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Colleagues,

As we come to the close of the Winter 2026 semester, I find myself reflecting with deep appreciation on the people who make our College of Education and Community Innovation such a meaningful and vibrant community.

I am especially grateful to all who participated in Grand Valley's recent Day of Giving. Because of your generosity, we reached an inspiring faculty/staff participation rate of **46%** (up from 31% in 2025). Every gift—of any size—represents a belief in our students and in the importance of the work they are preparing to do. Your support opens doors, creates opportunities, and strengthens the experiences that shape their journeys.

This time of year also brings the joy of celebrating our graduates. To our Winter 2026 cohort—congratulations. You have worked hard to reach this milestone, and it shows. I also want to personally thank our faculty and staff, whose care, expertise, and commitment make these moments possible. You invest in our students not only as learners, but as people, and that impact is lasting.

I am often reminded that what makes this college special is the way we show up for one another. As Gwendolyn Brooks wrote, "We are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond." I see that truth reflected every day—in our classrooms, our partnerships, and in the accomplishments of our graduates.



Thank you for being part of this community, and for all the ways you contribute to its strength and purpose.

~Sherril Soman
CECI Dean

CECI Unit Spotlight



[Students from Students Leaving A Mark \(SLAM\)](#), a student organization that **Quincy Williams, undergraduate program director and internship coordinator for Public and Nonprofit Administration (SCLD)**, serves as the faculty advisor for, spent their spring break making a tangible difference in the Gulf Coast communities in Florida through a new partnership with the **[Lions Club of Venice, FL](#)**. The group dedicated a day of their trip to supporting the Lions Club's long-running eyeglass recycling initiative, **[a program that helps restore sight for individuals around the world](#)**.



Venice Lions Club president, Pamela Brown, welcomed and addressed students from SLAM. She shared with students that the used eyeglasses collected by Lions are recycled at one of ten Lions Eyeglass Recycling Centers throughout the world. The used eyeglasses are cleaned, repaired, and classified by prescription. The eyeglasses are then distributed to those in need by Lions volunteers and other organizations hosting optical missions in developing countries.



During their visit, SLAM students worked alongside Lions Club volunteers to sort, clean, and categorize donated eyeglasses, preparing them for distribution to global partners. Their efforts directly supported **[Agape Flights](#)**, a nonprofit organization specializing in delivering cargo, mail, and humanitarian aid to missionary partners serving throughout the Caribbean.



Agape's logistics network ensures that the recycled glasses, once processed and matched to recipients, reach communities where access to vision care is limited. By contributing to this supply chain, SLAM students played a meaningful role in expanding access to essential resources.



Leaders from both SLAM and the Lions Club praised the collaboration, noting that the project gave students a hands-on way to live out their commitment to service while learning about international humanitarian work. Many students described the experience as eye-opening and deeply rewarding, a chance to leave a mark far beyond their own campus.

With the success of this year's partnership, both organizations expressed enthusiasm for continuing the collaboration in future service-learning trips.

The 2026 SLAM student experience in Venice, Englewood, and Charlotte County, Florida, was coordinated and led by **Quincy Williams and Lorie A. Tuma, associate professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management (SCLD)**.

SLAM was first organized in 2010 as a result of PA 380, a special topics Service Learning course. SLAM is dedicated to providing its members with academic, cultural, and social opportunities to enrich the students' professional leadership potential in the field of nonprofit management, leadership, and social entrepreneurship. Check out **[SLAM's Facebook group](#)** to see photos of current and past years' trips.

Click on photos to enlarge.

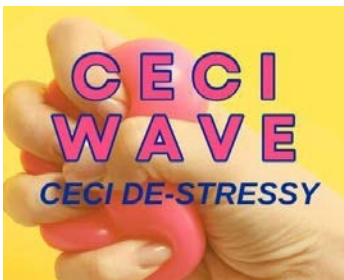
CECI Events



All CECI faculty and staff are invited and encouraged to attend the year-end college meeting on Monday, April 13.

CECI Year-End Winter Meeting
Monday, April 13 | 1008 Seidman Center
8:45 a.m. - Breakfast served
9:00 a.m. - Meeting begins

We look forward to celebrating another successful year of academic, research, and community engagement excellence!



CECI W.A.V.E.: CECI De-Stressy, April 21 from 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Join CECI Advisors for some crafting and de-stressing with their [Exam Jam!](#) tabling event on the Allendale Campus. The table will be in the Mary Idema Pew Library Cafe, and we will have supplies for you to make your very own STRESS BALL. Stop by, chat, craft, and watch the stress get *squeezed* away.

Learn more on our [CECI WAVE webpage, events section](#). Please share this event with your students!



Rain Barrel Fundraising Flyer

Rain Barrel Fundraiser for Local Outdoor K-12 Learning. The **Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP)** is hosting a fundraiser for the [Groundswell Stewardship Initiative](#), a program that facilitates place-based learning and outdoor education in local schools. **From now until May 13**, Groundswell is selling rain barrels, rain barrel accessories, and composting bins. Barrels start at \$65 and include a leaf and mosquito filter basket, overflow adaptor, spigot, and overflow hose. Efforts like rainwater diversion and composting reduce flooding, minimize waste to landfills, and support a healthier, more sustainable community.

For every rain barrel sold, \$15 will directly support student projects through Groundswell, helping expand hands-on learning opportunities and environmental stewardship initiatives across Kent and Ottawa counties.

To learn more and purchase a barrel, please visit the [fundraising website](#).

Celebrations



It is with great pleasure that we share the [Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation \(CAEP\)](#) Evaluators are recommending **full approval** for both the Initial and Advanced Education programs, **with no AFIs** (areas for improvement). **This is the first time in the history of GVSU's Education programs that we have completed an accreditation review with no areas for improvement!** This is a true testament to the hard work GVSU's Education faculty and staff have invested in our continuous improvement.

The accreditation status will be reviewed and confirmed by CAEP's Accreditation Council in October 2026, and GVSU will receive our official re-accreditation status by the end of 2026.

Thank you to all who had a hand in the re-accreditation process for your dedication to our educator preparation students, programs, community, and one another. People are the heart of GVSU's Education Programs. **Thank you for helping us achieve this excellence!**

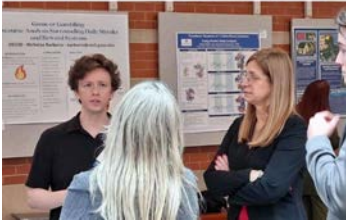


Thirty-seven students in CECI programs participated in [Student Scholars Day](#) on April 8. They produced 25 posters and 3 presentations for the all-day annual event. Faculty mentors from CECI included **Tonisha Jones (SCCJLS), **Melissa Villarreal (SSW)**, **Jamie Langlois (SSW)**, and **Joshua Bishop (SSW)**.**

The [Graduate Showcase](#) is **April 28 from 3-5 p.m.** in Loosemore Auditorium/Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall. This event features several of our graduate students' posters on a wide variety of research and scholarly activities. Please come and support our students at this event.



2026 CECI Student Scholar Day Participants



Jacquelynn Doyon-Martin, professor and director of the School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS), **Carrie Buist, associate professor in SCCJLS**, **Courtney Topic, assistant professor in SCCJLS**, and **Mike Eichberger, GVSU Director of Prior Learning**, joined students at [Careerline Tech Center](#) in Ottawa County on March 27 to explore opportunities in criminal justice and legal studies. Professors Buist and Topic provided interactive sessions on the GVSU Cold Case Program and Virtual Reality classrooms.



Jina Lee, associate professor in the School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS), took four students to the Crime Scene Investigation (CSI) competition at the [American Society of Criminology](#) in Philadelphia, PA, in early March. The annual CSI competition is sponsored by [GVSU's Alpha Phi Sigma](#) (Criminal Justice Honors Society) and is a hands-on, team-based event. Teams of four students compete in forensic analysis, with mandatory participation in a preliminary forensics workshop. It promotes academic excellence, analytical thinking, and practical skills in criminal justice. After winning 2nd place in the competition for the past two years, **GVSU criminal justice students, TaNyla Billips, Emmalynn Kroupa, Rebekah Reed, and Isabelle Williams, took 1st place in the competition for 2026!**



The **Legal Studies (SCCJLS)** program inducted a record number of 16 students into **Lambda Epsilon Chi (LEX)**, which is the largest number of GVSU students inducted in a single semester. LEX is a national honor society for paralegal and legal studies students. To be eligible for induction, students must achieve an overall GPA of 3.3+, a GPA in the Legal Studies major of 3.5+, and have completed a minimum of 80 credits (including 12 credits of Legal Studies courses).



Laura Marsh, internship coordinator in the School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS), **Dayna Phillips**, assistant director and career advisor for the Education, Nonprofit, and Public Service Career Community in the GVSU Career Center, and **Tom Fellows**, senior academic advisor in the CECI Undergraduate Advising Center, hosted the annual CJ/LS Internship Fair on March 19. In addition to learning about internship opportunities, attendees heard from three current SCCJLS student interns about their experiences and the value of an internship: **Jeremy Jensen '26** (interning with the Offender Success Reentry Services and the 63rd District Court), **Adara DeWolf '26** (interning with the Michigan State Police), and **Jennifer Walters '26** (interning with Covenant High School Security and Kent County Juvenile Services and Probation).



Ronke Olawale, assistant professor in the School of Social Work (SSW), was the keynote speaker at this year's **EqualiTEA**. In her talk, "The Subversive Steep: Tea, Resistance, Healing and the Architecture of Care," Olawale spoke about the history of women's labor and resistance movements across the world. Read more in [GVNext](#).



Adam Poll, 2006 MPA (SCLD) alum, was recently named the new city manager for Belding, MI. Poll is a Cedar Springs native with 15 years of government experience, including time as Alpena's planning and development director and the president of the local Chamber of Commerce. [Daily News article \(subscription required\)](#).



Kevin Polston, 2005 M.Ed. - Educational Leadership, 2020 Ed.S. - Leadership (ELC) alum, was recently appointed to Grand Valley's Board of Trustees by Governor Gretchen Witmer. Polston is the superintendent of Kentwood Public Schools, and Godfrey-Lee Public Schools before that. Polston's term begins January 1, 2027, and will expire December 31, 2034. [Read more in GVNext](#).



Erika Wallace, 2014 MPA (SCLD) alum, was recently profiled by [NCAA Media Center](#). Wallace is currently the athletics director at Wayne State University, and previously served at GVSU as an associate athletic director and associate director of financial aid and scholarships.



More than 170 undergraduate Education pre-service students gathered on March 18 for the **GVSU Education Alumni Network Roundtable event, hosted by the Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP)**. Superintendents, principals, and Human Resource representatives from across the region met with soon-to-be graduates to share insights on hiring and expectations for new teachers. Attendees participated in small-group roundtables led by the visiting administrators, where students could show their resumes and cover letters for review and ask direct questions about the realities of the field.

A panel of returning alumni administrators closed the event, offering candid perspectives on what the teaching profession looks like now and answering thoughtful questions from the Education Alumni Network Chair, Emily Miller (Allendale Public Schools). The event served as a strong bridge between preparation and practice for young professionals soon to receive their teaching certificate. Attendees left with notated CVs and new connections, equipped with increased confidence as they enter the job market. Read more about this event in [Forum](#).



In February, the **Early Childhood program in the Teaching and Learning (T&L) department** hosted a **"Diverse Families Panel" event** for all students taking EDI 317 - *Collaborating with Professionals and Families*. Organized and moderated by **Christine Kenney, associate professor in T&L**, the event allowed students to hear from panelists who represent a variety of family structures and experiences. Panelists gave honest portrayals of what family life looks like, how they are regarded and treated by others, and shared their experiences, positive and negative, in the schools. Students had an opportunity to hear first-hand accounts of what it's like to be a caregiver, were able to ask questions, and receive advice on how they might proceed as future educators, to ensure all families are supported within our schools and community. It was a great success!

Campus Events



As we prepare to celebrate our students who will be graduating this spring, make sure that they are aware of [Toast](#). On **Wednesday, April 22**, President Mantella and Alumni Relations are hosting Toast, a celebration for students graduating this semester. The event includes short remarks, giveaways, and a champagne toast for the Class of 2026.

Toast to the Class of 2026
Wednesday, April 22
5:00 - 6:00 p.m. OR 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.
L.V. Eberhard Center - Pew Campus
[Event Info](#)

This event is an important milestone as Lakers move from students to alumni, and we'd appreciate your help spreading the word.

Publications/Presentations



CECI CONNECT
PODCAST
ADVISE. MENTOR. NETWORK.

CECI Connect, NEW Podcast Episode: “Dare to Understand with Dr. Paul Bylsma.” Learning isn't just about information — it's about courage. In this conversation, **Melanie Rabine-Johnson, academic resources and retention specialist in the CECI Undergraduate Advising Center**, and **Paul Bylsma, assistant professor in the Educational Leadership and Counseling (ELC) department**, explore the idea that real growth requires two things working together: the empathy to meet something new on its own terms, and the bravery to step into discomfort without knowing what's on the other side. Learn more about the [CECI Connect Podcast](#) on the CECI Undergraduate Advising Center's website, listen to the [episode on Podbean](#) or anywhere you get your podcasts!



In March, two faculty members from the **Early Childhood program in the Teaching and Learning (T&L) department** presented at the [Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children's \(MIAEYC\) Annual Conference](#) in Grand Rapids, MI. **Kathryn Ohle, professor in T&L**, shared a presentation, “Unintended Consequences: Re-Considering Traditionally Replicated Practices,” while **Ashley Copperstone, visiting faculty in T&L**, presented, “Before We Call It ‘Challenging’: Tier II Interventions that Center Kids.”



With funding support from the **Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology (LEFT) department's** Special Projects Grant and GVSU's Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarship (OURS), the **Literacy Studies** team attended the [Michigan Reading Association's Annual Conference](#) in Lansing along with 17 undergraduate and graduate students.

As part of the **Mentoring into the Literacy Profession initiative**, faculty members mentored students over the past year to develop and implement their own research presentations related to literacy education. This partnership resulted in four group presentations:



- **Elizabeth Stolle, professor**, collaborated with **graduate students Kylie Brigham and Emmie Scheffler** to present their session, *From Reading to Writing: Empowering K-5 Students Through Nonfiction Literacy*. Dr. Stolle also partnered with **undergraduate students Lindsey Springer and Melanie Avila** to present two sessions on their topic, *Vocabulary for All: Differentiating Instruction to Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners*.



- **Jennifer Vanderground, affiliate faculty**, partnered with **graduate student Lindsay Bowen and undergraduate students Hadley Halterman and Kiersten Christner** to deliver their session, *Empowering Diverse Learners: Integrated Strategies for Enhancing Literacy Skills in Students with Individualized Needs*.
- **Lindsay Stoetzel, assistant professor**, presented with **undergraduate students Lauren Peterson, Lauryn Pogliano, and Amaya Farhat**, *Four Ways to Level Up Phonics Instruction*.



Brian Johnson, professor in the School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS), recently published a book chapter titled, "Human rights and the private security industry: The need for alignment," in [Citizens, the State and Justice: A Multidisciplinary Perspective](#) (Routledge). The edited collection investigates the evolving relationship between the state, citizens, and private actors in ensuring justice.



Jennifer Vanderground, affiliate faculty of Literacy Studies in the Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology (LEFT) department, recently published an article titled, "[Building Self-Efficacy in Students with Dyslexia: A Practice-Forward Framework for Classrooms, Families, and Teacher Preparation](#)," in the *Michigan Reading Journal*.

Important Notices



The [CECI deadline](#) to post final grades in Banner is Monday, May 4 at 5:00 p.m.

Timely entry of grades is crucial to meeting the end-of-semester needs of our students. All grades must be entered by the deadline in order for students to have a proper calculation of their grade point average, academic standing, and Dean's List honors. Additionally, from the grades you post, numerous outreach activities provide support to students in academic jeopardy.

[Reference materials](#) for online grading are available. The Registrar's Office will send an email notification when final grading opens in Banner for you to start submitting grades.



For ALL CECI Faculty/Staff: Fiscal Year End (FYE) is quickly approaching (June 30)! Now is the time to begin working on any outstanding expense reports you have for submission/reimbursement and to utilize any remaining professional development funds you may have. **Please connect with your unit's Cost Center Assistant (CCA - your Department Coordinator) and Unit Head for assistance completing your report(s) by the forthcoming FYE deadlines.**

CECI CCAs and Unit Heads: Katie Humphrey, CECI administrative associate dean for budget and staff affairs, will discuss FYE best practices and CECI-specific deadlines during your Q3 unit budget meetings at the end of April.

Expense Report Reminders:

- **GVSU expense cards must be reconciled by the last day of every month.** Failure to comply may result in your card being deactivated. (SLT 6.18)
- **Mileage expense reports should be submitted every 30-45 days.** (T&E Procedures (310) related to SLT 6.18)
- **Expense reports need to have the correct "worktags"** on them upon initial submission. If you do not know what worktags to use, please ask your unit's CCA.

CECI Expense Report
Guide 2025-2026
(Full Guide)

CECI Expense Report
QUICK GUIDE

Please turn on "Tasks" and "To-Dos" notifications in Workday.

This is the **only way you'll be notified** if your expense report is sent back to you for correction.

Both expense reports and corrections **must be completed in a timely manner**. Instructions for how to turn both notifications on are on page 4 of the CECI Expense Report Guide.

- **Use the correct "Expense Items" in your reports** - the default Expense Item listed may not be the correct one you need to use for your expense. What automatically populates is Workday's "guess" as to what your expense may be, but your report must have the Expense Item that **most accurately** describes the expense.
- **Technology purchases** require pre-approval from Administrative Associate Dean Humphrey *and* approval from [Technology Acquisition](#).



Click on image to enlarge.

NOTICE: 2nd Floor DeVos C – East Wing (SCCJLS side) will be getting new carpeting in the common areas in June. The work is currently scheduled to take place **June 15-19**. All furniture will be picked up in place to limit the daily impact on staff. Please contact [Justin Petersen](#), project manager in Facilities Planning, if you have any questions.

2nd Floor DeVos C - West Wing (SCLD side) carpet replacement is scheduled to take place over Winter Break.

University Governance

University Committees

Representation Slidedeck

Representation List

CECI Winter 2026 University-Level Committee Election Results

- **University Academic Senate**
 - Laila McCloud (ELC) - 3-year term
 - Elizabeth Stolle (LEFT) - 3-year term
- **Academic Technology Advisory Committee**
 - Rick Vandermolen (LEFT) - 3-year term
- **Campus Life Committee**
 - Carrie Buist (SCCJLS) - 3-year term
- **Faculty Facilities Planning Advisory Committee**
 - Adrian Copeland (SCCJLS) - 3-year term
- **Faculty Personnel Policy Committee**
 - A. Scott Rood (SCLD) - 3-year term
- **Faculty Teaching and Learning Center Advisory Committee**
 - Paul Bylsma (ELC) - 3-year term
- **Graduate Council**
 - Gregory Warsen (ELC) - 3-year term
- **Outstanding Service Award Committee**
 - Jaclyn Cwick (SCCJLS) - 3-year term
- **Undergraduate Research Council**
 - Janelle Grant Ashbaugh (LEFT) - 3-year term
- **University Assessment Committee**
 - Raymond Higbea (SCLD) - 3-year term

VACANT SEATS:

- **Affiliate Faculty Advisory Committee - Regular Faculty**
 - 3-year term - One seat available
- **Affiliate Faculty Advisory Committee - Affiliate Faculty**
 - 2-year terms - Two seats available

If interested in the **vacant Regular Faculty seat** on the Affiliate Faculty Advisory university committee, please reach out to [Karyn Rabourn](#).

If interested in one of the **vacant Affiliate Faculty seats** on the Affiliate Faculty Advisory university committee, please reach out to [Megan Freudigmann](#).



[FFPAC Website](#)

Greetings from your **CECI Faculty Facilities Planning Advisory Committee (FFPAC) representative, Christine Kenney (T&L)**. FFPAC plays a role in identifying issues with teaching spaces and recommending improvements to ensure accessibility and functionality. The FFPAC met throughout the 2025-2026 academic year to focus on specific charges, some of which included:

- Updating the Classroom Issues and Innovation Survey that is circulated every three years. The next survey is tentatively scheduled for Fall 2026.
- Evaluating instructional spaces for safety concerns and making recommendations.
- Updating FFPAC bylaws and charges.

A few helpful reminders to keep in mind for the remainder of this semester and moving forward:

- If you experience any issues in your classroom or workspace and need immediate assistance, call 616-331-2101.
- If the issue is not urgent, you can submit a report using the [FIXIT website](#).

Finally, exciting news! CECI will have two FFPAC representatives starting in Fall 2026.

Welcome Adrian Copeland (SCCJLS)!

College Governance

[CECI Governance Committees](#)

[Governance Website](#)

[Representation List](#)

Winter 2026 College-Level Committee Election Results

- **College Advisory and Communication Committee (CACC)**
 - Zohra Asad (SSW) - 3-year term
 - Mei Mah (CEP) - 2-year term
 - Rui Niu-Cooper (LEFT) - 3-year term
 - Shelly Page (OCA) - 2-year term
 - Melanie Rabine-Johnson (CECI UAC) - 3-year term
 - **College Curriculum Committee (CCC)**
 - Christina Ponzio (LEFT) - 3-year term (At Large)
 - A. Scott Rood (SCLD) - 2-year term
 - Joshua Sheffer (SCCJLS) - 3-year term
 - **College Personnel Committee (CPC)**
 - Monica Harris (T&L) - 3-year term
 - **Faculty Council (FC)**
 - Travis Milburn (SCCJLS) - 1-year term
 - Kathryn Ohle (T&L) - 3-year term
 - Karyn Rabourn (ELC) - 3-year term
- VACANT SEATS:**
- **College Advisory and Communication Committee**
 - **SCLD** - 1-year term
 - **Faculty Council**
 - **SCLD** - 3-year term

If any **SCLD faculty/staff** are interested in the **vacant CACC and/or FC seats**, please reach out to [Neal Buckwalter](#).

Important Dates

IMPORTANT DATES!



April 13 - CECI Winter 2026 All-College Meeting | 8:45 a.m. | 1008 Seidman Center

April 22 - [RSVP deadline](#) for W26 Commencement

April 22 - [Toast](#) | 5-6 p.m. OR 7-8 p.m. | Eberhard Center (*Share with graduating students*)

April 25 - W26 Classes End

April 25 - May 2 - W26 Final Exam Week

April 28 - Graduate Showcase | 3-5 p.m. | Loosemore Auditorium/Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall

May 1 - Payment Deadline for Summer 2026 Semester by 5 p.m.

May 1 - Winter 2026 Commencement | 7 p.m. | Van Andel Arena

May 2 - W26 Semester Ends

May 4 - W26 FINAL GRADES DUE IN BANNER by 5 p.m. (CECI deadline)

May 11 - Summer 2026 Semester Begins | 1st 6 and 12 weeks courses

CECI Resources

[Acronyms](#)

[CECI Connections Guide](#)

[CECI Newsletter Repository](#)

[Experts Guide](#)

[Organizational Chart](#)

[Student Flowchart](#)

CECI HAPPENINGS

[CECI Happenings](#) is an informational form that can be submitted by any faculty, staff, or student to promote an event, publication, etc. that they would like shared to CECI social media platforms and/or the newsletter.

Newsletter Contributions

Thanks to all those who contributed to the April 2026 edition of *CECI Connections*:

Rita Cooper, Jackie Doyon-Martin, Bill Herbst, Mark Hoffman, Christine Kenney, Jina Lee, Kathryn Ohle, Melanie Rabine-Johnson, Amy Schelling, Sherril Soman, Mara Spears, Lindsay Stoetzel, Victoria Stubbs, Courtney Topic, Lorie A. Tuma, Jen Vanderground, Quincy Williams.

Submit a story for the May edition [here!](#)

You may also send items to share in future editions of *CECI Connections* directly to Bill Herbst, Director of Communications, at herbstw@gvsu.edu, and/or Victoria A. Stubbs, Office Assistant, at stubbsvi@gvsu.edu.

Questions? cecidean@gvsu.edu | [\(616\) 331-6821](tel:(616)331-6821) | gvsu.edu/ceci

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