



April 13, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

Grand Valley State University is excited to participate in #uifresh (University Innovation Freshmen), an initiative spearheaded by the University Innovation Fellows program as a means to expand the participation and retention of incoming first-year STEM students. The initiative will help young students see problems as opportunities that should be approached with fresh eyes and an entrepreneurial mindset.

As part of the initiative, University Innovation Fellows will explore how entrepreneurship, design thinking, creativity and innovation could be included in the student experience. This will be done as part of an orientation to design thinking, a single class, a series of classes or events that help students solve real-world problems and connect first-year students to peer communities of makers and innovators in STEM.

The initiative was developed in response to findings published by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology in a report titled "Engage to Excel: Producing One Million Additional College Graduates with Degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics." The report indicates that 60% of U.S. first year students (in aggregate) who arrive to college intending to major in STEM change majors to non-STEM disciplines.


The report also cites the importance of a student experience that is both intellectually and personally engaging and fosters "identification with a STEM field." This can be established by connecting students with a community of STEM professionals, and fostering meaningful relationships with both peers and instructors.

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University Innovation Fellows and their teams will seek to collaborate with their faculty, administrators and staff to explore fun and engaging experiential learning opportunities and expose incoming first year students to Grand Valley State University's community of design thinkers, makers and innovators with the goal of collectively reducing the national percentage of STEM attrition by half in five years.

We believe that early exposure to entrepreneurship, innovation, creativity and design thinking are powerful tools to engage and retain STEM students. Grand Valley State University is pleased to work with the University Innovation Fellows, an initiative of the NSF-funded National Center for Engineering Pathways to Innovation (Epicenter) and a soon-to-be program of the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (d.school) at Stanford University. We believe efforts such as #uifresh will contribute to enhancing STEM attraction and retention, ultimately meeting U.S. workforce needs and strengthening our national competitiveness.

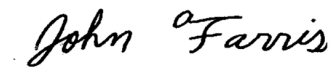
Sincerely,




Thomas J. Haas  
President




Jeff Chamberlain  
Director of the Frederik Meijer  
Honors College




John Farris  
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