

# College Isn't Just for Kids

Through GVSU's new Accelerated Degree Program, adult learners can achieve their dreams of earning a bachelor's degree quickly and easily.

By Michele Coffill and Maria C. Montoya, Grand Valley State University



**A**s Christina Mireles' children began to share with her their dreams of attending college, the full-time working mom wondered if there would ever be enough time or money in the family budget to complete her own bachelor's degree.

"Year after year, when I was working in the non-profit sector I would see younger, newer employees get promoted above me into full-time jobs with benefits, and I knew it wasn't my experience or work ethic that was preventing me from moving up," said Mireles, the 41-year-old mother of three kids, 13, 18 and 19 years old. Mireles earned her associate degree from Henry Ford College in 2013 by taking one or two in-person classes at a time.

"Often it was the lack of a bachelor's degree that stood between me and the jobs I really wanted to be in," Mireles says. "I was given some opportunities to move up, but the job qualifications would stipulate you had to have a bachelor's degree."

## Launched for success

The perfect opportunity for Mireles to earn her degree finally arrived this past winter. Grand Valley State University's President Philomena V. Mantella announced in February during a joint press conference with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer that GVSU has created an accelerated program that will help adults complete their bachelor's degrees and enhance the state's productivity. The program answers Whitmer's call for more Michigan residents to finish their degrees, Mantella said at the event.

"GVSU, born of a community's understanding that a local university is a powerful economic engine, understands the need to embrace what is 'next' now," Mantella said. "Now is the time to keep prosperity inclusive and our state competitive. We are proud to lead."

The new online accelerated degree program not only helps adult learners — that's you, parents — attain their degrees faster, it is also a critical step that fits a statewide initiative Whitmer first announced during the 2019 State of the State address, in which 60% of Michi-

gan adults will have obtained a post-secondary credential by 2030. There are 2 million Michiganders who have some college credit but did not earn a bachelor's degree.

"GVSU has taken into account the needs of adult learners; this program was built with students in mind," Whitmer said.

Mantella said the 19-month program allows students to shape their degrees in integrative studies while, at the same time, earning a certificate in leadership, applied data analytics, project management or global communication. Grand Valley has invested in this program, Mantella added, by reimbursing students the cost of the first course so that they can apply those funds to future courses.

## Reaching for her "next"

After developing community programs for nonprofits and local schools for more than 10 years, Mireles joined the GVSU Charter School Office as a community associate, creating partnerships and bringing resources to more than 34,000 K-12 students enrolled in GVSU charter schools. Finally,

she says, she sees herself being able to finish her undergraduate coursework since enrolling in GVSU's accelerated degree program to pursue a degree in integrative studies with a global communications certificate.

"As parents, too often when children come along, we shelve our own dreams, but honestly with this new program, I can see my children and I going after our degrees together," Mireles said. "Other families need to know there are pathways for parents to become graduates too."

## Dual degree/certificate details

- Bachelor's degree in integrative studies, plus certificate in one of four skill categories (leadership, applied data analytics, project management, or global communication)
- Six-week classes
- Online, two on-campus Saturday visits required (any location: Grand Rapids, Holland, Traverse City, Detroit)
- Typical students are older than 24, with work experience and at least 30 earned college credits

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