



Grand Valley State University

Vice President for People, Culture & Equity

Position Description

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Hanold Associates Executive Search & Leadership Advisory



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Grand Valley State University – Vice President for People, Culture & Equity

Our Client

Grand Valley State University (often referred to as GVSU) is a public university with interconnected campuses in Allendale and Grand Rapids, Michigan. This includes a Health Campus in downtown Grand Rapids and five centers across the state: Meijer Campus in Holland, Detroit Center, Muskegon Regional Center, Traverse City Regional Center and Battle Creek Regional Outreach Center.

The Michigan legislature chartered GVSU in 1960 to meet the need for a public four-year college in the state's fastest-growing metropolitan region. The university's more than 60 years of history has seen expansion across degree offerings, locations and beyond. The university currently offers 100 undergraduate and 43 graduate degrees to its more than 22,000 students, hailing from 78 different countries around the world. More than 1,200 faculty members and nearly 1,900 support staff members support these students.

GVSU's mission is to empower learners in their pursuits, professions and purposes. The university enriches the broader society through excellent teaching, active scholarship, advancement of equity and public service. GVSU's community of educators create and employ innovative approaches to liberal education and professional programs, preparing students for a lifetime of continual learning and growth. Through the leadership of [President Philomena Mantella](#), the university has embarked upon its [Reach Higher 2025](#) strategic plan, which includes three key pillars:

- **An Empowered Educational Experience:** centering students in everything the university does, with student agency and success always driving its collective work.
- **A Lifetime of Learning:** striving to provide innovative curricular, cocurricular and experiential learning opportunities, designing and leveraging learning opportunities for students at all stages in their lives and careers, meeting their needs where they are.
- **A Culture of Educational Equity:** embracing the role as a leader in urgently advancing equity for all learners, centering equity and inclusion for a more diverse learning community.

GVSU aspires to be the national model for equity and inclusion in higher education by implementing evidence-based best practices and contributing to local and national discourse on equitable experiences. The university aims to innovate and drive change, working with community members and business leaders to be a recognized model for equity and inclusion in West Michigan.

Additionally, GVSU prioritizes an inclusive and equitable employee experience through its Human Resources, People and Culture areas, focusing on talent recruitment, growth opportunities and strategic support to ensure a supportive and innovative work environment.

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In alignment with Grand Valley State University's rich legacy of innovation, President Mantella has built a strong Senior Leadership Team and, with the entire university community, has brought forth great change at GVSU over the past five years. As the university approaches the culmination of its Reach Higher 2025 plan, it has begun work on its next strategic phase, which doubles down on the three main priorities of the 2025 plan. The university has already announced its [Omni flexible learning initiative](#) and its [Blue Dot](#) ecosystem initiative.

As GVSU embarks on the next phase of its evolution, it has realigned several functional areas to drive more integration, collaboration and enterprise-wide thinking. It has recently brought together People & Culture (P&C), including Human Resources and Employee Ombuds offices, and the Division of Inclusion & Equity (I&E), creating a higher level of visibility for both areas and furthering GVSU's commitment to DEI and the employee experience. As a result, it is seeking its first Vice President for People, Culture and Equity, who will serve as the Chief Talent Officer and Chief Inclusion & Equity Officer who will oversee talent management, total rewards (including payroll), staff relations & engagement, I&E, learning and development and civil rights compliance. Reporting directly to President Mantella, this innovative and strategic leader will lead the P&C and I&E functions with six direct reports. Inheriting strong foundations in P&C and I&E, the initial focus will be on integration, collaboration and broader strategic visioning. The role will continue to elevate and complement the existing I&E work by empowering education and leveraging the P&C function to recruit and serve employees with opportunities for growth and both technical and strategic support. This leader will be a change agent and culture champion, building an agile, adaptable and empowered workforce where leaders exist at all levels of the organization. As part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), this leader will build strong relationships across all functional areas, acting as an enterprise leader first and providing input on the university's strategic direction. They will also serve as a functional leader, driving continuous improvement across P&C and I&E.

The ideal candidate will be a true enterprise-wide thinker who works collaboratively with leaders in all areas of the university to advance broader goals while leading I&E and P&C practices throughout the university. Expertise within both P&C and I&E functions will be important, as will the ability to drive change through and within these functions in a highly complex environment. The ideal candidate will also be an innovative, fast-paced leader who can build upon existing successes to shape a great environment within GVSU. The end result should be a function of forward-thinking, strategic partners who care for and anticipate the needs of the GVSU community and believe in the development and administration of an inclusive and equitable employee experience at GVSU.

Position Location: Allendale and Grand Rapids, Michigan

Key Accountabilities

- As part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), act as an enterprise-wide leader and work across functions to advance the university's strategy, mission and vision.
- Serve as the university's senior advisor on all matters related to human resources, people strategy and culture.
- Serve as a thought partner to the president and rest of the Senior Leadership Team, working to enrich thinking and solve problems.
- Continue progressing GVSU's HR Transformation and I&E environments by fostering shared equity leadership, where all organization levels are accountable for the employee experience and I&E efforts; execute existing strategies, improve policies and procedures, and shape a

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strategic, proactive HR function focused on talent management, leadership development, and culture.

- Provide input on the university's next five-year strategy from an I&E and P&C perspective to ensure it is creating an inclusive and people-centric vision; lead the planning in their own areas.
- Oversee the Associate Vice President for Human Resources, who manages Staff Relations & Engagement (including Labor Relations and collective bargaining), Talent Management and Total Rewards (including Payroll).
- Lead as the university's Chief Inclusion & Equity Officer, collaborating with two Associate Vice Presidents and Deputy Chiefs for Inclusion and Equity. This includes oversight of inclusion and equity learning and development, university's shared equity leadership functions, compliance with civil rights legislations including Title IX, AA/EEO, ADA, Anti-Harassment, and Religious Inclusion, and support for faculty/staff affinity associations.
- Utilize DEI initiatives to empower education and reduce systematic barriers.
- Shape and foster a collaborative and nonhierarchical organizational culture while building better education every day.
- Continue to advance an organization that has leaders at all levels.
- Demonstrate that people are the greatest asset to the university by finding ways to increase employee engagement and satisfaction.
- Continue to foster a sense of care and connection for people and culture.
- Align leadership development programming and talent initiatives to the organization's strategy and goals.
- Evolve and advance the HR and I&E structures and functions as necessary to provide the appropriate amount of support across the organization.
- Travel throughout Michigan to GVSU campuses, supporting the organizational mission through I&E and P&C initiatives.
- Continue to optimize and build on the digital capabilities of GVSU's recently implemented Workday system across functions.

Knowledge Base and Experience

- An experienced HR, P&C and DEI leader with broad and deep experience across the function.
- Led P&C and I&E in a highly complex environment; experience within higher education is preferred.
- Knows what best in class, contemporary HR looks like and can apply that knowledge to shape a better P&C function.
- Demonstrated experience in leading and managing I&E within an organization; has achieved success beyond implementing programs and policies and is able to foster an environment of shared equity leadership by infusing I&E into an organization's culture and processes.
- Demonstrated success driving a data- and metrics-driven approach to decision-making.

Professional and Cultural Characteristics

- Passionate about their work and how it can support the mission and vision of GVSU.
- Serves as an enterprise leader first; an intersectional leader who works beyond their function in support of greater goals.
- A flexible, adaptable and fast-paced individual who effectively manages long- and short-term priorities.

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- Innovative tech-savvy leader willing to challenge the status quo; knows what good looks like and works with an entrepreneurial builder mentality to transform an organization from good to great.
- A strategic leader who can connect the dots from the highest level down to the initial steps; turns ideas into reality while getting daily work done.
- A natural collaborator who fosters a nonhierarchical leadership culture at every level.
- Possesses a high level of gravitas and is comfortable in a highly visible and impactful role as both an institutional leader and a community leader.
- Growth-focused; a change agent and driver who is excited to come in and make a difference.
- Understands and learns how to move at the ideal pace for change for the organization.
- A connector and communicator who builds coalition, brings people along and unites them with a shared vision and journey.
- A problem solver and capacity builder; finds creative ways to accomplish goals regardless of the level of resources.

Qualifications and Compensation

- Ten or more years of progressive HR and DEI experience.
- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree preferred.
- Able to travel to GVSU campuses and centers across Michigan.
- Compensation for this role is based on experience, with a base salary target of \$275,000, plus a target bonus and executive benefits package, including automobile.

Contact

Val Lopez
+1 224-515-7221
Val@hanoldassociates.com

Ashley Schiele
+1 847-332-1350
Ashley@hanoldassociates.com

About Hanold Associates

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