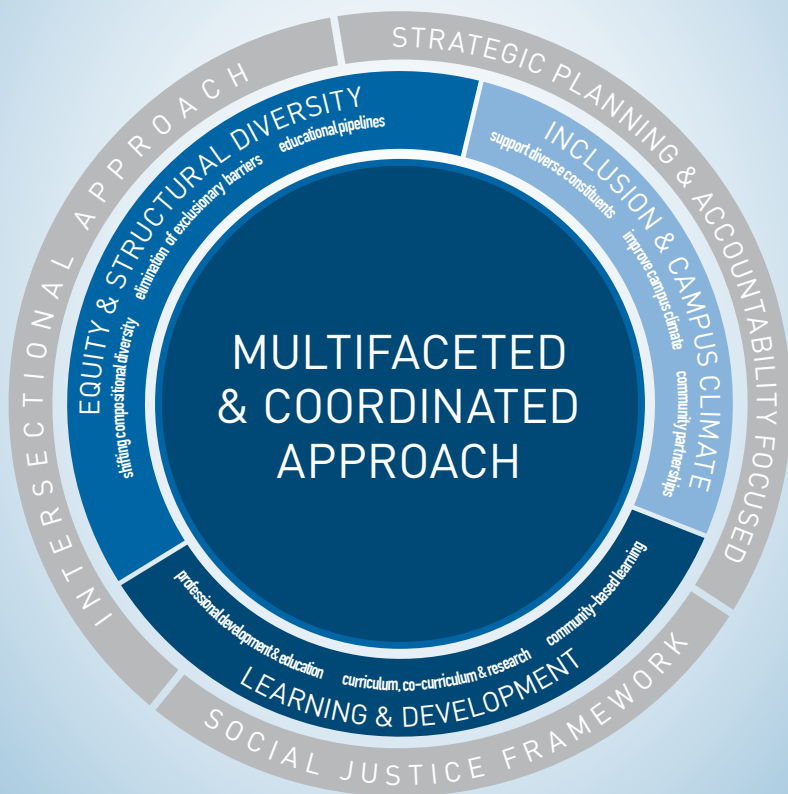


# FRAMEWORK FOR Inclusion & Equity



*Inclusion and equity are integral to our mission at Grand Valley State University to educate students to shape their lives, their professions, and their societies, and to enrich the community through excellent teaching, active scholarship, and public service.*

*From GVSU Board of Trustees' Policies, Chapter 1:  
Vision, Mission, and Values Statement*

## Inclusiveness.

Grand Valley State University values all identities, perspectives, and backgrounds and is dedicated to incorporating multiple voices and experiences into every aspect of its operations. We believe that diversity competencies are an intellectual asset and that a range of thoughtful perspectives and a commitment to open inquiry strengthens our liberal education tradition. We recognize that the long-term viability of the institution depends upon anticipating and meeting the needs of emerging constituent groups, especially our changing student body. Therefore, the institution seeks to include, engage, and support diverse groups of students, faculty and staff members, as well as community members. Grand Valley is committed to strengthening our living, learning, and working environment by recognizing and removing the barriers to full participation and providing a safe, inclusive, vibrant community for all.

*The profound integration of Grand Valley's commitment and approach to inclusion and equity is visible across the university and guided by values of inclusiveness and community:*

## Community.

Grand Valley State University values its connections to, participation with, and responsibility to local communities, West Michigan, the state, the nation, and the world. We value the collaboration of faculty members, staff members, and students with external partners in addressing mutual interests and community needs. The university offers the communities it serves resources and inspiration in their own lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Faculty and staff members are encouraged to contribute their expertise and service working in partnership with communities. Students are encouraged to take part in various service learning and volunteer opportunities in their communities and abroad. To foster and expand these community connections, the institution and its members promote, value, and honor diverse perspectives.

Grand Valley's vision is to become one of the nation's premier institutions of higher education grounded in the tradition of the liberal arts. This commitment to liberal arts education is strengthened by providing a welcoming environment where all members of the Grand Valley community can safely and proudly be their authentic selves with equitable opportunity for success. Grand Valley strives to foster a healthy and diverse environment where all members of the community act with integrity, communicate respectfully, and accept responsibility for their words and actions. Authentic personal relationships and a spirit of community matter at Grand Valley.

Grand Valley intends 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 and 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. Grand Valley aspires to embody the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of our region, thus becoming recognized as the practiced model and resource for equity and inclusion in West Michigan.







## Long Standing Commitment to Advance Inclusion and Equity



Building on prior decades of work, in 2008, President Thomas J. Haas (2007–current) created the Division of Inclusion and Equity. Grand Valley was one of the first universities to create a unit portfolio division structure to lead diversity efforts. This included a chief diversity officer (CDO) at the senior management level who reports directly to the president. The path to the creation of a CDO at GVSU was led by a significant number of factors that had emerged over the previous decade. Not only did the institution consider the importance of diversity to accrediting bodies, it also listened to its own constituents. GVSU conducted a climate study that gathered quantitative and qualitative information; it supported the growth of numerous grassroots efforts (e.g., the People of Color Network, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender [LGBT] Faculty/Staff Association, and the Intercultural Awareness Committee); and it listened to student concerns that had arisen as a result of bias incidents on campus. These strengths and challenges painted a picture of an institution ready to grow, and efforts were then propelled by the leadership of a new president who understood that notable and sustained progress required more formal leadership to lend authority and coordination to diversity efforts.

Significant progress toward creating a welcoming environment has been achieved at GVSU since 2008. A university-wide Inclusion Implementation Plan (IIP) was completed in 2011 under the leadership of the inaugural Vice President for Inclusion and Equity, Dr. Jeanne Arnold (2008-2014). The IIP documents strategic initiatives from each college, division, and unit detailing their contribution to making GVSU a more inclusive campus. Adapted from a framework articulated by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, four action areas were highlighted:



Grand Valley’s efforts to advance equity and inclusion are now embedded in the 2016-2021 university strategic plan. As previously noted, Grand Valley also has been a leader in campus climate assessment and will complete a fifth assessment in the fall of 2015.

Grand Valley has received national recognition for its commitment to diversity and inclusion. In September 2014, *Insight Into Diversity* named GVSU among its **Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED)** recipients. Grand Valley has also received the Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council's **Corporate ONE** Award and was named a **Role Model Institution** by **Minority Access Inc.**

Grand Valley intentionally recognizes its place among larger systems of marginalization and oppression, the cumulative effect of racial inequality that plagues the education system, and the continued existence of identity-based tension on campuses that sometimes results in educational and experiential inequalities. Grand Valley, as a complex social system, is neither immune to the impact nor the root cause of systemic oppression and takes stock of the history that has marginalized some communities and prevented full access to the benefits of higher education on a systemic level. Unfortunately, college access continues to be stratified along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. Underrepresented communities are more likely to have feelings of exclusion, isolation, and experiences with insensitivity and microaggression leading to a general sense of vulnerability and even invisibility. Consistent with national trends, findings of GVSU’s 2011 campus climate study show that some groups on campus, particularly people of color, LGBTQ individuals, and women, reported having less comfort with the climate in some areas in relation to their counterpart groups. And while these dynamics are not isolated to Grand Valley, or even always under the university’s direct control, the equity and inclusion framework provides the necessary accountability to ensure even greater progress for all communities despite these historical challenges.

## Next Phase of Grand Valley's Commitment to Advance Inclusion and Equity



The noteworthy leadership and commitment of President Haas, other senior leaders, countless members of the GVSU community, and community partners are indicative of a strong foundation for advancement. Grand Valley acknowledges the need for a new, coordinated, and comprehensive strategy to advance equity and inclusion. The challenge ahead is to continue to transform GVSU into a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive university. This effort honors the diversity of West Michigan, renews a commitment to individuals and communities of every background and perspective, and advances social justice locally and nationally.



## Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Accreditation Standards

Grand Valley's continued efforts will align with the university accreditation standards of the Higher Learning Commission. The framework articulated here and the university's strategic planning for equity and inclusion advances HLC's guiding value that "education for a diverse, technologically and globally connected" world is essential and demonstrates an example of Grand Valley's "culture of continuous improvement" amid great success related to equity and inclusion. Importantly, equity and inclusion efforts at GVSU will be driven by "evidence-based institutional learning" and a commitment to evaluation and assessment that aligns equity and inclusion efforts with the evidence and assessment critical "quality assurance" function of accreditation. (See <https://hlcommission.org/Criteria-Eligibility-and-Candidacy/guiding-values-new-criteria-for-accreditation.html> for more information about HLC's guiding values).

# Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Social Justice

## Diversity.

Diversity refers to the presence of difference and variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from difference of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, age, class, religion and spirituality, geographic and international, and more. Diversity, in all its forms, is at the heart of Grand Valley's mission to provide a liberal education that will help shape lives, professions, and societies. Diversity is affirmed and celebrated at GVSU and in the community as a necessary intellectual asset and institutional resource. Grand Valley believes it has a responsibility to serve all members of our community through a coordinated equity and inclusion strategy.

## Inclusion.

Inclusion refers to GVSU's support for the success and engagement of all students, faculty, staff and campus visitors in creating a healthy and affirming climate. Inclusion is "the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity — in people, in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect — in ways that increase one's awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within value systems and institutions" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, AAC&U). Inclusion establishes an environment in which all individuals and communities are able to thrive in authentic ways. Moreover, an inclusive and welcoming climate embraces difference so that all people can fully participate in the university's opportunities. Grand Valley is committed to the advancement of inclusion — the act of creating environments where individuals feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued.

## Equity.

Equity is a guiding principle at GVSU. It refers to the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for students, faculty, and staff at every stage of educational and career development. Grand Valley acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations. Every effort is made to identify and eliminate barriers preventing their full participation.

## Social Justice.

Social justice serves as the conceptual foundation for Grand Valley's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The institution recognizes its responsibility to examine traditional power structures and to address unfair treatment of any university constituent within these structures. Moreover, Grand Valley intends to educate and empower all members of the community to think critically about systems of marginalization and oppression. This includes a deeper understanding of privilege and the need for all in the community to work toward equity and fairness in the pursuit of transformation of lives, professions, and societies.



# Strategic Planning and Accountability for Inclusion and Equity



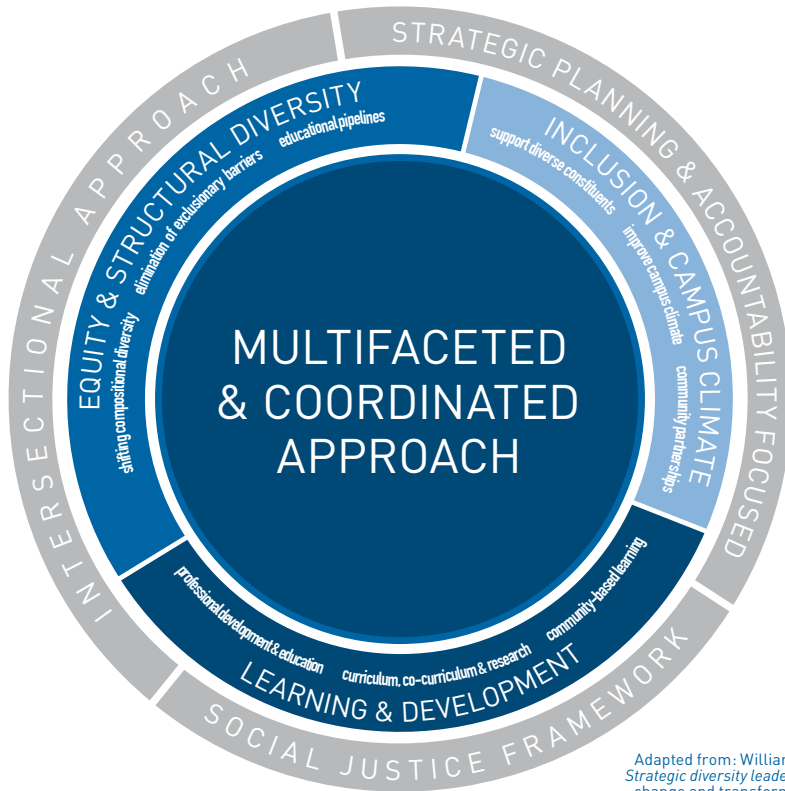
An organized strategy that focuses on diversity, inclusion, and equity, solidly grounded in a foundation of social justice, drives the next phase of the university's work. Looking forward, Grand Valley's commitment includes sustaining institutional efforts to ensure that equity is embedded across the campus, and ingrained in all functions, decision making, and planning. Grand Valley will also redouble efforts to eliminate inequities and advance access while continuing to create a campus climate that is welcoming and inclusive for all.

A social justice foundation motivates the increased intellectual depth that is crucial for solving societal challenges. It also contributes to the mechanisms and advocacy that are necessary to ensure access and support for all at GVSU. This plan will also support university efforts to:

- further position GVSU as the national model for equity and inclusion among public, regional comprehensive universities.
- operationalize Grand Valley's 2016–2021 Strategic Plan, and guide strategic planning for the Division of Inclusion and Equity.
- develop communications and outreach content to support cohesive messaging for internal and external engagement.



# Multifaceted and Coordinated Approach

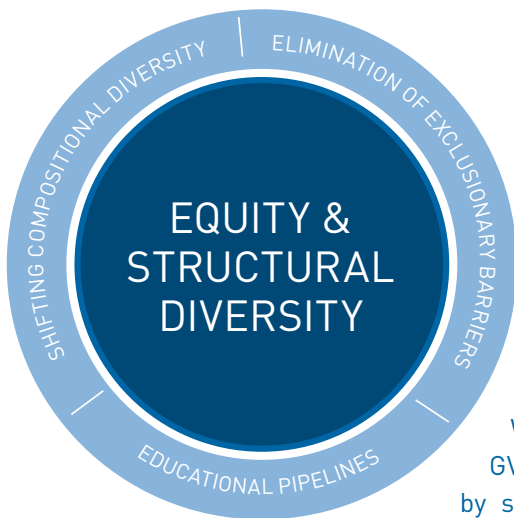


Adapted from: Williams, D.A. (2012). *Strategic diversity leadership: Activating change and transformation in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Grand Valley is a large and complex institution, with over 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students, nearly 3,500 faculty and staff members, and over 100,000 alumni. In addition, the university partners with countless community members, organizations, business, and other institutions across the world. A multifaceted and coordinated approach to inclusion and equity seeks to engage GVSU in activities related to faculty members, students, prospective students, staff members, administrators, trustees, alumni, and external community members. In the next phase of this commitment, Grand Valley seeks to organize its efforts to advance equity and inclusion in three broad areas:

- Equity and structural diversity
- Inclusion and campus climate
- Learning and development

In each of these broad areas, an intersectional social justice lens, strategic planning, and accountability are central organizing frameworks.



## 1. Equity and Structural Diversity:

How does GVSU eliminate exclusionary barriers and support the educational pipeline? Grand Valley seeks to recruit and retain students, faculty members, and staff members who more accurately reflect the diversity of West Michigan. As a public institution, GVSU can shape the educational pipeline by supporting equity in education for K-12 students, increasing college-readiness and college eligibility, promoting the success of students through undergraduate graduation, and encouraging the pursuit of graduate degrees at equitable rates. The following are the areas of focus within equity and structural diversity:

- Recruitment and Retention (students, faculty, and staff)
- Nondiscrimination and Compliance
- Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity
  - Gender equity and Title IX
  - Civil Rights framework
  - Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and accommodations
- Procurement/Supplier Diversity
- Education Pipeline and Outreach

### RELEVANT OBJECTIVES IN GVSU'S 2016-2021 STRATEGIC PLAN:

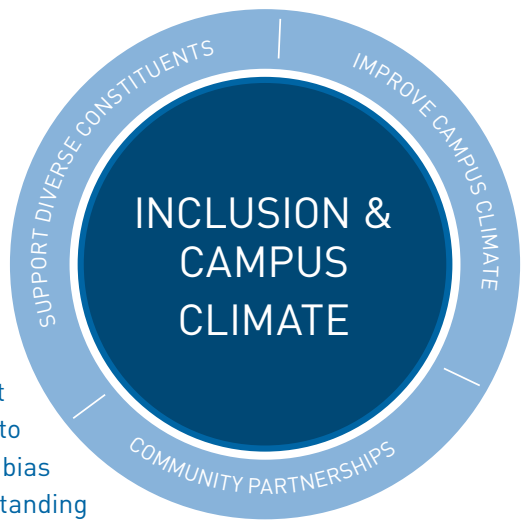
- GVSU's diversity of students, faculty, staff, and administrators increases to 18% to reflect the populations of West Michigan. (1.B.1.)
- Retention rates between first-year and sophomore years and sophomore and junior years for first-generation and other non-traditional undergraduate students meet or exceed the retention rates of traditional undergraduate students. (1.B.2.)

## 2. Inclusion and Campus Climate:

How does GVSU continually improve campus climate and become an integrated member of the broader community? Grand Valley desires to sustain an institutional climate that allows all members of the community to thrive and seeks to eliminate incidents of bias and discrimination on campus. Understanding the impact of the external environment on campus

climate, Grand Valley strives to be a voice of progress and an advocate of social justice for and within the broader community. In an effort to better understand the experiences and perceptions of the campus community and to promote openness and accountability, Grand Valley prioritizes the collection of campus climate and diversity-related data. It commits to developing sustained action plans to respond to findings. It considers relationships with diverse external communities and strives to develop compelling messages and initiatives that resonate with those communities. Areas of focus within inclusion and campus climate include:

- Climate Assessment
- Education and Response to Bias
- Intergroup Relations and Discourse
- Student, Faculty, Staff Achievement and Success
- Retention (students, faculty, and staff)
- Institutional Development
- External Relations
- Alumni Relations



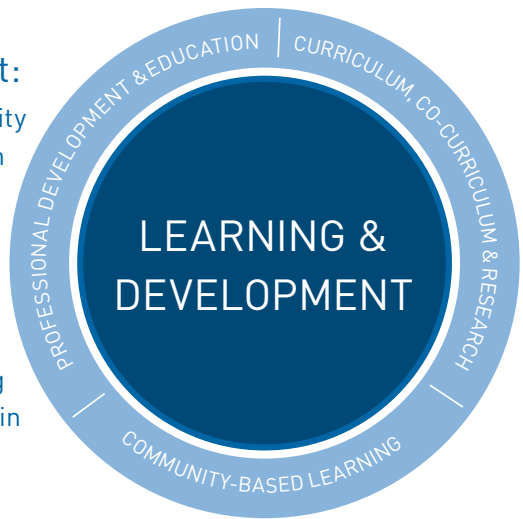
### RELEVANT OBJECTIVES IN GVSU'S 2016-2021 STRATEGIC PLAN:

- Retention rates between first-year and sophomore years and sophomore and junior years for first-generation and other non-traditional undergraduate students meet or exceed the retention rates of traditional undergraduate students. (1.B.2.)
- All decision-making bodies at every level institution-wide include diverse individuals and reflect diverse perspectives. (2.B.1.)
- All university systems and policies ensure inclusiveness and accessibility. (3.B.1.)
- At least 90% of the GVSU community report high levels of equity as characteristic of the institutional climate. (3.B.2.)
- On a 7-point scale, Grand Valley improves its overall reputation and familiarity in West Michigan and Metro Detroit among prospective students of color by at least 0.2 points. (4.B.1.)
- On a 7-point scale, Grand Valley improves its overall reputation and familiarity in West Michigan and Metro Detroit among the general public of color by at least 0.2 percent. (4.B.2.)

### 3. Learning and Development:

How does GVSU ensure that university expertise related to equity and inclusion is relevant and innovative? How does GVSU support the community's continual development of greater self-awareness, knowledge, and skills required for the advancement of equity and inclusion? Social justice education is a life-long learning process. Areas of focus within learning and development include:

- Curriculum and Instruction
- Research and Inquiry
- Leadership Development
- Social Justice Education

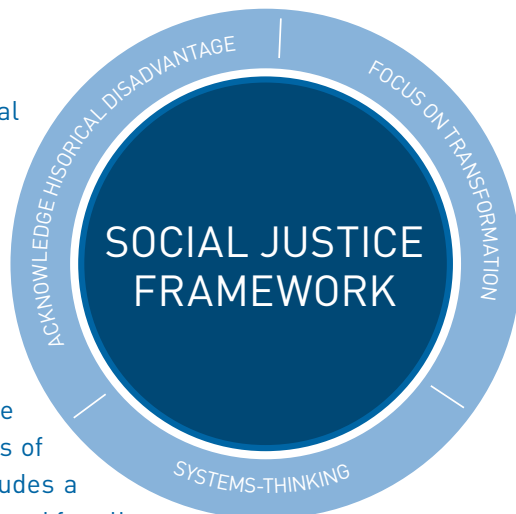


RELEVANT OBJECTIVES IN GVSU'S 2016-2021 STRATEGIC PLAN:

Orientation for all new employees includes intercultural training and development. (2.B.2.)

### 4. Social Justice Framework:

Social Justice serves as the conceptual foundation for Grand Valley's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The institution recognizes its responsibility to examine traditional power structures and to address unfair treatment of any university constituent within these structures. Moreover, Grand Valley intends to educate and empower all members of the community to think critically about systems of marginalization and oppression. This includes a deeper understanding of privilege and the need for all in the community to work toward equity and fairness in the pursuit of transformation of lives, professions, and societies.







## 5. Intersectional Approach:

GVSU's multifaceted and coordinated framework for equity and inclusion considers and affirms the role of multiple identities with relationship to various social contexts and interlocking systems of power, privilege, and oppression in shaping experiences of our community members. The university's efforts broadly consider complex experiences and needs through multiple dimensions of identity, particularly marginalized identities, including:

- Age
- Disability status/varying abilities
- First generation status
- Gender
- Gender identity and expression
- International status and national/geographic origin
- Race and ethnicity
- Religion and faith/spirituality
- Sexual orientation
- Socio-economic status
- Veteran/Military status

While intentional focus on intersectionality is central to the university's framework, community- and identity-specific efforts are necessary until full equality is realized. These efforts acknowledge important nuances within diverse communities and identities and allow for strategic attention that advances the work more broadly.



## 6. Strategic Planning and Accountability Focused:

Strategic planning focuses on creating measurable ways inclusion and equity can support the strategic direction, goals, and objectives of the university. At GVSU, strategic planning is centralized through the 2016–2021 University Strategic Plan. Although all academic and administrative units contextualize objectives and outcomes, all objectives, across the university, should advance the goals enumerated in the university plan. To ensure the success of Grand Valley's strategic planning related to equity and inclusion, accountability is key. Efforts should include opportunities to review progress and articulate course-corrections, if necessary. While efforts should be broadly shared across campus, accountability partners should be identified to ensure timely progress. Accountability helps to ensure that "everyone is on board" and actively engaged in the equity and inclusion process. At GVSU, the Division of Inclusion and Equity is charged with supporting and advancing the university's strategic framework for equity and inclusion.

## Charge of the Division of Inclusion and Equity.

In its policies, the Board of Trustees of Grand Valley State University charges the Division of Inclusion and Equity to direct diversity planning for the university, address equity issues in collaboration with other divisions and units, and support the vision and mission of the university by providing leadership and services. The division will provide leadership to the university through a divisional strategic plan. The Division of Inclusion and Equity supports GVSU in being the model for equity and inclusion among public, comprehensive regional universities in the nation.

## Everyone has a stake in these efforts.

While the Division of Inclusion and Equity takes a leadership role in advancing this framework through its divisional strategic plan, the participation of the entire campus is essential to its success. Everyone has a stake in this work – equity and inclusion makes each member of our community better and is fundamental to what it means to be a Laker.

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## Division Leadership



**Jesse M. Bernal, Ph.D.**  
*Vice President for Inclusion and Equity*



**Marlene Kowalski-Braun, Ph.D.**  
*Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs  
and Inclusion and Equity*



**Beverly Grant, MSW**  
*Interim Assistant Vice President  
for Inclusion and Equity*



**Kathleen VanderVeen, Ph.D.**  
*Assistant Vice President  
for Inclusion and Equity*



**Theresa Rowland**  
*Title IX Coordinator & Equity Officer/Director*



**Connie Dang**  
*Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs*



**Jessica Jennrich, Ph.D.**  
*Director, Women's Center*



**Marla Wick, Ph.D.**  
*Assistant Director, Milton E. Ford  
LGBT Resource Center*



**Shontaye Witcher**  
*Director, Disability Student Resources*



# Division of Inclusion and Equity

## *Vision*

*Grand Valley State University is transformed as a national model for equity, inclusion, and social justice through pioneering, innovative and dynamic leadership by the Division of Inclusion and Equity and its shared efforts.*

## *Mission*

*Through collaboration, consultation, and leadership with students, faculty, staff, administrators and community partners, the Division of Inclusion and Equity advances GVSU's social justice framework for equity and inclusion. The division coordinates sustainable and strategic institutional efforts to engage all members of the community while also intentionally supporting and advocating for historically underrepresented communities. The division's work furthers the university's liberal education and student-centered mission.*

## Core Values

The Division of Inclusion and Equity core values include

1. **SOCIAL JUSTICE-FOCUSED:** A social justice and intersectional framework guides the strategic efforts of the division. This framework acknowledges systems of oppression and marginalization and aspects of power and privilege and seeks to educate and empower all members of the community to work toward equity. This framework also acknowledges the university's place within systemic and institutionalized challenges for equity and inclusion, but affirms our commitment and responsibility to strive for transformation. The division is guided by this framework to seek a deeper understanding of complex intersecting social identities which highlights the centrality of understanding the full dimensions of identities and how these they dynamically interact with one another. As such, our work and education is grounded in teaching about and addressing interdependent systems of oppression and marginalization.

**2. EQUITY-MINDED:** The division's value for equity supports the university's "institutional commitment to acting with integrity, communicating openly and honestly, operating transparently and accepting responsibility for our words and actions" (University Compliance Office) and commitment to identify and eliminate barriers to recruitment and retention of diverse students, faculty, and staff. The division seeks to set high standards of professional ethics and consistency in principles, expectations, and actions. The division supports the university's compliance with extensive and ever-changing applicable federal and state laws and regulations regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action as well as university policy. The division also ensures GVSU's commitment to equal opportunity for all persons and works to eliminate and prevent discrimination on the basis of age, ancestry, citizenship, color, familial or marital status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information (including family medical history), height, national origin, political affiliation, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, participation in the uniformed services, veteran status, or weight in admissions, access, and treatment in educational, athletic, social, cultural, or other university programs and activities and employment. Equitable practices and policies are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of learning and working, particularly in light of historical factors of disadvantage and marginalization. While taking seriously the university's legal obligations, we also understand that if we look at this approach as merely a compliance issue we will never achieve our greater goals within our community. By creating a community that fosters diversity, rather than requires it, we hope to create a place where obligations are met organically rather than through federal mandate. As such, the division accepts a beyond-compliance model that recognizes compliance as a minimum standard for equity and inclusion and strives to set a new bar for excellence and advocacy in these areas.

**3. STUDENT SUCCESS-CENTERED:** The division furthers the university's commitment to student success by supporting diverse and underrepresented student engagement and development as well as the recruitment, development, and retention of reflective, student-centered faculty and staff who are prepared to meet the needs of our diverse students. It shapes educational practice and policies that encourage high levels of learning and personal development for marginalized and underrepresented students, student persistence, and student satisfaction. The division partners with faculty, staff, and the community to educate all students about power and privilege and works collaboratively to empower students from diverse communities, and engages students in critical dialogue and programming related to campus climate and social justice.

4. **COLLABORATIVE:** Understanding that equity and inclusion must be embedded across the university to effect institutional change, the division accomplishes its mission in part by establishing partnerships within the university and across our external communities. As such, effective equity and inclusion strategies are derived only through efforts that support shared understanding and shared accountability. In these efforts, the division prioritizes collaboration with academic and administrative units across campus, and furthers the university's commitment to shared governance through ongoing education, engagement, and consultation with students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Effective, authentic and genuine collaboration is modeled within the division.
5. **COMMUNITY-ENGAGED:** GVSU's success in advancing equity and inclusion is due, in part, to the long-standing diversity champions within West Michigan's diverse communities. GVSU strives to be as much a part of the community as it hopes the community is a part of it. It's with this deep understanding that the division is committed to creating reciprocal and mutually beneficial external partnerships particularly with historically underserved communities.
6. **STRATEGIC, DATA-DRIVEN AND ACTION-ORIENTED:** The division seeks to advance the university's culture of assessment and data-driven decision-making and is committed to implementing and innovating evidence-based practices that are supported by measurable outcomes that drive institutional actions and further the university's strategic planning priorities. Diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice are not just rhetoric within the division, nor at GVSU. Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions about relevance and effectiveness. We are committed to measuring and demonstrating institutional change through assessment and reporting and maintaining a high level of transparency and accountability.



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*Endorsed by President's Cabinet, October 2015*

*Endorsed by University Academic Senate, February 2016*

*Endorsed by GVSU Student Senate, March 2016*