

To: Kathleen VanderVeen

From: Charlie Blaich and Kathy Wise

RE: ****DRAFT**** Summary of winter 2023 focus group conversations at Grand Valley State University

Date: 2/2/23

We visited Grand Valley State University (GVSU) from January 30–February 1, 2023 to speak with faculty and staff about their experiences related to race, ethnicity, and disability at the university. This is our second visit to GVSU. We first visited GVSU from August 31–September 2, 2022 to talk with staff and faculty connected with the LGBTQ+ community about their experiences at GVSU. Both of these visits are follow-ups to the myGVSU climate survey, which HEDS helped GVSU administer in fall 2021. In this memo, we will discuss the focus groups from our second visit. We summarized the first set of focus groups in an earlier memo.

We'll begin by describing the number and structure of our focus group conversations. Then we'll provide some background information from our fall 2022 focus group visit and data from the MyGVSU climate survey. After that, we'll give an overview of what we heard during our conversations on this visit. We'll follow our high-level summary with details about the themes that emerged as people described their experiences at GVSU.

Structure of the conversations

Our schedule during our visit allotted time for ten one-hour conversations. We ended up hosting nine conversations with a total of 27 current employees of GVSU. Seventeen of the people we spoke with were staff, and they came from a range of areas within the university. The ten faculty members we spoke with all came from different disciplines. We did not ask people's gender, but some people volunteered that information. Around 70% of the people we spoke with identified as or appeared to be women. Seventeen people identified as people of color, six people identified as having a disability, and four people identified as people of color with a disability. The amount of time people had spent at the institution varied from less than a year to several decades. Seven people had been at GVSU for less than two years, eleven had been at GVSU for 2-10 years, and nine had been at the university more than 10 years. Some of the staff members who have worked at GVSU for a while have held multiple positions, sometimes in different areas of the university. Several of the people we spoke with were also GVSU alumni, and some had multiple degrees from the institution.

The goal of our conversations was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of people of color and people with disabilities who work as faculty and staff at GVSU. To this end, GVSU created five groups with a focus on race and ethnicity and five groups with a focus on disability. Several people identified as both a person of color and a person with a disability, and a few people attended two focus groups to speak about their experiences in each area separately.

Rather than asking focus group participants direct questions about their experiences related to race, ethnicity, and disability, we asked them general questions about their work and sense of community at GVSU. We did this because, in our view, the end goal of DEI efforts is to build a community where everyone feels welcome, included, and respected, regardless of the different aspects of their identity. And in our experience in prior focus groups, including our focus groups last fall at GVSU, we know that DEI issues will surface when we ask these broad questions.

We asked the following questions in the focus groups:

1. What do you like most about being a faculty/staff member at GVSU?
2. What makes you feel like you are part of the GVSU community?

3. What, if anything, makes you feel like you are not part of the GVSU community?
4. What can GVSU do to better support you and increase your sense of belonging to the GVSU community?

We spent the first day of our visit at the Allendale Campus, the second day at the Robert C. Pew Grand Rapids Campus, and the final day of our visit at the Health Campus. All of our conversations were face-to-face.

We began each session by introducing ourselves, reviewing the purpose of our visit, and telling participants that we would not include their names in our notes or in any summary we wrote of the conversations. We also gave them a sheet of paper that described the purpose of our visit to GVSU, explained what would happen during our conversation, and provided our contact information in case participants had any follow-up questions (see the Appendix for a copy of this information sheet). We kicked off the conversations by asking people for some background information. We asked people to tell us their name, what their role was, how long they'd been at GVSU, and what brought them to GVSU.

After the introductions, we handed out a sheet with the four focus group questions listed above and asked people to spend a few minutes reviewing the questions and jotting down their thoughts on responses. Given the emphasis on race, ethnicity, and disability in these conversations, we also asked people how they describe their race/ethnicity (open-ended question), and if they “currently have a physical or mental condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities?” (yes/no question). We assured people that this was not a test and said they did not need to write complete sentences or worry about spelling or handwriting. Our goal in having them write for a few minutes was to give them some time to think about the questions before we began talking. After 10 or so minutes, we began the conversation by working around the room and asking people to talk about their response to the first focus group question. We repeated this until we'd worked through every question. One person spoke at a time, and we usually asked a few follow-up questions to make sure that we understood what people were saying. We made sure that everyone took part in the conversation several times. Finally, we spoke with whomever showed up, whether it was two people or seven. While the conversations were scheduled for an hour, most went longer.

We cannot adequately express how grateful we are that 27 GVSU staff and faculty took time to share their honest and often painful reflections on their experiences at the university. As you'll see below, a number of the comments will be challenging for the institution and for institutional leaders, but like our fall 2022 GVSU focus groups, everyone we spoke with wanted to make GVSU a stronger and more inclusive institution. No one came simply to air grievances.

Before we review our observations and themes, we want to emphasize three points to contextualize the rest of the memo:

1. We're not trying to make generalizable comments about staff and faculty at GVSU. We're trying to represent as faithfully as we can what we heard from the 27 staff and faculty members that we spoke with across nine focus groups.
2. We're not GVSU insiders, and we can't fact-check what people said. Some of the quotes and feedback you read below may not align with your understanding of things that have happened at GVSU. Remember, we're not newspaper reporters reporting a story. Our goal is to faithfully capture how the staff and faculty we spoke with understood their experiences. Whether there is room to quibble on the facts, we're confident that the people we spoke with gave an honest account of what they've experienced at GVSU.

3. We will use “they,” not “she” or “he,” in the memo when we describe our conversations with people, regardless of the pronouns they use or the gender of the people they spoke about. We do this in all of our reports on focus groups to help mask people’s identities.

One last note, we’ve written this memo over a one-and-a-half-day period after our visit to GVSU. We thought it was important to get the information to you as quickly as possible, so it could inform institutional policies and actions. However, we hope you excuse our clunky prose or inelegant turns of phrase.

Background

In our visit early last fall, we spoke with members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community. In those conversations, we found that people’s positive and negative experiences at GVSU were not always linked with their sexual orientation or gender identity, but were often connected with the work conditions in their unit. These included the level of support from their supervisors, turnover in their offices, the level of predictability in their work, and the extent to which people would take their suggestions seriously. On the other hand, the transgender people we spoke with experienced prejudice and discrimination at GVSU, and a number of the gay and lesbian people we spoke with talked about challenges they experienced in the local community. We provided a fuller summary of our fall conversations in the report we delivered to Kathleen VanderVeen and Jesse Bernal last October.

Our conversations on race, ethnicity, and disability during this visit went in a very different direction. The racial and ethnic identities and the disability status of the people we spoke with had a profound and usually negative impact on their experiences at GVSU. Unfortunately, this is not surprising given what we see in GVSU’s data from the fall 2021 myGVSU climate survey that we administered. GVSU’s overall data on campus climate, campus support for diversity and equity, and experiences with discrimination and harassment were a little worse than other public institutions. But, it’s important to interpret that small difference in light of the fact that over 80% of the staff and faculty who took the survey at GVSU were White compared to about 65% at the other public institutions that participated in the survey. To state the obvious, White people are far less likely to have negative experiences based on their racial and ethnic identity. And while the percentage of people who indicated that they have some sort of disability was about the same at GVSU as it was at other public institutions, the number of people who reported having a disability was so small, about 10% of the people who took the survey, that even if their experiences were terrible, it wouldn’t have an impact on the institution’s overall data.

To get a better sense of people’s experience at GVSU, it’s critical to disaggregate GVSU’s data according to people’s identity. The first figure below is a copy of data from the sixth tab of the report on the myGVSU climate survey. These data are from questions about people’s satisfaction with GVSU’s overall climate and their sense of belonging and community. We’ve used arrows to indicate the size of the difference, with more arrows indicating larger differences. As the table below shows, survey respondents who identified as African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and having multiple races/ethnicities had much lower views on campus climate at GVSU than respondents with those same identities at other public 4-year institutions.¹

¹ These differences are all statistically significant. The arrows show when differences are much larger than just being statistically significant.

Table 1: Campus Climate for Diversity and Equity by Demographic Categories							
		Grand Valley State University				All 4-Year Public Institutions	
		Effect Size ²				n	Mean
		n	Mean ¹	vs. All 4-Year Public Institutions	vs. All Participating Institutions		
All Employees	White	983	3.51	↓	↓	10,012	3.72
	Multiple races/ethnicities	76	3.27	↓↓	↓	1,476	3.69
	African American/Black	51	3.09	↓↓	↓	1,224	3.39
	Hispanic/Latino	23	3.38	↓↓↓	↓↓	1,124	3.99
	International	9	3.78			261	4.01
	Asian	34	3.36	↓↓	↓↓	492	3.81
	All other races/ethnicities	17	3.07	↓↓	↓↓	470	3.50

GVSU survey respondents who indicated that they had a disability also had substantially less positive views about GVSU’s climate than people with disabilities at other public institutions (see the table below).

Table 1: Campus Climate for Diversity and Equity by Demographic Categories									
		Grand Valley State University				All 4-Year Public Institutions		All Participating Institutions	
		Effect Size ²				n	Mean	n	Mean
		n	Mean ¹	vs. All 4-Year Public Institutions	vs. All Participating Institutions				
All Employees	Long-term disability	87	3.18	↓	↓	1,003	3.44	3,331	3.40
	Temporary disability	20	3.03	↓↓↓	↓↓	276	3.50	927	3.47
	No disability	1,111	3.48	↓	↓	14,124	3.73	54,098	3.67

The myGVSU climate survey also asked people how often they a) heard insensitive or disparaging remarks and b) experienced discrimination or harassment. In the two tables below (from tabs 8 and 9 respectively of our report), people of color were more likely to hear insensitive or disparaging remarks than people of color at other 4-year public institutions, and they were more likely to experience discrimination or harassment.

Table 1: Insensitive or Disparaging Remarks by Demographic Categories									
		Grand Valley State University				All 4-Year Public Institutions		All Participating Institutions	
		Effect Size ²				n	Mean	n	Mean
		n	Mean ¹	vs. All 4-Year Public Institutions	vs. All Participating Institutions				
All Employees	White	986	1.89	≈	≈	10,020	1.92	42,743	1.86
	Multiple races/ethnicities	76	2.14	↑	↑	1,478	1.97	4,514	2.01
	African American/Black	49	2.25	↑	↑	1,213	2.07	3,248	2.03
	Hispanic/Latino	23	1.94	↑	↑	1,129	1.80	2,654	1.84
	International	9	1.48			259	1.56	694	1.62
	Asian	32	2.15	↑↑	↑↑	492	1.81	1,943	1.85
	All other races/ethnicities	19	2.12	≈	↑	471	2.08	1,434	1.98

Table 1: Experiences of Discrimination or Harassment by Demographic Categories									
		Grand Valley State University				All 4-Year Public Institutions		All Participating Institutions	
		Effect Size ²				n	% Yes	n	% Yes
		n	% Yes ¹	vs. All 4-Year Public Institutions	vs. All Participating Institutions				
All Employees	White	998	22%	≈	↑	10,182	20%	43,344	17%
	Multiple races/ethnicities	77	27%	≈	≈	1,497	27%	4,597	28%
	African American/Black	50	46%	↑↑	↑↑	1,246	30%	3,327	30%
	Hispanic/Latino	23	39%	↑↑	↑↑	1,155	18%	2,715	20%
	International	9	11%			262	10%	704	13%
	Asian	34	29%	↑↑	↑	500	17%	1,978	20%
	All other races/ethnicities	19	42%	↑	↑	490	32%	1,470	29%

Sixteen percent more African American/Black people and nearly double the percentage of Hispanic/Latino and Asian people were likely to experience discrimination or harassment at GVSU than people with those same identities at other 4-year public institutions.

The data for people who reported experiencing some kind of disability are little different. People with long-term disabilities at GVSU don't report experiencing insensitive or disparaging remarks more than people with those kinds of disabilities at other 4-year public institutions, but they do report experiencing discrimination or harassment more often.

Table 1: Insensitive or Disparaging Remarks by Demographic Categories									
		Grand Valley State University				All 4-Year Public Institutions		All Participating Institutions	
		Effect Size ²				n	Mean	n	Mean
		n	Mean ¹	vs. All 4-Year Public Institutions	vs. All Participating Institutions				
All Employees	Long-term disability	87	2.14	≈	≈	1,015	2.15	3,352	2.11
	Temporary disability	20	2.03	↓	↓	276	2.18	928	2.12
	No disability	1,110	1.91	≈	≈	14,116	1.90	54,238	1.86

Table 1: Experiences of Discrimination or Harassment by Demographic Categories									
		Grand Valley State University				All 4-Year Public Institutions		All Participating Institutions	
		Effect Size ²				n	% Yes	n	% Yes
		n	% Yes ¹	vs. All 4-Year Public Institutions	vs. All Participating Institutions				
All Employees	Long-term disability	87	51%	↑	↑	1,029	39%	3,411	36%
	Temporary disability	20	30%	↓	≈	282	36%	955	33%
	No disability	1,128	22%	≈	≈	14,375	20%	55,105	19%

Finally, people with long-term disabilities experience higher levels of discrimination or harassment at GVSU than people of color. About half of all people with disabilities who took the myGVSU climate survey reported experiencing discrimination or harassment, a higher level than what people of color reported.

Finally, before we turn to our winter focus group conversations, there's one other relevant finding from the myGVSU climate survey we wanted to note: Overall, regardless of their racial/ethnic identity, disability status, and sexual orientation or gender identity, staff and administrators at GVSU report experiencing higher levels of insensitive or disparaging remarks and discrimination or harassment than staff and administrators at other 4-year public institutions. This is consistent with what we heard in both of our visits about the work environment in some of the units at GVSU.

Overview

We heard the following themes across our conversations:

I. Student focus

As we heard in our last visit, just about everyone we spoke with, staff and faculty, said that what they liked most about working at GVSU was the opportunity to work with and/or support GVSU students. However, a number of more senior faculty who said that they came to GVSU because of its focus on teaching lamented that their units seemed to be shifting their focus away from rewarding teaching to rewarding scholarly productivity.

II. The importance of being heard and recognized

As we've seen at a number of institutions we've visited in the last year, one of the most important qualities of a welcoming climate in an organization is that people feel like their ideas and their concerns are heard and taken seriously. People feel respected when they have agency, whether it's getting support so they can teach in

classrooms and be less hampered by their disability or playing a role in informing decisions that are made about their work. We saw this among the people we spoke with at GVSU. When people felt that they were an integral part of a team working with good colleagues and had supervisors who knew and understood them, they were thriving. On the other hand, when they felt that people ignored their input and concerns, or just didn't want to find out more about who they are, they felt isolated and at odds with the institution.

III. History

As it does for all of us, the long tail of personal experience shaped how many of the people we spoke with experience their day-to-day work at GVSU. A number of the people we met said things like, “because of who I am, my abilities and conditions, and where I was born, no one ever expected me to get this far.” And while part of statements like that was pride in overcoming discrimination and poverty, it was also a response to experiencing bias, dismissal, and disparagement from colleagues or supervisors at GVSU. Likewise, the longer people had worked at GVSU, the more they felt the accumulated history of being ignored, being discriminated against, or suffering prejudice at the institution. For good reason, people's history shaped what they experience at GVSU in the present and their faith, or lack thereof, in GVSU's work to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion.

IV. Accountability

Many of the people we spoke with said that there are no consequences for people at GVSU who engage in biased, discriminatory, disparaging, or cruel behavior. Indeed, to many of them, it looked like people who engaged in such behaviors were often promoted or rewarded in some way by the institution. A number of people described incidents where they reported someone and nothing ever came of it. They never heard about any consequence and many times they never even heard whether a conversation had occurred with the person they reported. Worse still, some people heard, “Oh yeah, so-and-so is a problem, but there's nothing we can do about it.” We also heard multiple accounts from people who felt that they didn't get a fair shake in applying for new jobs, or getting promotions or raises. They described processes that seemed opaque and arbitrary. Between the two of us, we have decades of experience in higher education in a variety of positions and organizations, and we understand the complexities of personnel issues and decisions. But few things are as dispiriting to people as seeing bad actors continue to reap the benefits of institutional support or having a sense that they don't have a fair chance to advance in their work.

V. It's all local

In our focus groups we asked about GVSU's community, but in a way, that question missed the mark. GVSU is a large and sprawling multi-campus institution, and there's no single overall community any more than there's an overall Detroit community or Chicago community. A person's community at GVSU is the group of people they interact with every day. The quality of the communities of the people we spoke with depended on how their colleagues and their bosses interacted with them. If the people around them were welcoming to their ideas, appropriately recognized and celebrated their accomplishments, cared enough to find out who they were as people, and were fair and equitable, then the people we spoke with liked their GVSU community. But the less often those things were present, the less they valued their GVSU community. As we noted in our visit last fall, some people at GVSU work in warm and generous communities. Others, we're sorry to say, work in communities that can only be described as toxic.

VI. A last chance

Because of their history at GVSU, the seeming lack of accountability, and negative experiences in units where the climate is poor, a number of people we spoke with are skeptical that GVSU is serious about its intention to:

“...be a national model for equity and inclusion in higher education, not only by implementing and innovating evidenced-based best practices and responding to regional and national trends but also by contributing to local and national discourse on the responsibility of higher education to provide equity and inclusion to all students, faculty, and staff.”²

Although we spoke with only a small part of GVSU’s staff and faculty body, we hope that GVSU’s leaders appreciate the effort it took for these 27 members of GVSU’s community to talk about, and at times relive, deeply painful experiences in our conversations. We also heard that many more people considered coming to these sessions, but decided not because there’d be no point. Nothing would change. If nothing concrete comes from the myGVSU climate survey and these focus groups, then the people who participated in the focus groups, and the people like them who didn’t, will take it as a sign that GVSU doesn’t plan to “walk the walk” when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

What GVSU staff and faculty said in response to our questions

Below we summarize what GVSU faculty and staff said in response to our focus group questions. We also provide quotes so you can hear what they said in their voices. Please note, we have removed potentially identifying information from the quotes, and sometimes lightly edited people’s comments, to protect people's identity.

What do you like most about being a faculty/staff member at GVSU?

Like staff and faculty that we’ve talked with elsewhere, our colleagues at GVSU identified good and supportive colleagues, good and supportive bosses, and the chance to work collaboratively on effective teams. A number of them highlighted GVSU’s generous benefits as important as well. But more than these things, people talked about enjoying the chance to make a positive difference with students - or as one person put it, “The ability to impact the journey that students are taking in their education.” Indeed, one thing that stood out to us is that unlike our experience at many other institutions, no one complained about students, their motivation, or their preparation. When we asked people “what do you like about GVSU students,” they always had something to say.

Here are some of the things that staff and faculty said in response to our question, “What do you like *most* about being a faculty/staff member at GVSU?”:

- “Developing good working relationships with the people who work for me. However, I’ve had a number of them leave their jobs over the last 18 months. I also value the fact that I can go directly up the chain of command to talk with people higher in the administration. I couldn’t do this in my previous job at another institution. I like the way I can work within my area of the university.”
- “The freedom and flexibility in my role. I enjoy most of the people in my department, and I have a good relationship with my supervisor. They’re responsive. I like my job, my actual work responsibilities. My job is strategic and overlooking, so I get to see the whole picture. I like working with students one-on-one too.”
- “I really, really love my job!!! I enjoy problem-solving and being the resource person. I really like the relationships with the people I work with - my colleagues and students. I’m a very relational person. That’s what I enjoy and what keeps me going. I like the flexibility in my position. It’s one of the best things. I love the opportunities I have to do things at GVSU that are outside of my work role - like affinity groups and leadership on committees. These opportunities provide room for growth.”
- “My position suits me and is a good match for me, overall. Being at a primarily undergraduate institution suits my needs and personality. Grand Rapids is an affordable city”

² <https://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/>

- “Being around other staff and faculty who have the same commitments and experiences that I do. I love that I have colleagues who support me. I get immense support from my supervisor. The praise I’ve been getting here is wonderful because I’ve experienced so much shame in my life because of my disability. My disability is a part of me, but it’s not who I am. Yes, I do things differently, but I still get the job done. I have colleagues that understand and are willing to listen.”
- “Colleagues, friends, and students at GVSU. Flexibility. The chance to participate in the GVSU community, affinity groups, and other organizations. The ability to try and effect change. I love working with students. It brings me joy to see them graduate.”
- “Working with students. I believe education is the key to bringing equity. As an international student first and then an American citizen, I appreciate the value of education. Not a lot of people have access to education in my home country. I believe that education is the key to bridging gaps in equity and breaking the cycle. I love working with students and giving them the tools to succeed. I see people move across social classes here because of education. People can’t do that in my home country.”
- “The ability to impact the journey that students are taking in their education. Providing opportunities for students. Learning and coming up with things that can help them. Working with colleagues to make our systems and processes more student-friendly.”
- “I like that GVSU is a teaching university. And the salary and benefits are decent. I get to try new projects and technology, and to experiment in class.”
- “Everyone is polite and respectful to one another. I get to do research in addition to teaching. I get to mentor students and see them grow. That’s my passion.”
- “The excellence of the work environment in my department...until recently.”
- “The work I do with students, faculty, and staff. Building relationships. Old friends and the chance to find new friends. Companionship. Amenities and benefits. The wide range of everyday resources such as coupons, health coverage, and educational opportunities. This is a large system that includes many walks of life.”
- “Working with students. Finding moments where I can help them build community with each other. Creating programs for them. Making a difference in their lives. Teaching them about intercultural competence, how the world works, and how we all can change it one step at a time.”
- “The students are the reason why I continued in academia. I have connections with them and I care about them. I had a great mentor in college who was the reason I made it through. That’s what I try to be for my students.”
- “Building relationships with students, faculty, and staff. The benefit of being a hired professional. The status that comes with being in my position at GV. It gives me the power to change things.”
- “Serving students. They bring me joy. I also like being part of a team. I like the people I directly work with. I like helping students with their education and making sure they have the resources they need. GV offers so much that students don’t know about. I love what I do to help students’ dreams come true. The person I work for is phenomenal, and the students we work with are great. They all bring something different to the table and have such great ideas. My supervisor knows how to get us all motivated and make stuff real. You can tell that my supervisor enjoys what they do every day and that inspires me. My supervisor is flexible. They come in and ask how you’re doing; they’ll sit down and talk with me and try to connect on a different level.”
- “Job security. The university is financially secure with little or no layoffs. Most people get tenure. There’s security for faculty. We have motivated students. Working with students is both satisfying and exhausting. After COVID, they need more support. They need an extreme amount of help. I’ll spend two hours on Zoom with a student to help them. I’m happy to do it, but it’s tiring.”

- “The ability to connect with and support students. The students keep me going. I like seeing people change their lives. I like helping them get to the next step and achieve their goals. I also like the access to educational opportunities and the discussions around those opportunities. They bring in great speakers and have great activities here.”
- “GV’s benefits are some of the best I’ve seen. The offices and the facilities are nice. I like the various employment opportunities within the university. You can move around the university.”
- “The chance to interact with student workers, the benefits, and the relationships that I’ve formed over my time here.”
- “Working to transform lives through educational opportunities. Leveraging the GVSU brand to form and launch conversations and partnerships. Working for GVSU gives my efforts some weight and gravitas.”
- “Having a valued network across the university. The sense of being valued for who I am. I like having a flexible schedule. Being able to interact with students and being part of a community of learners. The many opportunities to keep learning and my affinity group.”
- “Being student focused. Teaching and learning with students and being able to support their growth. Working with students, I grow myself. That’s why I’ve stayed here so long. Being able to innovate in my teaching.”
- “I’m glad to work at a public institution that focuses on liberal education and has many first-generation students. Liberal education changed my life and opened my eyes. I grew up poor and never thought of going to college or grad school. Then people thought I was smart, and school became my sanctuary. I hope we never become an R1. There are enough of them in the state.”
- “The overall general atmosphere and environment is pretty nice and friendly. But I’m a little more removed from the mainstream university in my area. We’re not included in many things.”
- “Working with students in a state of art facility. They’re very eager to learn, and open to learning. They often will thank me for my work, and I don’t get thanked a lot in other jobs. That gives me a sense that they truly value what I’m doing and my role at the university.”
- “I like the fact that the university is addressing and talking openly about the racial divide here. They’re intentional about highlighting things that are going on. I feel like they’ve taken action, and they’re not just talking. They created the ombuds position for faculty and staff. And there’s more of an open door policy so you can have candid conversations with leadership.”
- “I like working with students. I have good relationships with many, but not all, faculty members.”
- “Students. The opportunities we have to work with students in a variety of contexts, such as the classroom, through club advising, outside the classroom events, and undergraduate research. These kids are awesome, amazing, and so smart. It is fun and meaningful to work with them.”
- “Working with and helping students, community members, and anyone who needs help. Doing my best to get people what they need. Supporting my colleagues in allyship. Genuinely, right now I don’t feel any particular loyalty to GVSU, it’s just a job to pay my bills.”

What makes you feel like you are part of the GVSU community?

What gives people a sense of belonging with the GVSU community? Good relationships with other members of the community - people who listen to your ideas and concerns, people with whom you can let off steam, and people who share your commitment to students. The chance to play a positive role in student development, to push students, and to serve as examples inspire faculty and staff to their own success. These positive relationships might be with colleagues in their department, program, or unit, or the relationships might arise from work on cross-university committees and activities. People also mentioned the important role that faculty & staff affinity groups play in helping them develop relationships with people with shared identities from across the university.

A few people we spoke with had a hard time answering this question. Sometimes it was because they focused on their work with people in their unit and that environment wasn't supportive, and they didn't think about the GVSU community outside of their immediate area. The other time people had a hard time answering this question was when they didn't see colleagues who looked like them, shared their experiences, or shared some of the challenges they faced. But this means that the idea of community is connected with the kinds of relationships that people can form.

Here are some of the things that staff and faculty said in response to our question, "What makes you feel like you are part of the GVSU community?":

- "Having good working relationships with my direct reports. Helping them develop skills and learning what they like is rewarding. I feel like I'm contributing to their growth. Finding other people with my racial/ethnic identity who come from outside the area and have similar experiences trying to understand the university."
- "Good relationships with colleagues, having productive conversations with them. Having people who you can share good gossip with and ask, 'Is it me?' after meetings. People where you feel like you have that safety to be open and honest, where you can let off steam before you compose a well-crafted email about something negative that happened. The hard thing is that often these people are the ones who are more likely to move on. They're not 'GV for life.' My area has had very high turnover, and that makes it hard to build community. Participating in meaningful DEI efforts and initiatives also helps."
- "My colleagues and students. The way you are invited to things such as affinity group celebrations, etc. I also feel like part of the community when I've been invited to participate in activities and leadership roles. I went to school here too, which makes me feel connected to the community. The people around me make me feel like part of the community."
- "I have good relationships with some colleagues. They're an important part of my professional life. I appreciate that I see ideas about change, but I'm not sure how much is in place. I'm holding onto hope with my fingernails. I see seeds of hope that I hope can grow. I don't know if they will, but I'm holding on. I appreciate that they're adding to the DEI conversation by talking about belonging. I see this as a positive. What is the lived experience of the people who are here?"
- "When others are listening to me and interested in my advocacy for and support of students. There was a situation where the university provided a resource for faculty, staff, and students, but I thought the materials weren't good. I spoke to someone about my concerns, and they changed the resource to make it better. Just the fact that someone listened to me and then did something about it made me feel more included here. I also feel like part of the community when I have the chance to work with other departments."
- "School spirit. The ability to participate in new things. Flexibility with my job when I or my family have to deal with medical issues. Flexibility is really important to me, because there are days when I just can't get out of bed due to my disability."
- "Students. I have worked with wonderful students. I like mentoring and coaching them, helping them translate their skills and experience to their resumes. Certain members of the faculty and staff, especially outside my department, have been very supportive. But I see a need for change. We can do things better."
- "GV is big on the 'Laker for a lifetime' phrase. Certain staff and faculty members have helped my development here and become mentors."
- "GVSU is student-focused. Processes here are somewhat transparent, but they could be better."
- "I'm involved in GVSU committees and other activities where I get to know other colleagues outside of my department. And my colleagues are great."

- “Many personal acquaintances and friendships I’ve built up with co-workers across the institution. I’m still making new, productive, positive relationships after all this time. I put myself out there and attend as many events as I can.”
- “Being asked to be involved with different cross-department and cross-campus initiatives that hope to ultimately better the GV community. However, when I’m asked to support something and then disregarded, that’s not a great feeling. It feels performative. Sometimes I’ve wondered why I was even asked to be part of things.”
- “I’m still searching for community. I’m relatively new and there’s been a lot of turnover in my area. It’s hard to establish community with so much change. I’ve been asked to be part of committees, but it feels like it’s just a checkbox. It feels like sometimes I’m there as a representative for my office, but people aren’t listening to what I say or asking what I think. A lot of people here don’t engage the other people in the room at meetings. You need to welcome people in and give them prompts to think about.”
- “The students are what drives me to be the best professor I can be. I do all that I can to empower students in believing in themselves, because I continue to have to overcome the kinds of obstacles that they face. I make myself vulnerable so they can be vulnerable and learn from each other. I push them to question their own beliefs, biases, and stereotypes. I’m really real with them. I don’t think I’m the typical professor because I’m first generation and I come from poverty. Coming from my background, I wasn’t meant to get to where I am today. I’m there for my students like my mentor was there for me. I’m paying it back.”
- “Events at my own department and other departments. It’s a very school thing. There’s a lot of programming and learning. I’ve found so many new relationships and been pulled into so many different areas, committees, and groups. Being able to be brought in to meet new professionals and collaborate on what we are content experts on.”
- “I had the most difficulty writing an answer to this question. I was like, ‘Am I really part of the community?’ And not in a bad way. I like the annual events the university puts on because I get to meet other faculty and staff in person, especially faculty and staff who look like me. Otherwise people tend to stay in their buildings/areas. I enjoy the kickoff event in the summer. It makes me feel like part of the community. Also, the colleagues that I have a connection with. And my boss who sits down and talks to me and really wants to get to know about my life. I like when we have opportunities to sit down and be ourselves, and not just talk about work. When I go to get water, I’ll take a lap in the office and talk to people. I enjoy connecting with and talking with colleagues - more than in a hi/bye way, but it also doesn’t have to be deeply personal.”
- “Their attempts to be inclusive (successful or not). The faculty/staff affinity group is a lifeline. However, I really wonder what the GVSU community is. I don’t feel a sense of it. It’s not clear what the GVSU community is. I feel an invisible barrier here. It’s like, ‘I’m not your friend; I’m your colleague.’ This makes it very difficult to make friends. The sense of isolation is hard. COVID made it even worse. I feel like the sense of community is even lower now.”
- “The fact that I and several family members have a degree from this institution. My relationships and connections with my colleagues across campus. I feel isolated in my current building, but my relationships have continued from my previous roles at the institution.”
- “Seeing people who look like me in various departments and roles, but I wish there were more. The place I grew up is much more diverse. Campus celebrations around Black Culture, like MLK Day and lots of other things. The affinity groups where I can connect and meet people. Black Graduation is the most spiritually fulfilling thing. It’s my people, my music, speakers and quotes I’ve heard before. It’s a way to uplift people. I also like the fact that they play various genres of music in the lobby of my building. It’s good to hear all different genres played and celebrated.”

- “I don’t know if I feel like I’m a part of the community. But I appreciate things that the President is doing.”
- “Connecting with colleagues and students across campus. For example, advising student organizations and leading special projects across the university and the community. Mentoring and teaching students who share my identity. Understanding long-term objectives for systematic change helps me feel like I’m part of the work and making the change. But I don’t think these opportunities are open to everyone, and that makes me sad.”
- “Collaborating with others in my college and the university leadership team. Recruitment and retention activities, working in new student orientation where I can seek out students of color. I’m passionate about students of color. I know what it’s like being a first-generation student. Support from leaders. Getting requests for assistance answered. If I ask for something, I can usually get it. The affinity group.”
- “Latino/a/x graduation is so personal and rewarding. Those students feel like no one knows them at the regular graduation.”
- “When I get outside my own department. My department is very sexist. I find my belonging outside my department. Taking part in university-wide events and committees, especially ones focused on DEI-AB or personal growth.”
- “Very little. But that’s not necessarily a negative reflection on the university. I just feel removed and have little interaction. I try to go to larger university events, but I’m still relatively new so I don’t know people at those events and there’s nothing that helps me get to know people there. ”
- “Interacting with students and staff/colleagues. My role isn’t a full-time standard position, so I’m not here all the time. But when I’m here, I feel welcomed and part of the community. When I’m not here, not as much.”
- “Having a college degree makes me feel like I’m part of the community. I recognize that as an African American female, I’d better have a degree, because if I don’t, I’m not going to be promoted or any of those things. But I have counterparts in other positions who don’t have degrees. I can understand if a degree is required, but then make it required across the board. That’s not the case here. It’s not consistent.”
- “At the university level, I work well with my colleagues. I like being on university committees because I get to interact with people from all over campus.”
- “My work is really important to me. I like that I can contribute meaningfully to the work/mission of GV. When my contributions and ideas are being valued. I like when credit is being given to my work, but that hasn’t always happened.”
- “Intentional inclusivity. When leaders get buy-in from me on policies that will affect my work. There are times when decisions get made about staff work, and we’re not asked or informed about them. Thoughtful leadership at all levels (department and administrative).”

What, if anything, makes you feel like you are not part of the GVSU community?

As you’ll see, people said a lot in response to this question. We encourage you to take your time and work through these comments carefully. One reason that people didn’t feel like part of the GVSU community is that most or all of the time they didn’t interact with many people who looked like them. And that means that they didn’t interact with many people who shared their experiences or fully understood their concerns. People will feel isolated if they are the “...only person of color in my class, my unit, or meetings.” That’s especially true if classes, units, and meetings are subtly or even overtly hostile to people of color or people with disabilities. Another reason that people didn’t feel like part of the community is the pushback they experienced from White faculty, staff, administrators, and/or students who were asked to consider or engage in a conversation about DEI issues. People also talked a great deal about experiencing or witnessing discrimination in hiring and promotion practices and

personnel disputes. Again and again, people talked about reporting incidents in which they were harassed, disparaged, or discriminated against by a colleague or boss and there was no consequence. They often talked about this as a lack of accountability or follow through. Some of the faculty noted that faculty of color seem to have a harder time getting tenure at GVSU. More than that, some of the faculty and staff reported behavior by their colleagues that could only be described as cruel. People talked about not being recognized or rewarded for their work, and frequently being asked to do unpaid, extra work related to their racial/ethnic identity. Finally, many people talked about experiencing microaggressions over and over. They mentioned instances of racism, sexism, and ableism. People with disabilities described instances in which their needs were not met, and they did not receive assistance that would help them perform their jobs and fully engage in the community. One person summarized these experiences by saying: “There are pockets in the institution where local leadership can make your life hell. It doesn’t matter what happens with senior administration because of what’s happening in your area. Coming to work everyday can be traumatizing.”

When people talked about what made them feel like part of the GVSU community, they focused on good relationships. In a sense, relationships are also at the core of much of what people said about when they don’t feel like part of the community. You won’t feel like part of the community if people in the community, especially leaders in the community, don’t seem to care if you’ve been harmed or treated unfairly.

Here are some of the things that staff and faculty said in response to our question, “What makes you feel like you are *not* part of the GVSU community?”:

- “My supervisor has never supervised a person of color before me. There is only one other person with my racial/ethnic identity in my part of GVSU. And I had to find that person myself, no one introduced us. I feel like my diversity only matters when it comes to the diversity numbers that GVSU reports.”
- “Race is the issue for me. As a person of color, when you attend things, you’ll be the minority. In my area, I can count the people of color on one hand, and I know them all. GV has a history of being a good old boys club.”
- “Grand Valley’s student body is approximately 80% white and that translates to the demographics of faculty and staff. There are times when that is not acknowledged in recruiting/retention/resource solutions for students, faculty, and staff. There are few people of color in my area, and that can be really hard. Especially when life happens outside of work, human rights things that impact you at work. You can be in a mood, and no one else can relate to what you’re going through. I would appreciate it if people would reach out when they see something in the news. I’m used to being in a community with more diversity. Being here is hard.”
- “It’s not a friendly place for Black, Hispanic, and international students.”
- “GVSU is a white serving institution. I’ve tried to reach out to students, but they lashed out. It’s hard when I’m in class, and I see a sea of white in front of me. I’ve tried to bring ethical issues related to race and socioeconomic status into my classes, but students don’t want to think about those things.”
- “I’ve taken classes here, and I’ve been the only person of color in the class. There’s no representation in class or in employment either. If I had a child, there’s no way I’d tell them to come here unless they really wanted to. Even with a free ride, there’s nothing to keep them here. Where’s the support for them to stay here?”
- “Unhappy, frustrated students who question the addition of DEI activities in our program. Students in my program are mostly white, and there’s a lot of pushback when we try to include diversity topics. It’s like they don’t want anything that will scare or startle students.”
- “The lack of progress (even loss) in these areas over the years. We have not gotten better. We’ve gone backwards since I started. When affirmative action became illegal in the state, the institution didn’t see it

coming or plan for it. Scholarships to support students were banished. They defunded so much of the way we used to support students. And if students come in but don't feel supported, they'll leave thinking they're failures, and they'll also have a lot of debt. It's a revolving door."

- "We don't do inclusive hiring. Hiring committees I've served on haven't been inclusive, but the institution says that inclusive hiring has been taken care of and that box has already been checked."
- "Over the years, I've learned to find my voice. This is the hill I will die on. I will speak out every time. I have concerns about the lack of diversity in my area and our hiring practices. There was a situation where a person got a job without interviewing because they restructured the position, but women of color had to interview for a lower-level job. Hiring practices across the institution are not equitable or consistent. We don't try to keep people here. We're always searching for people, and we're not focused. We don't do exit interviews to find out why people are leaving. They say it's because people got better positions, but we know it's not always that. Sometimes it's because they weren't treated equitably here."
- "Some of the faculty in my department and how I am treated by them. I had no problems with my evaluations and then when I came up for promotion, many of my colleagues didn't support me. I had no idea why they did this. I couldn't understand it. I'd published articles, made presentations, and my student evaluations were great. There was no explanation for why I didn't get support. It's not clear what the expectations are. I'm one of several people of color who've had problems getting tenure or promotion in my department. It's like they don't want me on the same level as them, so they keep me at the lowest level. It's like there are the haves and the have nots here, and if you're not part of the popular group they will do whatever they need to get you out. I don't understand why my colleagues are so nasty. That's another reason I'm here today in this focus group. Some of my other colleagues have hidden away and given up because of this behavior, but I'm not going to do that. They gave me my voice. We're a teaching university, and that's what the focus should be. Maybe you should have one publication, but the point should be coming together to help our students. That's what I try to do. I'm as good as everyone else. The more that they tell me I'm not, the more I'm going to keep pushing."
- "I applied for a position at a higher level, and the interview process seemed like it went okay. But then the chair of the committee let me know I didn't get the job, and in the rationale for their decision, they wrote about me like I was a delinquent. It was just horrendous. I had to stop and regroup after reading that. I thought, 'How am I even an employee of GVSU if this is what they see in me?' I couldn't believe this had happened. I've never received that kind of feedback in any position I've had. I took it as a racial issue because I was the only person of color there."
- "Nepotism and cliques. Spousal hiring can create challenges in departments."
- "Leadership in my area restructured the department to demote me."
- "If I bring up an issue or problem, the ignorance in response drives me crazy. People here don't see the issue. All the people of color in my area have had trouble getting through tenure and promotion, but none of the white people did. How do you not see this as a problem?"
- "Student evaluations are very biased, and they should not be used as the sole criterion to measure teaching effectiveness. There have been numerous stories about bias in evaluations, but that's not taken into consideration when it comes to raises and promotions. It doesn't matter how hard I work, I won't get ratings as good as some of my colleagues."
- "Colleagues undermine me and my work. Unfair interview and job application process. I've interviewed for several positions here and haven't gotten them even though people said I was qualified. And then those positions went to white people with similar qualifications to mine. Individuals who are challenged with change."
- "Having to fight for equal pay for equal work and experience. When someone new is hired into a position comparable to yours and they make more than you. Lack of advancement opportunities."

- “Multiple things. A very clear instance of attempted retaliation by some community members, which were ignored or not taken seriously by GVSU leadership. And leadership even perpetuated them.”
- “I received an important national award, and leadership refused to put it in my portfolio. It was a clear example of their disrespect for me.”
- “There are pockets in the institution where local leadership can make your life hell. It doesn’t matter what happens with senior administration because of what’s happening in your area. Coming to work everyday can be traumatizing.”
- “I keep getting reminders that I haven’t made it, that I’m still under someone’s thumb. But I don’t give up. That’s what I do with my students. And I don’t want to take away from the good things, because there are good things here. I have some good colleagues, and I’ve made some good relationships, but I don’t trust everyone.”
- “The lack of accountability when there is an issue distances me from the community. Also, when leaders and people higher up in the institution say, ‘Yes, X is a problem, but didn’t you see when we did Y & Z over here?’ And Y and Z are something completely different. It’s deflection rather than action.”
- “I reported someone for an incident, and someone came to talk to me and told me that they talked to the person I reported. And then that was it. They talked to them and then they talked to me about talking to them. I was like, ‘What’s the result?’ I wish I’d said more at the time, but I didn’t know what I wanted. There was no conflict resolution. I’m like, ‘Can we talk about this please?’ If I’m willing to talk about it, why can’t we? That’s what I want. I don’t hate you. I’m not mad at you. We can still talk, and we can move past it. It could be an easy conversation between both parties if everyone is ready. You’ve got to talk about these things. There’s a history of these things happening, and nothing’s changing. There are many close-minded people here. If they were open-minded, they’d say, ‘I hear what you’re saying,’ and hear other people out. People need to be willing to learn from these experiences. This is a learning institution after all.”
- “I’ve reported issues with the hiring process here and had meetings with people about awful things I’ve experienced. No one ever got back to me and said, ‘This is how the policy is going to change so things like this will never happen again.’ And there was no apology. People need to know things like this are happening. Just acknowledge that a mistake was made and tell me what you’re going to do to change it. What are you doing to make sure that the person who did this to me knows that what they did was incorrect and to make sure they won’t do it again?”
- “I had an incident with a faculty member here. They’re just hateful with anyone they feel is less than them. This faculty member lost it in a meeting with me when I was trying to get information the university needed. They yelled at me and said, ‘Why do you get to ask me all these questions?’ I went to someone in leadership and said that someone needed to address this situation because no one should be part of verbal abuse like that. The person I talked to said, ‘I don’t know what you expect me to do,’ and suggested I take it up with the union.”
- “Why aren’t supervisors tired of hearing the same reports? Who can help people work through these situations and have conversations without power dynamics scaring the crap out of people and making them worry that they’ll lose their jobs?”
- “Microaggressions. Prejudice, judgment, and closed minded people. The people who need to go to training don’t go. I think people should be required to do it. If you have a history of doing negative things, you need to do this work, and if you don’t or can’t then maybe we need to reconsider you being a part of GVSU. Why should we let you continue working with faculty, staff, and students when you behave this way? We need to be willing to let people go.”
- “I had a problem with my supervisor, and I went to the union. The union said, ‘We know about them. They’ve had issues in the past.’ So why are they still here?”

- “GVSU says they appreciate and value people of color. But after having been here a while, I can see that I’m clearly less valued. People praise my work when it’s consistent with stereotypes of people with my identity, but they say it’s mediocre otherwise. It’s like an invisible bubble, a glass ceiling that I need to keep fighting. Invisible forces are trying to keep me at mediocrity. There’s bias regarding the ability of people in minority groups. Also it’s difficult, almost impossible, to make close friends.”
- “Lack of recognition for your achievements. Awards here are like an all white show. #OscarsSoWhite, #GVSoWhite. We work so hard but we’re not recognized. Some people think things have gotten better here, but they haven’t. As people of color, we’re always being looked at to do DEI work. Then once we do the work, they put a white person in charge of the group. We do a lot of talking, but we don’t put a lot into practice.”
- “No credit being given to my work. Having credit for my work misappropriated. I helped to start a program here, and then when an article was written about the program, a colleague took all the credit for the work. I let it go, but I should have said something because it’s just eating at me. And that’s just one example.”
- “When colleagues don’t share my accomplishments with the broader community. When a colleague treats me like I am a child. I’ve only had one unsupportive colleague here, and I started writing down the things that they were doing and saying that made me feel like they were intentionally being ableist. I don’t know why they were so hard on me when I first started here. To me, it was unnecessary. The lack of resources and help for staff and faculty who have disabilities. Getting rejected from opportunities because of my disability.”
- “I’m making people uncomfortable, so I’m the problem. West Michigan nice means that there are expectations for how you behave, especially for women and even more so for women of color. The expectation is that I won’t shake the boat. So if I see something that’s not going well, I’m just supposed to fix it, but not call it out. People in my chain of command don’t like when I call things out. Also, when white administrators say that people of color experience GVSU one way, and I say that my experience isn’t like that, they don’t like it.”
- “All the aggressions we have to deal with. And then if you say anything, it’s couched as if you’re just angry. People say, ‘That’s not how we deal with things here.’ This whole region is West Michigan nice. But that’s very two-faced because people smile at your face and actively work against you behind your back.”
- “This is a PWI that still elevates whiteness and ableism. I have to start and end the day looking a certain way. I still have to carry myself in a way that is white-centered. Any concerns because of my disabilities find little support. Here there’s West Michigan niceness centered on whiteness. There’s this idea that neutral is best, and aggression will happen if you step outside that.”
- “Whenever you mention issues here, they say you’re the troublemaker. It’s so frustrating. During the first part of my career here, I tried to ignore this, but it gets too hard to ignore. A lot of us have left. There are certain pockets and groups around the university that don’t walk the walk. They think training is the answer, but we are overtrained. It’s not a matter of training - people need to be held accountable. There’s no accountability, and if you complain, it’s your fault. It becomes a vicious cycle. In the last few years I’ve said ‘enough is enough,’ and I’ve stopped being quiet. I’ll always defend students, no matter the consequences on my own professional life.”
- “Performative DEI efforts and defensiveness if things are critiqued. People here will be preemptively defensive, like when they know a report will be released that includes negative things, they’ll send an email out about all the good things the institution has done.”
- “People here are clueless about what’s happening. They say, ‘It was better before. It doesn’t feel like it used to feel. I want it to go back to the way it was.’”

- “People say, ‘We know you’re tired and at capacity, but we still need you to do this.’ It feels like nothing I say matters, and when I tell people this, they feel like it’s creating conflict. They want to tokenize you as the angry person of color when there’s nothing wrong with being mad or being expressive.”
- “There’s a mentality here where there’s an insistence on one ‘right way’ of doing things. There isn’t much diversity in ideas. Cliques. Not being among the group in the know. There’s a group of people in my area who know all the opportunities and nominate each other for things.”
- “Inequitable treatment of faculty and staff. Microaggressions and other hurtful language. It’s West Michigan nice - you don’t call people out. There are microaggressions in a meeting and nothing is done. Silence about AAPI violence and hate.”
- “I’ve experienced different microaggressions and concerns about my race/ethnicity, language, and accent. Dealing with unrealistic expectations. A lack of communication from/with higher ups. It’s like communication gets stopped in the middle and doesn’t go from the top to the bottom. I’m in the community, I’m part of these committees, and I have this job, but there’s no meaningful feedback - so I have a feeling of isolation, like I’m on my own island. There’s a lack of professional respect and a sense of a career path here.”
- “I put myself out there and do a lot at the university, but my face is not allowed to be on the website. The way I look is not the way the university wants to present itself.”
- “As a woman of color there are many things that marginalize me here. The lack of inclusion at all levels. The disinvitation of diverse viewpoints. The microaggressions and lack of empathy. We had a ‘We’re Not Okay’ session recently and the speaker said to go where we are celebrated, not just tolerated. We feel tolerated here at GVSU. We’re not celebrated in the least. MLK Day is just a drop in the bucket. The trauma is real.”
- “Extreme sexism in my department and ableism throughout the campus including the library, classrooms, and DSR van service. Constant microaggressions. I have a deal with one of my male colleagues that if I have a point to make, I’ll tell him, and he’ll make it. That way it will get heard. Because things I say are ignored. A colleague screamed at me in front of students. Another colleague slams the door to their office whenever I walk by. Things are extreme enough that I’m thinking of leaving.”
- “People need to be consistent. If you’re not here for me all the time, you’re not here for me at all. If you say we’re going for equity, then we all should be paid the same, our raises should be the same, and our hiring should be the same.”
- “Leadership. I want people on the executive leadership team to be here for me all the time, not just when it’s convenient for you. Lack of funding, resources, and not being valued as a person with certain intercultural skills.”
- “Not being valued for all of the extra committee work. Because I’m bilingual, I’m asked to translate, but that’s not in my job description. The university won’t pay me for that. And when I say I won’t do it, they just ask some new professional who doesn’t have the courage to say no. I’m just put on committees that have nothing to do with my job because of my identity. I’m not asked if I want to be on those committees. I’m not compensated or recognized for this extra work, or someone else takes credit for it.”
- “I’ve been asked to lead efforts related to my racial/ethnic identity. But that’s not my job, and it’s a lot of work. And people were surprised when I said no. But they ask us to do extra, unpaid work all the time.”
- “The institution says that we have the most diverse incoming class we’ve ever had, but we’re not retaining them because we’re not retaining the faculty and staff to work with them. There’s only one of me to work with hundreds of students.”
- “The support isn’t here for students, faculty, and staff of color. They’ll recruit people, but once they get here, there’s no support. So many people have left because they know they can be celebrated somewhere else.”

- “We say we do things, but we’re not really doing them. My kids didn’t go here. I tell people why they should come here and why they shouldn’t. If you’re a student of color and you get money from other places, go there.”
- “The lack of input. I don’t necessarily see or get exposed to the planning initiatives that affect Black/Brown students and staff. Who’s planning these things? It doesn’t make sense for white people to plan Black people stuff. I’ve never been asked about speakers, who I’d like to see here. Initiatives and events for people of color are few. Those I do participate in are only facilitated by minority groups, not the university. Faculty are out of touch with minority groups and the discomfort those groups feel. Their teaching lacks inclusivity. There’s a lack of representation in general, but also within the leadership hierarchy. And the emails from the university are meaningless. They’re all the same. It’s like they’re checking a box. No one in leadership ever comes to meetings just to listen to Black and Brown people.”
- “Being excluded from or not being able to provide input on decisions that directly impact me and my community. Why is the onus on people who are disabled and medically vulnerable to make sure that we’re heard? Why do we have to champion ourselves?”
- “My department talks about ‘team’ all the time, but then they decide to do something and don’t even meet with the people who are being affected by the decision. And this isn’t necessarily about race. Then after the decision is made, they ask what I think about it. It doesn’t matter what I think - the decision has already been made.”
- “Not being seen or heard, and not being valued. Being dismissed.”
- “My supervisor asked me to come up with a project. I thought about it and did, and then I learned that the project I developed was changing but no one ever explained why. They’re just changing it. There was no meeting to discuss the changes or why things were going to change.”
- “Being told that my role is not as valuable as someone else’s. The lack of diversity on the staff. Feeling that you are not heard or seen. Being told you have no skills or intellect by people with PhDs. One of my first experiences here was a faculty member standing really close and pointing in my face, saying ‘You are just a staff member. I’m a tenured faculty member, and you will listen to what I say.’ Having a PhD doesn’t make you smarter or better. It just means that you had the time and privilege to get that degree. So many faculty lack collaboration skills.”
- “The elitism that comes from sitting in a faculty group. I sit in meetings with faculty all the time, and they disregard my comments. They say I don’t know pedagogy when I have decades of experience supporting marginalized students.”
- “My department is not an academic unit and therefore rarely recognized. Sometimes, but not very often, I feel like our work is appreciated by the university. I’d like to do more with the university. I think that would benefit my area and GVSU.”
- “Being a part-time employee makes my role feel not as integrated with the GVSU community. I feel like I’m temporary. I get all of the university emails, but I don’t always read them. There are a lot of emails. I saw the opportunity for these focus groups and thought it would be really cool to talk to people and share my experiences.”
- “Being downtown is different from being at Allendale. We’re more isolated downtown. It’s a struggle to feel so isolated. You really have to make the effort to connect with people or else you won’t talk to anyone outside your immediate area.”
- “Because my work is interdisciplinary, I don’t have a clear home. I’m not sure how to be part of the community. I’m not sure what that would feel like.”
- “I want to feel more included. I want a community. Now I feel like it’s just me. I want there to be more. I’d like to be more open and share more. People with disabilities come from a place where little was

expected of us, where others thought we weren't going to do things with our lives. And now I am successful, but it's others holding me back."

- "I've been so discouraged because of all these issues that it's impacting my work with students. There's a difference between espoused values and lived experiences here. My experience has been pretty awful, and I want things to change."
- "This is the last climate survey I'm doing until we can see some change. I won't keep reliving these things."
- "I asked several colleagues if they were coming to the focus group today, and they all said they weren't going to share themselves and their thoughts when the university isn't going to do anything about it. GVSU has been working on DEI for 20 years, but all they do is take our thoughts and put them on a piece of paper and then do nothing to change things."
- "They're pushing DEI initiatives and there's some low hanging fruit, but none of those initiatives have moved forward at all."
- "The attitude of some faculty in my department. The institution's shift away from a focus on teaching. I came here to teach. But they've made changes to how people get tenure and promotion, and that's made it more difficult for me. It's like GV wants to pretend it's an R1 school. It's all about the numbers and the rank of the journals you publish in - teaching and service don't matter. It's all about research now."
- "I've always done a lot of community outreach and work with students. But I don't do the research and I'm being punished for that now. GVSU didn't used to be all about the research."
- "Sometimes colleagues who have been here a long time will undermine people and decisions. They'll find ways to manipulate the system to get what they want."
- "Because of my educational experience, and some really problematic experiences around my disability, I've been left with scars. I wrestle with the idea of education as a safe space. It's not a safe space for me, but I've signed up to do it. How do I make peace with this? A significant part of my identity is as a disabled person, but that's not acknowledged in the competitiveness of higher education. How do I keep focused and not lose myself? I don't know colleagues at GVSU who can understand what I've gone through. I feel isolated. My colleagues are supportive, but they're not like me. How do I make it safe to be here? I don't see the effort or initiative to make this possible at GVSU. I don't know how long I can go without seeing it."
- "I have to wait in the cold for 20-30 minutes for the DSR van in the winter. I get sick every winter because of this. And if I'm 10 minutes late for pickup, the van will leave."
- "They moved the handicapped parking spaces away from buildings on campus for the sake of aesthetics. There's no handicap parking near the building I work in, so I have to rely on the DSR van. When I have to move between buildings for meetings, I can waste half the day waiting for the van."
- "I've had some transportation issues. I can't drive. There are problems with the buses. I signed up for ride sharing/van pooling right away, but nothing is ever available. And I keep checking. I can ride the buses for free, but the routes aren't favorable. I have to walk a mile to get to the bus. They used to have a better bus route, but they canceled that one."
- "The challenges I face physically navigating campus. My department not being supportive of my disability. Leadership's attitude changed once they found out I had a disability. Their level of respect dropped. They acted like it took away my ability to do my job, but it doesn't."
- "There's a lack of empathy when you have a hidden disability. When you mention something about pain, people make off-handed comments about changing your diet or exercise without understanding that those things have nothing to do with your pain. Walking on the hills to different buildings on campus is hard. Meetings are sometimes back-to-back, and it's almost impossible for me to get to them on time."

- “I came into work after a snowstorm, and the sidewalk into my building hadn’t been shoveled. There was snow on it all day. There’s inconsistent shoveling across campus when it snows. This is basic accessibility stuff that should have been taken care of.”
- “It’s hard for me to grasp concepts sometimes. Sometimes it takes a while for me to think about things. And it’s hard because sometimes people expect you to have a response ready on the spot. A lot of people here don’t have patience and don’t take a minute to let people process things. I don’t tell people that I have this problem though, because I don’t think they’d get it or understand. And if I do tell someone, they’re always surprised and say things like, ‘I never knew,’ or ‘It didn’t seem like you have that problem.’ Which is a reminder that you never know what someone is going through, or what abilities they have.”
- “When they built the new library, the door to get in didn’t have handicap access. There was only one door with a long winding ramp, and that doesn’t work for people who have trouble walking long distances.”
- “DSR does the bare minimum legal compliance here.”
- “People here are not understanding of accessibility issues. I’ve been assigned to classrooms that I couldn’t navigate through because of how close together the desks were. When I raised this issue, I was told that I had to deal with it myself.”
- “I had to argue for why I couldn’t come to campus during COVID, and people know I’m immunocompromised.”
- “I didn’t report my disability for a while because I was managing my life. But then when I reported it, it took three weeks to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodations.”
- [From a person with a disability] “My building is so cold. In a lot of buildings, the heating and cooling is ridiculous. When I talk to people about it, they say they can’t change the temperature too much because that’s how we keep tuition down. I’ve talked to several people about this now because I’m in literal pain from the temperature in my office, but they can’t change the temperature and then I’m told that I can’t work from home. So I bought my own space heater, and then they say that it’s making the AC in my building go on. I have an issue, and it’s my issue. No one will help me with it.”
- “The lights in my office, and most other places on campus, are so bright. And I can’t dim the lights in my office. There aren’t any sensory-friendly areas on campus, so if I get overloaded, I need to go out to my car.”
- “Nothing so far. I haven’t met with any microaggressions (yet!).”

What can GVSU do to better support you and increase your sense of belonging to the GVSU community?

Three people responded to this question in a way that captures the themes behind all of the responses. First, one person said, “Take a look at everything I said that makes me feel like I’m not part of the community, and stop doing it!” That is, stop the microaggressions and the unfair and discriminatory acts; be more supportive; listen to me; take my ideas seriously; treat me fairly and as a full person in the community. Another person added:

“Hold people accountable. Walk the talk. Communication at all levels, vertically and horizontally. And stop all the happy talk and bullsh*t. I’m religious. Just because I go to church doesn’t mean I’m a good person. Just because you say you believe in things or are doing things, it doesn’t mean you are.”

High-profile diversity initiatives and big committees don’t mean anything if people’s day-to-day experiences at GVSU don’t change. Worse still, the gap between the content on glossy web pages and what people experience in their day-to-day interactions is a constant reminder that, to them at least, GVSU isn’t serious about this work. As someone else added:

“Actually being inclusive and not just saying they are. Actually doing what they say they want to do. Don’t just put it on the website, on a piece of paper, or on the side of the bus. I almost didn’t come to this

focus group today, because I'm just over it. Nothing ever changes. I'm tired of talking when nothing is changing."

Here are some of the things that staff and faculty said in response to our question, "What can GVSU do to better support you and increase your sense of belonging to the GVSU community?":

- "More diversity and better representation in the leadership of departments. Remember that even if someone doesn't intend to cause harm, they may still cause harm, and that matters. Often people believe that if people have good intent, the impact of their actions is lessened, but that's not true."
- "Be realistic with job applicants about the real level of diversity and inclusion at GVSU. Tell people, 'We're trying but we're not there yet. We will make mistakes, and we want you to hold us accountable.'"
- "Some affinity groups could do a better job of reaching out and providing support."
- "I wish there was a disability affinity group. I think of belonging as being both about feeling included and feeling able to contribute. These feel rare for me."
- "GVSU has a lot of affinity groups, but they don't do anything together, they don't collaborate. It's important to have the affinity groups, because there I can see other faculty and staff who look like me. But I also think it's important to have some collaboration between them as well."
- "I think that in general there's AAPI erasure at GVSU. I can count on my hand the number of statements that have come out after AAPI violence in the country - there's not a real acknowledgement of the harm being done. Also, Lunar New Year just happened, and no one mentioned it."
- "Make real change! Have accountability - that's a keyword, especially for leadership. It's not about punishment, but people need to be held accountable for their words, actions, and policies. People don't feel like they can speak up here, especially if it's about someone in a leadership position. There's a fragility here. People don't want to be told they're doing something wrong even if they think they want to be told. It's hard for them to take it with grace. And then they want a solution right away. But just having the acknowledgement that something harmful happened would be powerful."
- "Ways to hold others accountable. There's one person who's been very difficult, making side comments and baiting me about my disability. There's no clear infrastructure aside from the ombuds to know what to do or how to act on it. There are also no clear ways for my senior colleagues to do something about it. It would be really helpful if senior colleagues had a clear way to support junior colleagues, even if that was just saying, 'Here's how you can support and advocate for yourself.'"
- "Hold people accountable. Walk the talk. Communication at all levels, vertically and horizontally. And stop all the happy talk and bullsh*t. I'm religious. Just because I go to church doesn't mean I'm a good person. Just because you say you believe in things or are doing things, it doesn't mean you are."
- "There are no boundaries on what some people can say or do. My unit head made arbitrary and harmful statements about me, and I wrote to someone in leadership who said there was nothing they could do."
- "People need to be fired if they mess up. We need to threaten their livelihood, just like they threaten ours."
- "Required training and discussion groups. Acknowledge that this is hard work. More inclusive hiring and retention efforts. Improvements to faculty tenure policies so that they are more equitable. Tenure is working against retention - it's like academic hazing. Faculty hold their non-tenured colleagues to criteria they were never held to. Provide more formative feedback in the tenure process. Now it's like an excuse to gang up on people. We need to include teaching evaluations in our portfolio, but that's problematic for people of color. There's research on this. And people have lost tenure because of their teaching evaluations. People misunderstand how bias works. They say, 'Just don't be biased.' But they don't understand how implicit bias works; it's so deeply ingrained. I got really horrible feedback in my review,

and I almost quit. People write these comments about you and then they forget about them, but for you, the comments last and grow.”

- “I’ve heard that faculty of color have left because of the tenure process. Most Black faculty had to go up for tenure a second time, because they didn’t get it the first time. The places they published weren’t considered credible because they were aimed at people of color. People were a lot harsher on them in the tenure process, and they just decided, ‘I’m done. I’m not staying here.’”
- “Start recognizing the achievements of people of color. It only takes a small amount of time. When you recognize a white person who’s been here two years versus a person of color who’s been here ten years, the person of color thinks, ‘What do you see in them that you don’t see in me?’ That doesn’t make anyone feel good.”
- “Give credit to people who are doing good work. Be flexible about how to accomplish things, don’t just give awards and recognition to ‘people in the know.’ Be more transparent about decision making and be more inclusive about input into decisions.”
- “Ensure that people get equal pay for equal work, responsibility, and experience.”
- “We also need consistency in advancement and hiring. There was a situation where a person of color, a graduate student, applied for a job and didn’t get it because they were told they needed to finish their degree first. Then that unit hired a white person in the same graduate program. What’s that about? Leadership here is all white. There’s diversity at the lowest levels of the university but those people don’t move up.”
- “Stop using numbers in LIFT evals. Stop nepotism and implement better conflict of interest policies. Consider bias in peer evaluations.”
- “On our evaluations we have to say how much time we put into different activities vs. just describing our accomplishments. Things take me longer, and I won’t say how long they take because I’m not willing to have a conversation about my disability with a person who won’t understand. It’s painful that the form asks for this information. Asking about time is a desperate way to compare Person A to Person B. They just want an easy way to quantify things. And this is tied to salary increases too.”
- “Take a much closer look at systems at GV where supervisors and senior staff can exploit workplace loopholes to oppress junior and/or reporting colleagues. GV has too many places where the application of policy decisions is discretionary, and that’s where problems come up. There’s resistance from middle management and some leaders about reducing the level of discretion people have, but there are so many holes in our personnel policies.”
- “Be more supportive of faculty work other than research. Uplift people who have other interests but are still supporting GVSU’s teaching mission.”
- “GV should value its personnel with funding and high wage jobs, not packing people with work because of their identity. The same people of color are always doing more work. They’re expected to say yes.”
- “Ensuring that compensation is fair across campus and related to workload and performance and not educational attainment (staff versus faculty).”
- “When there are issues that happen that involve my community, you don’t check with me, but then you expect me to do all the DEI work here. I want you to check in with me because you care about me, not just because you’re checking a box. It needs to be sincere.”
- “With the latest shooting, where’s the communication, where’s the checking in on us? Don’t just send out the same email to everyone, a blanket email. Why not just reach out to the few of us and say, ‘I heard what happened. How are you doing?’ Those blanket emails seem like something someone just checked off a list.”
- “There’s a question of authenticity with institutional emails about incidents of violence against people of color. After George Floyd, everyone started sending emails. But how authentic are they? I was at a DEI

workshop, and someone said, ‘I’m so tired of talking about race.’ That’s privilege. As a Black person, I don’t get to not think or talk about it.”

- “Make those who are not prevalent in the GV community a priority (ability differences, race, sexuality, etc.). Celebrate us! Know my holidays. Don’t just contact me when someone dies. Celebrate us instead of tolerating us. Lift staff and faculty voices. We’re student centered, but not enough.”
- “Higher education follows an expertise model. In this model, you need to go through a rote period where you have to acculturate. If there’s anything in your identity that doesn’t fit, you need to shatter yourself or shear parts of yourself off to push through the pipe. Once you’re through the pipe, you have the opportunity to play and make yourself better. But mostly, I’d just like to make the pipe bigger.”
- “Instead of thinking about how I can measure up according to standards other people have, it would be great if people asked me how they could help me and what I want to achieve.”
- “There needs to be more awareness that faculty and staff on campus have disabilities, especially invisible ones. For some of us, everyday is a coming out story. To have more support would be great. Listen to staff and faculty with disabilities, include our stories in GVSU media. Listen to what support we need.”
- “Diversity and inclusion have become buzz words rather than actual action. Do a better job of letting people know what resources are available. Listen to the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ community. Change the top-down approach we have where people with the most privilege are making policies that impact people without privilege.”
- “Stopping microaggressions from occurring. But I don’t think that’s possible. Microaggressions exist because people are afraid to confront them. And when people do confront them, they tend to be scapegoated. It’s a battle I’ll always face. All I can do is empower myself and my students. I can’t make the hate go away.”
- “Think through what you’re doing. If you’re going to put up a new building or create a shiny new position, make sure that it’s accessible for everyone. Remember that the little things you do could be huge to someone else, good or bad.”
- “Having difficult conversations together as a group, versus individually.”
- “When there’s an issue with faculty or staff, quit sending out a blanket email to everyone. Instead address the issue with the person/people who created the issue. Go and talk to them directly.”
- “Not sure. Incremental improvement in understanding the challenges that people of color face.”
- “Climate studies and dialogues are fine, but not enough. We need to implement training and change at all levels. Leadership ‘understands’ but they don’t see or feel the day-to-day struggle it is to work at this institution as a person of color. We’re not going to change the diversity makeup of the institution overnight. We need to train our senior colleagues and allies so they understand how things work. We need to create safe spaces.”
- “Require training and workshops for non-minority and minority faculty/staff led by minority members. Create safe spaces where people can ask questions and get feedback. Increased support for minority staff members with participation from campus leaders. More artwork by diverse artists. More diversity among suppliers to the institution. A lot of the vendors come from Michigan, but they’re not minority-owned businesses.”
- “Actually being inclusive and not just saying they are. Actually doing what they say they want to do. Don’t just put it on the website, on a piece of paper, or on the side of the bus. I almost didn’t come to this focus group today, because I’m just over it. Nothing ever changes. I’m tired of talking when nothing is changing.”
- “True action to make the community an inclusive and safe environment.”
- “Instead of seeing so many conversations, I’d like to see more action. That would make me feel like it’s worth it. In my opinion, the President wants to see change. The President needs to get the entire university

working on the same path, moving in the same direction. That's a big challenge. But if that happens, then people won't have all these different experiences in different areas."

- "Make marginalized voices a priority rather than an afterthought. 'Walk the walk' in addition to 'talking the talk.' There's a lot of conversation about DEI, but not a lot of day-to-day action or consideration."
- "More social events for faculty and staff. More mentoring check-ins. Assist others in understanding the different roles we have, administration and faculty."
- [From a part-time staff member] "I'm not sure - more opportunities to connect somehow?"
- "Improve handicap parking and put handicap parking near buildings. Improve the DSR van service. Salt icy paths in the winter. Listen and act on ADA issues to increase our sense of belonging. I've been saying the same thing for years and nothing has changed."
- "Even though I've identified as having a disability several times, no one at GVSU has ever reached out to me about my disability. No one has ever asked what my disability is or if there's anything they could do to help. I would've welcomed that. But I heard absolutely nothing."
- "Departments also need to be more supportive of people with disabilities."
- "All the Division of Equity and Inclusion is really thinking about is race. They need to think about all the other types of exclusion that happen here."
- "To be fair, GVSU has a lot of activities for non-white members to have a sense of belonging. I'm the one who doesn't have time to join and be part of the community. It's hard to have work-life balance, so these activities become non-essential, unfortunately."

Conclusion

Looking back over our DEI work of the last couple of years, we've come to believe that there are a number of preconditions for effective institutional DEI efforts. That is, if certain ways of acting towards and working with one another aren't present, then all of the DEI programming in the world won't make much difference. We think that, at root, DEI efforts are all about recognizing and valuing the intrinsic worth and humanity of people in a community regardless of how they may differ in their experiences, their identities, their abilities, and their histories. If members of a community who have power and status don't practice basic decency and fairness in their interactions with other community members, don't respect their ideas and concerns, and don't celebrate their accomplishments in their "non DEI lives," then they're not going to suddenly adopt these practices because of a DEI initiative or an email from a senior leader.

We believe that GVSU's leadership is truly committed to making the university a "national model for equity and inclusion in higher education." But from our perspective, GVSU faces two challenges in enacting this commitment. First, there appears to be variability in the extent to which departments, schools, programs, and other units have the kinds of preconditions necessary to support successful DEI efforts. Over the course of our two visits, we've heard a number of people talk about working in units with leaders and colleagues who've created the kinds of supportive environments that we described above, but we've also heard about a number of units where the opposite is true. If the variability we've heard about in the focus groups is true of the broader institution, then a lot of work will need to be done in units across the institution before DEI work can move the institution as a whole forward. Perhaps this work is going on, but it's not anything we've heard about in our conversations.

Second, if what we heard in our conversations is true of the experiences of the people of color and/or people who have disabilities with whom we didn't speak, GVSU has had a long history of problems with DEI. And people do not lose the accumulated weight of these experiences quickly. They've been hurt or disappointed repeatedly and have learned not to give the benefit of the doubt to the intentions of their bosses or colleagues or the institution when it comes to new initiatives. They've seen this rodeo before and regaining their trust will be challenging,

especially if they happen to work in those units that continue to be marred by bad or indifferent bosses and nasty colleagues.

Data from the myGVSU climate survey are consistent with the skepticism we heard about institutional DEI efforts in our focus groups. The myGVSU climate survey includes four questions that we combine to summarize people’s perceptions of the institution’s support for diversity and equity. Specifically, we ask people the extent to which they agree with each of the following four statements:

- The campus environment is free from tensions related to individual or group differences.
- Recruitment of historically marginalized students, faculty, and staff is an institutional priority.
- Retention of historically marginalized students, faculty, and staff is an institutional priority.
- Senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to diversity and equity on this campus.

Overall, employees at GVSU were significantly less likely to agree with these statements than employees at other 4-year public institutions. But the results are larger when we look at racial/ethnic identity. In the table below, the number of arrows indicates the size of the difference. Staff and faculty with the highlighted identities are much less likely to agree with these four statements concerning institutional commitment to DEI than staff and faculty with the same racial/ethnic identities at other 4-year public institutions.

Table 1: Institutional Support for Diversity and Equity by Demographic Categories									
	Grand Valley State University				All 4-Year Public Institutions		All Participating Institutions		
	n	Mean ¹	Effect Size ²		n	Mean	n	Mean	
			vs. All 4-Year Public Institutions	vs. All Participating Institutions					
All Employees	White	995	3.37	↓	≈	10,130	3.50	43,058	3.43
	Multiple races/ethnicities	76	3.01	↓↓	↓	1,493	3.38	4,575	3.19
	African American/Black	51	2.74	↓	↓	1,239	3.02	3,311	3.00
	Hispanic/Latino	23	3.14	↓↓↓	↓↓	1,145	3.69	2,694	3.46
	International	9	3.86			261	3.87	698	3.68
	Asian	34	3.26	↓↓	↓	498	3.60	1,960	3.42
	All other races/ethnicities	19	2.99	↓↓	↓↓	482	3.32	1,455	3.30

And while the differences for people with disabilities aren’t as large, it’s still the case that people with disabilities at GVSU who took the survey are notably less likely to agree with these four statements than people with disabilities at other 4-year institutions.

We don’t highlight these data to disparage the goals of GVSU’s leadership, only to point out that the skepticism we heard in the focus groups isn’t limited to the people we spoke with.

We realize that we don’t know what GVSU’s senior leadership is planning to improve conditions for staff and faculty, and we don’t know what programs are already in the works. Effective change may be afoot. We only know what we’ve heard from the people we’ve spoken with and what we’ve seen in GVSU’s survey data.

We appreciated the opportunity to meet with members of the GVSU community during this visit and our last visit. We appreciated people’s honesty in their comments and their patience in listening to and responding to our many questions. We’re glad to have follow-up conversations to address any questions or comments that you have.

Appendix

Copy of the text from the information sheet

Grand Valley State University Staff and Faculty Focus Groups on Race, Ethnicity, & Disability

As part of GVSU's ongoing efforts to better understand our climate for inclusion and equity, we administered the myGVSU climate survey in fall 2021. Our next steps include holding focus groups with members of the GVSU community to gather more detailed information about their experiences on campus. We held the first set of focus groups from August 31-September 2 with staff and faculty in the LGBTQ+ community. This is our second set of focus groups with GVSU staff and faculty focused on race, ethnicity, and disability.

Charlie Blaich and Kathy Wise lead the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS), the organization that designed and administered the myGVSU climate survey. They're visiting our three Grand Rapids campuses from January 30-February 1, 2023 to conduct these focus groups. Their conversations will focus on learning more about your experiences working at GVSU. Charlie and Kathy will ask questions about what you like most about working at GVSU; things that make you feel like you are, or are not, part of the GVSU community; and changes GVSU could make to help you feel more supported and increase your sense of belonging to the GVSU community.

Charlie and Kathy will visit the Allendale Campus on Monday, January 30, the Robert C. Pew Grand Rapids Campus on Tuesday, January 31, and the Health Campus on Wednesday, February 1. Each focus group session will last for no more than 60 minutes. Charlie and Kathy will take notes during the focus groups, but they will not make an audio recording of the conversation, and they will not use your name in their notes. Furthermore, they will not connect your name or other identifying information (such as title or department) with your comments in anything they write or say to other people about these sessions. When the focus groups are completed, Charlie and Kathy will write a report summarizing themes from the conversations. They will share this report with stakeholders who are working on inclusion and equity efforts at the university. GVSU will use the information from these focus groups to inform policies and procedures and improve the work environment for staff and faculty at our institution.

Charlie and Kathy will also share themes from the focus groups with the GVSU community on Friday, February 3 from 1:00-3:00 p.m in the DeVos Loosemore Auditorium on the downtown campus. Everyone is welcome to attend; no registration required.

We encourage you to ask questions about the purpose of these conversations at any time. Your participation is voluntary. If at any point during the course of the focus group you decide that you'd like to stop, please feel free to leave. There's no penalty. If you have questions or concerns about this initiative, please contact Charlie, Kathy, Jesse Bernal (Chief of Staff to the President & Vice President for Inclusion and Equity), or Kathleen VanderVeen (Associate Vice President & Deputy Chief Inclusion and Equity Officer).

Note: We included the contact information for these individuals on the information sheet that we passed out.