some of these may seem like life-ending emergencies. However, one of the most important skills you can develop is to understand what is and is not an emergency.

While no personal troubles should be ignored, consider the impact of whatever it is you are facing. A late assignment, a missed bus, or a sick day may seem like an emergency, but it is something that someone can work on by himself. More elaborate emergencies could involve an upcoming event like signing up for classes. Essentially, there are things that you may not know how to do and need help doing them, but that does not create an emergency. Academic and work emergencies will happen, but that does not mean that the world is ending.

**Contact the Grand Valley Police Department at 616-331-3255. In case of emergency, call 911.**

### Office hours vs. Non-office hours

As you encounter emergencies throughout your career, you will realize that a lot of work has to

be done during “office hours.” This time, usually between 9 AM and 5 PM, Monday through Friday, is when most of the university buildings are open. So, you may realize that you do not know how to sign up for classes at 2 AM on a weekend. While that may be an incredibly stressful situation, understand that not much work can be done until the university is open again. You may have the ability to do some work online.

However, if you are looking for personal support, be ready to wait until Monday. Use this waiting time effectively: Write down a list of questions and prepare yourself to make the meeting go by as effectively as possible

## You are not alone!

As always, remember that you are not alone. Everyone at the university has experienced emergencies, and everyone here wants to help solve them. Be prepared to communicate with people to solve whatever problems you run into. When it comes to emergencies, you can never receive too much help. Grand Valley provides the right tools to help things go smoothly: Academic advising, the counseling center, and the many on campus resources will help you when you need it the most.



# Chapter 5: Important stuff

## Meal plans and food

If you peer into the life of a busy college student, you'll find that his favorite time of day is usually one of two sections: Food time or sleep time. While sleeping is important, it's up to you to figure out the best way to fit that into your schedule. On the other hand, Grand Valley has plenty of food opportunities.

### Meal Plans

Most students at Grand Valley will at least consider a meal plan during their time at the university. This is something that most administrators and plenty of students recommend, as a meal plan can give you flexibility and peace of mind. Cooking can be incredibly rewarding, but being able to sit down for a quick meal can free up some time and reduce stress.

This does not mean that every meal plan is right for you. Before choosing one, consider the following options:

- For how many meals will you be on campus?

If you're only going to be on campus for eight meals a week, you might not need to purchase the plan with 14 meals per week. Take a look at your schedule and figure out when you'll have time to eat somewhere where you can use your meal plan.

- Do you like the food on campus?

The university will say that there is a broad variety of food available on campus, but it all boils down to three general categories: Franchise fast food (Panda Express, Subway), varied fast food (Ciao serves pasta, Connection has meals), and minimal healthy options



(Two or three salad places). Check out the places that you might be interested in. If there's nothing you like, a meal plan might not be for you.

- Can you just use debit dollars?

Most students forget that you do not need to necessarily buy a meal plan to have the convenience of one. While purchasing a \$750-\$1400 meal plan can give you access to all the restaurants, you can pay for all of those things with debit dollars. Debit dollars allow you to control exactly how much you want to spend, since you can manually add money to your student ID. If you are unsure about the cost of a meal plan or how often you'll eat on-campus, save your money and load a small sum of cash into your debit dollars.

## Events & Parties

You have probably seen some sort of feature film that you base your conception of the American col-

lege experience on. Whether it's a fascination with fraternity parties or an outrageous spring break, you have the opportunity to turn your college experience into whatever you want it to be.

### Parties

While Grand Valley may not be known as a party school, there is an active nightlife. As you might expect, it all happens in the off-campus apartments, where the RA's prying eyes can't stop anyone. Yet, the advantage of Grand Valley's nightlife is that it is extremely varied and flexible: If you'd like, you can find traditional Greek life parties. If you want to get together with a small group of friends every weekend, that is acceptable. There are certain things that everyone does during their time at the university, but you have the ability to discover exactly how you want to handle parties. You may become a fan of 48 West, or perhaps you like the Meadows parties. Maybe heading to Grand Rapids is your style. All of these options exist, you just need to figure out the best way to handle them.

### Events

Allendale may not seem like the most exciting city in America, but there is plenty to do near the university. The university hosts a variety of events like plays, club meetings, and campus-wide events. Grand Valley also prides themselves in their sports programming: From the football Saturdays to the weekly basketball games in November, there's always something to watch. Most of Grand Valley teams are amongst the best in Division II, so make sure to enjoy these student athletes while they're around. Finally, the best thing about all these events: Most of them are free. Most university-sponsored events will be free to Grand Valley students. In some cases you can also get discounts if you bring your student ID. If you want to experience something outside of Allendale, Grand Rapids is only a short drive or bus ride away.

### Popular Tools

The university provides students with everything they will need during their time at their university.



Yet, most students find their own roundabout ways to do things. You'll learn about Brian's Books and Amazon Rentals as effective alternatives to the bookstore. You'll hear about RateMyProfessor and how you shouldn't pick a class without looking your professor up. There's all these unofficial tools that a lot of students use or learn to use. Many of these tools are wonderful and will help you prepare for the many things you'll do at the university.

However, use caution as you approach each one: A professor with a negative rating does not mean you will hate the professor. I have personally taken classes with professors who had terrible ratings on the website and I thoroughly enjoyed the way they handled the class. So, be wary: You can, and should, use these tools to gain as much information as you can. But, much like the advice on this booklet, those tools provide only that: advice.

The final decision is up to you.



# Chapter 6: Your part of the Grand Valley community

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This booklet exists because there are plenty of things I wish someone would have told me. Too often I felt alone, abandoned by my professors, mentors, faculty, and administrators. While I hope the same does not happen to you, it might. If it does, I hope this booklet, and the resources it directs you to, were helpful. If they were, I have one request:

## **Give back to the Grand Valley Community.**

Sometime during my senior year of high school and my first year of college, someone told me a phrase I still remember. For whatever reason, my brain refuses to acknowledge who said it, but it still rings true to me: “Leave this place better than it was when you found it.” This is what I’ve followed during my time at the university, from my job at the Writing Center to my work at University Communications. It is one of the reasons I embarked on this project. If at any point during your college career you were helped by a Grand Valley community member, think about what you can do for someone else. It can be as easy as attending an event, or as complex as joining and heading an organization. You can do whatever you want. I ask that you try to do something that will help someone who is anxious, worried or nervous feel a little less alone.





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by Lucas Escalada**

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