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Colleagues,

Black History Month is a time to honor the history, culture, and contributions of Black communities—past and present. It also invites us to reflect on the power of community engagement, collective action, and local leadership in creating lasting change. By learning, listening, and showing up, we strengthen our communities not just this month, but all year long.

Earlier this year, we learned that the [university has earned](#) the designation of the [Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement](#) classification. First, I'm grateful for the significant contributions of Dr. Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury and Dr. Paul Stansbie, who partnered with former Director of Community Engagement, Travus Burton, to compile and submit the application on behalf of the institution. CECI embodies the tenets of the classification in the many ways we engage with our community. From our annual give-back event to the multitude of experiential learning opportunities offered by every program and discipline in our college, I'm proud to say that we live our mission of educating leaders and professionals to engage, enrich, and transform communities.



~Sherril Soman
CECI Dean

Welcome to CECI!

Please join us in welcoming CECI's newest staff members to the college!



Bill Herbst, Director of Communications, CECI Dean's Office/Academic Affairs Communications Team

Bill Herbst joined CECI at the start of the Winter semester as the college's Director of Communications. He is part of a newly created Academic Affairs Communications Team, whose mission is to identify and amplify the great things being done in GVSU's colleges for both internal and external audiences. Bill is a West Michigan native with more than three decades of communications experience, including work as a journalist, at a leading Public Relations agency and most recently, in the GVSU Office of the President.



Arden LaMere, Elementary Placement Specialist, Office of Certification and Accreditation

Arden LaMere holds a master's degree from Western Michigan University and a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University. Her career in public education spans teaching in elementary classrooms (grades 2–5) as well as serving as an elementary reading specialist and district language arts & Title I coordinator. Most recently, Arden spent nine semesters as an Elementary Clinical Instructor for GVSU, supporting and mentoring teacher candidates in the field.

A strong advocate for public education, Arden is deeply committed to thoughtfully matching elementary teacher candidates with experienced, knowledgeable mentor teachers. She believes education is a noble profession and is passionate about supporting schools and communities by helping ensure that future educators are well prepared to serve today's learners.

Outside of work, Arden enjoys spending time, hiking, and biking with her husband, adult children, and her new grandson. A lifelong reader, she enjoys exchanging book recommendations and connecting with others through titles that inspire, challenge, or simply bring joy.



Holly Ricco, Teacher Education Academic Department Coordinator, Office of Certification and Accreditation

Holly Ricco comes to GVSU with a background in healthcare training and administration, having spent many years working with individuals on the autism spectrum, followed by three years supporting and training staff through the opening of two psychiatric hospitals. She is motivated by work that improves the lives of others and is excited to bring her experience and passion to her work supporting the Teacher Education program as the new Teacher Education Academic Department Coordinator. In her spare time, she enjoys reading fiction, playing Wordle, and knitting. She loves to go hiking, camping, skiing, and kayaking with her husband and their big, fluffy dog.



Ben Sobczak, Assistant Director, Office of Certification and Accreditation

Ben Sobczak holds degrees from Central Michigan University and Western Michigan University, including a master's degree in Educational Leadership. He joins the GVSU team most recently from Alma College, bringing a strong background in higher education administration, with prior experience managing student housing and overseeing complex operational systems. This work shaped his deeply student-centered approach and commitment to helping individuals navigate institutional processes with clarity and care. Ben is excited to bring this perspective to his work with teacher education students, as well with prospective students and their supporters. Outside of work, he is training for his first half marathon, enjoys playing pickleball, making espresso, and reading!



Kids' Food Basket Community Impact Event: The College Advisory and Communications Committee (CACC) invites you to join your colleagues over the month of February to decorate paper bags for the Kids' Food Basket's sack supper program. Our neighbors in West Michigan will receive much-needed sustenance in a friendly and affirming bag that we get to decorate. Bags and art supplies are provided to each unit, and finished bags will be collected by the CECI Dean's Office every Friday (after 4 p.m.) for a weekly tally. The unit with the highest tally of colored bags will win the elusive CECI "G.O.A.T." award!

There are a couple of ways to participate. First, **try taking plain paper bags to your advising appointments, classes, kids or neighbors, or whoever else** wants to participate. Who decorates the bag is less important than the encouragement a decorated bag can bring! Second, join your CECI colleagues at the **Bag-a-thon event held on Thursday, February 19 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. in the DEV E wing.** Color bags, chat with colleagues, and enjoy a light lunch. Finally, if coloring bags isn't your thing, you can **make a financial donation to Kids' Food Basket.** Simply email your receipt to Rita Cooper in the Dean's Office and propel your unit closer to the coveted "Cash C.O.W." award!

Questions and comments can be directed to CACC chair Paul Bylsma (bylsmapa@gvsu.edu). We hope you can join us in offering a smile to a neighbor in need!

Leadership Dynamics of Gender: A Forum for All

A panel of leaders in education and public service will consider the dynamics of gender in the workplace. Attendees will be invited to discuss focus questions in table groups.



THURSDAY, FEB. 19, 2026

4:00PM - 6:00PM

GVSU PEW CAMPUS

L. WILLIAM SEIDMAN CENTER

50 FRONT AVE SW, GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49504

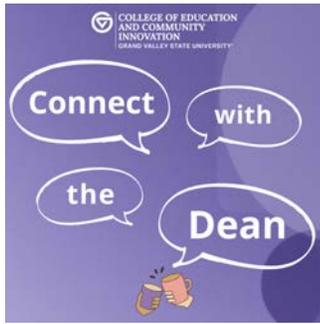
REGISTER AT [WWW.GVSU.EDU/CECI/LEADERSHIPDYNAMICS](https://www.gvsu.edu/ceci/leadershipdynamics)



Leadership Dynamics of Gender: A Forum for All: A panel of leaders in education and public service will consider the dynamics of gender in the workplace. Attendees will be invited to discuss focus questions in table groups. And of course, we will have refreshments. This event is organized by Dr. Jacqueline Doyon-Martin (SCCJLS), Dr. Neal Buckwalter (SCLD), Dr. Cathy Meyer-Looze (ELC), Dr. Greg Warsen (ELC), and Suzanne Cohrs (ELC).

Thursday, February 19, 2026, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

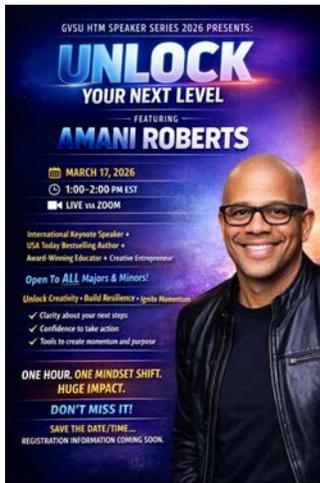
L. William Seidman Center
GVSU Grand Rapids Campus
Registration is [FREE](#)



W26 Connect with the Dean Flyer

Connect with the Dean: CECI faculty and staff are warmly invited to connect with Dean Soman in a casual setting throughout the Winter 2026 semester. Mark your calendars for any or all of the remaining dates below. No RSVP needed.

- **Coffee and Conversation with Dean Soman**
Wednesday, March 4 | 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
University Club (107C DEV)
- **Donuts with Dean Soman**
Thursday, April 2 | 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
University Club (107C DEV)



On **Tuesday, March 17, 2026, from 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. EST via Zoom**, **Dr. Lorie A. Tuma, associate professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management (SCLD)**, will join Courtney Stanley as she hosts [Amani Roberts](#) for a keynote titled **“UNLOCK Your Next Level.”**

Amani is an international keynote speaker, USA Today bestselling author, award-winning educator, and creative entrepreneur—but what makes him special is how relatable and relevant his message is for students today. He speaks directly to the exact reality students are living in right now: feeling stuck, overwhelmed, uncertain about the future, and trying to figure out how to turn passion into an actual career path.

This session is absolutely **relevant for every major and minor**, because the message is bigger than hospitality—it’s about life, momentum, and learning how to move forward even when you don’t have all the answers yet. Students will walk away with real takeaways on how to unlock creativity and confidence, bounce back from setbacks, build resilience and momentum, and gain clarity on what’s next (without panicking).

Please help spread the word and encourage your students from any program to attend. **SAVE THE DATE/TIME** — registration information is coming soon. Please reach out to Dr. Tuma for additional information at tumal@gvsu.edu.

Celebrations



Congratulations to GVSU CECI alums **Erica Chapin** and **Brian Blomstrom** on being appointed by Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer to serve on state boards and commissions.

Chapin, a 2019 graduate in **Public and Nonprofit Administration (SCLD)**, was appointed to the [Advisory Council on Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing](#), which advises the Department of Civil Rights. Erica is the interim executive director of [Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services](#).

Blomstrom, a 2008 **Master's of Public Administration graduate (SCLD)**, was reappointed to the [Fire Fighters Training Council](#). Brian is the director of public safety for the [City of Greenville](#) and the deputy city manager for [Montcalm County Emergency Services](#).



Dr. Paky Gerkin, professor in the School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS), was named a **TRAC Fellow** at the [Civic Research Data Lab at Syracuse University](#). His current work, *The Age of Impunity: White-Collar Crime and the Erosion of Accountability*, utilizes [TRAC Fed data](#) to explore criminal accountability for white-collar crimes.



Click on image to view
CECI recipients.

Congratulations to CECI faculty and staff who reached milestone anniversaries during the 2025 calendar year! Thank you for your many years of service!

2025 CECI Service Award Recipients (corrected from the January Connections issue):

- **Dr. Kathy Bailey**, School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS) - **30 Years**
- **Dr. Rich Jellier**, Public, Nonprofit, and Health Administration (SCLD) - **30 Years**
- **Dr. Priscilla Kimboko**, Public, Nonprofit, and Health Administration (SCLD) - **25 Years**
- **Mr. Clay Pelon**, Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) - **25 Years**
- **Dr. Sherril Soman**, CECI Dean - **25 Years**
- **Dr. Mary Bair**, Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology - **20 Years**
- **Dr. Scott Berlin**, School of Social Work (SSW) - **20 Years**
- **Dr. Cray Mulder**, School of Social Work (SSW) - **20 Years**
- **Mr. A. Scott Rood**, Hospitality and Tourism Management (SCLD) - **20 Years**
- **Mr. Tom Fellows**, CECI Undergraduate Advising Center (UAC) - **15 Years**
- **Dr. Jamie Langlois**, School of Social Work (SSW) - **15 Years**
- **Dr. Michael Scantlebury**, Hospitality and Tourism Management (SCLD) - **15 Years**
- **Dr. Raul Ysasi**, Teaching and Learning (T&L) - **15 Years**
- **Dr. Leanne Kang**, Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology - **10 Years**
- **Ms. Kym Pawelka**, Office of Certification and Accreditation (OCA) - **10 Years**
- **Dr. Karyn Rouborn**, Educational Leadership and Counseling (ELC) - **10 Years**
- **Dr. Melissa Villarreal**, School of Social Work (SSW) - **10 Years**
- **Mr. Duane Zuber**, Hospitality and Tourism Management (SCLD) - **10 Years**

Campus Events



GVSU students, faculty, and staff are invited to join in on **Black History Month** celebrations, sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Below are remaining events for the month.

February 20: Reaching New Heights with Jeanette Epps, former NASA astronaut, aerospace engineer, and CIA intelligence officer
10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. | University Club (107C DEV)

February 21: Ignite The Culture: Black History Month Showcase
8-11 p.m. (doors open at 7:30 p.m.) | Kirkhof Center - Grand River Room

February 26: Sitting at Their Feet: The History of Black GVSU Panel
5:30 p.m. | Kirkhof Center - Grand River Room

For a full list of opportunities to engage, visit the [Black History Month Celebration page](#) and explore the vital resources offered by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, as well as the GVSU [events page](#).

KING-CHÁVEZ-PARKS FUTURE FACULTY FELLOWSHIP

The Department of Inclusion and Equity is hosting two open-house informational events for the [King-Chavez-Parks \(KCP\) Future Faculty Fellowship](#) in March. The KCP Fellowship, a partnership between the State of Michigan and GVSU's Graduate School, can provide eligible, qualified students with up to \$20,000 for graduate study and \$35,000 for doctoral study to pursue a faculty teaching career in any discipline. Students are invited to attend the open-house events to learn more about the opportunity and how to apply before the April 17 deadline.

The Allendale event takes place **Tuesday, February 24, 12:00 – 2:00 PM** in the Kirkhof Center Lobby. The Grand Rapids event is **Wednesday, February 25, 12:00 – 2:00 PM** in the DeVos Center Lobby. In addition to informational handouts and KCP swag, both events feature a chance for students to participate in a giveaway for a \$100 micro-scholarship. Students may only participate in the giveaway if they are eligible and qualified for the KCP Fellowship and indicate interest in applying for the fellowship by April 17, 2026.

For more information, contact Cameron Jones, KCP Campus Administrator, at jonesca2@gvsu.edu.



Registration is OPEN for this year's Student Scholars Day. The 30th edition of this showcase of student research and creativity will take place on April 8. This year's theme, **SSD at 30: Reimagining the Purpose of Our Scholarship**, invites students to explore how academic knowledge can inspire, educate, and catalyze when it is shared beyond traditional boundaries and platforms. **The registration period runs from February 9 to February 27**, and all faculty mentors and co-presenters must approve their students' presentations by this date. Additional details and guides on the registration process can be found on the [Student Scholars Day website](#).

Important Notices



Academic Affairs Budget Sessions: This week, Provost Jennifer Drake shared a message outlining Academic Affairs' future planning, which will align with the Academic Affairs Strategic Framework and will include a focus on financial stewardship. As part of that work, she shared that Academic Affairs is approaching the work with a goal of ensuring that we remain stable, direct our resources to our strategic priorities, and stay laser focused on student success. Shared conversations with faculty staff will be part of the process, and the first sessions start next week. You can read [her full message and sign up for the budget conversations here](#).

- **Budget 101: Understanding GVSU Budget** - Introduction for Academic Affairs faculty and staff on how the GVSU budget functions, where resources are prioritized, and how budgets are allocated. *(Four chances to attend between Feb. 23-27)*
- **Budget 201: Understanding Budgetary Levers** - Discussion about the financial planning levers available to the Division of Academic Affairs. Participants will identify primary drivers of cost for the division and engage in a hands-on exercise exploring the impacts of changing various budgetary levers such as faculty workload, class size, and other factors. *(Three chances to attend between March 3-5)*



The Division of Academic Affairs is pleased to announce the launch of the **Academic Affairs Strategic Framework and 2026 Action Plan**, a shared roadmap guiding our work over the next several years. Grounded in GVSU's Reach Higher Together and shaped by broad campus input, the framework articulates key priorities that will strengthen student learning, support faculty and staff success, and advance academic excellence and innovation.

The 2026 Action Plan translates these priorities into focused, achievable actions that will guide decision-making, resource allocation, and assessment across Academic Affairs. Together, the framework and action plan provide clarity, alignment, and momentum as we continue building a thriving academic community.

Faculty and staff can explore the framework at www.gvsu.edu/aasf.



We all know that CECI has countless great stories to share about our work, our students, and our partnerships with the community. To help celebrate all that we do and strengthen our connections, we've created a [CECI LinkedIn page](#). LinkedIn is a growing resource for professional news and we look forward to posting stories showcasing how we successfully prepare students to be future leaders, and the many ways we serve and partner with our community. We invite you to follow the page, and if you or your unit has something to share, please send details to CECI Director of Communications, Bill Herbst, at herbstw@gvsu.edu.



Voting is OPEN for CECI representation on university committees and for positions on CECI college committees until Monday, February 23 at 5 p.m.

If you have any additional questions about university or college committees, please email [Emily Nichols](#) or [Karyn Rabourn](#), co-chairs of Faculty Council.

Winter 2026 Election Information



CECI faculty who teach on the Allendale Campus during W26: Additional office hours perch space is available in **2315 ASH for the Winter 2026 semester only**. If you are interested in scheduling time, please contact Rita Cooper at cooperr@gvsu.edu. Perch information will be posted on our [website](#).

Please stop by the Psychology Office, located in 2224 ASH, to have the perch space unlocked.



Now accepting submissions for the [CECI Dean's Innovation Grant!](#) The Dean's Innovation Grant is designed to support faculty in developing innovative projects with the potential to secure external funding.

- **Eligibility:**
 - Faculty members (tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track)
 - Collaborations between faculty (internal and external to the College) and students are highly encouraged
- **Grant Use:**

CECI Dean's
Innovation Grant
Application

- Funding may be utilized for activities directly related to the development of a competitive proposal for external funding
- **Grant Exclusions:**
 - Funding cannot be used for standard operational expenses such as salaries, equipment purchases that are not directly related to the proposal development, or travel that is not specifically for proposal development

CECI Dean's Innovation Grant Application Deadline: Sunday, March 15, 2026

University Governance

CECI University Committees

Representation Sliddeck

Representation List

College Governance

CECI Governance Committees

Governance Website

Representation List

CECI Faculty / Staff Awards



CECI College Awards: The College Advisory and Communications Committee (CACC) invites you to celebrate your colleagues through the CECI College Awards! [Click here to see a list of awards](#). Nominating is easy! Nominators will offer brief but specific (and as anonymous as possible) comments on why their nominee is deserving of the award. Nominees will be given the option to offer a 250-word supporting statement. Award winners will be notified by March 20 and can accept their award during the CECI year-end meeting on April 13. [Click here to access the awards nomination form](#).

The nomination window will close on Friday, February 20 at 11:45 p.m. Nominees will be notified by February 27 and will have until March 6 to submit their (optional) supporting statement.

Have questions or comments? Contact CACC chair Paul Bylsma (bylsmapa@gvsu.edu) for a quick response. We hope you can join us in celebrating our CECI colleagues!

College Committee Announcements/ Updates



Ethics, AI, and Education: Fueling Ethical AI in Teaching (Snacks Included!): We'll be digging into real-world ethical questions; fairness, privacy, creativity, academic integrity, and the human side of emerging technologies. Expect curious conversations, practical insights you can apply in your learning or teaching, and plenty of space to debate what "responsible AI" really looks like. Snacks will be provided to keep both brains and conversations energized!

Presenters: Scott Rood, Steve Dendrinis, Rania Khalsi Ep Yousaf, Denton Bobeldyk, Patrick Johnson, and Courtney Topic

Location: DeVos 203E and on Zoom - [Link](#)

Time: February 24, 11:30am – 12:30pm

Future Big Byte Events: March 24, 11:30am – 12:30pm: ADA compliance and SAR-related topics (Webinar)

Looking for additional information? Our new **CECI Big Byte org is now live** in Blackboard! Take some time to catch up on previous sessions, share questions/ideas

with your hosts on the Discussion Board, and find the link to join our Zoom webinars.

Important Dates

IMPORTANT DATES!



February 19 - CECI Kids' Food Basket Bag-A-Thon | 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. | Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall (105E DEV)
February 19 - Leadership Dynamics of Gender: A Forum for All | 4 p.m. | Seidman Center
February 23 - Budget 101 | 9 a.m. | 2204 Kirkhof Center - Allendale Campus
February 24 - CECI Big Byte - *Ethics, AI, and Education: Fueling Ethical AI in Teaching* | 11:30 a.m. | 203E DEV (panel session)
February 26 - Budget 101 | 1 p.m. | 104 DCIH - Health Campus
February 26 - Budget 101 | 2:30 p.m. | Zoom
February 27 - Budget 101 | 8:30 a.m. | 1008A Seidman Center - Pew Campus
February 27 - Student Scholars Day registration deadline | 11:59 p.m. | [SSD website](#)
March 3 - Budget 201 | 1 p.m. | 2270 Kirkhof Center - Allendale Campus
March 4 - Budget 201 | 9 a.m. | 104 DCIH - Health Campus
March 4 - Connect with the Dean | 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. | University Club (107C DEV)
March 5 - Budget 201 | 3 p.m. | 201A DEV - Pew Campus
March 8-14 - **GVSU Spring Break** | No classes, campus/offices open normal business hours
March 23 - Workday @ GVSU Town Hall | *Time and location TBA*
March 24 - CECI Big Byte - *ADA Compliance and SAR-Related Topics* | 11:30 a.m. | Zoom
April 2 - Connect with the Dean | 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. | University Club (107C DEV)
April 13 - **CECI Winter 2026 All-College Meeting** | 8 a.m. | 1008 Seidman Center
May 1 - Winter Commencement 2026 | 7 p.m. | Van Andel Arena

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 February 2026 edition of *CECI Connections*:

Paul Bylsma, Suzanne Cohrs, Rita Cooper, Jackie Doyon-Martin, Bill Herbst, Noah Houchlei, Cameron Jones, Arden LaMere, Cathy Meyer-Looze, Holly Ricco, Ben Sobczak, Sherril Soman, Victoria Stubbs, Lorie A. Tuma.

Submit a story for the March 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 | gvsu.edu/ceci

Connect with us!



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