

When I look back on what an amazing year it has been at Grand Canyon University in 2021-22, there are a number of moments that stand out. I'll start with two that occurred at the beginning and end of the academic year.

During Welcome Week, when we embraced 9,000 new incoming students on campus, we held our annual Ignite Worship Night at GCU Arena. As students gathered and listened to the music of the Worship team, something occurred that had never happened before: Students rushed the stage, their arms raised in worship, as they rejoiced in their shared passion for the Lord. It was one of those goose-bump experiences where you get chills from the energy in the room.

Near the end of the academic year, at our final Chapel service, it happened again as students rushed the stage, jumped up and down in their exuberance and formed a mosh pit as the Chapel band played a series of worship songs.

In between those two events, there were countless other moments that were made possible by the University's decision to return to full campus activities with no restrictions during the pandemic. We monitored COVID case counts daily and maintained contact with local health authorities but are happy to report that low case counts were manageable in large part because of mitigation efforts, mild symptoms experienced by those who did test positive, and the cooperation and compassion of our students. During each of the past six weeks there were 5 or fewer COVID cases connected to campus.

A campus experience without restrictions meant full in-person instruction in the classroom and in-person capstone showcases where students were able to share their incredible projects and research in everything from engineering, biomedical science, technology, business development, worship arts, behavioral health and digital design.

It meant a full GCU Arena for Chapel services. In-person job fairs. Signature events such as Lip Sync, Mr. GCU and Midnight Madness. Club activities. Intramurals. Outdoor recreation trips. NCAA athletics. Free tutoring for K-12 students in the Learning Lounge. And numerous community outreach projects, including our Habitat for Humanity home revitalization efforts and the CityServe initiative to provide free household goods to families in need.

In short, academics and campus life weren't just "back to normal" but were amplified in even more significant ways as students, faculty and staff embraced the opportunity to gather together. I tell people all the time that if I ask students what most attracts them to GCU, 9 out of 10 will say it's the community atmosphere on campus. It's what the University is known for.

Because of the attention that college basketball receives, people outside the University see a glimpse of that community when they witness the passion and energy of our Havocs student section, which is phenomenal. But for those of us who are on campus every day, we see that community lived out in many ways.

It's evident during Move-In as new students are welcomed to campus in a loving way that is a hallmark of GCU.

It's evident when 6,000+ students voluntarily join together in fellowship at GCU Arena every Monday morning for Chapel, on Tuesday evenings for The Gathering worship service, or in weekly Bible studies.

It's evident on a daily basis as our trained student Life Leaders and Resident Assistants make sure they connect with fellow students who may be having difficulties adjusting to college life. It's not just about housing students in one of the 27 residence halls on campus; it's about caring for them while they are here.

It's evident in the waiting list of students wanting to work as learning advocates (LEADs) in the Learning Lounge or as Buddies to assist young adults with mild to moderate intellectual and developmental disabilities in the L.O.P.E.S. Academy at the Cardon Center.

It's evident when students camp out in tents on the Quad, often for days, before major basketball games (spoiler: it's less about getting in line first for the best seats in the Arena and more about the camaraderie of hanging out with friends).

It's evident through Multicultural Office events, where students can celebrate different cultures and ethnicities while strengthening the bond that ties us all together – that we were all created in God's image.

It's evident in our students when, as the pandemic subsided, the first thing they asked was if they could get back out in the community and serve.

It's evident in the juniors and seniors who still prefer to live on campus in their final years of college, forging lifelong friendships.

And it's evident in simple acts of kindness, such as holding the door open for someone or saying "please" and "thank you."

There is an undeniable spirit in the hearts of GCU students, a joy and passion that is affirmation that God has His hand on this University in a very special way. And I can't wait to see what He has in store in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Brian Mueller

President, Grand Canyon University