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**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
AND COMMUNITY  
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GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY®

*March 2026*

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Colleagues,

I hope everyone had a refreshing GVSU spring break. As our campus community returns, we look forward to the energy and ideas that define this time of the semester. This excerpt from **“Wild Geese,”** by **Mary Oliver**, reminds us of the larger rhythms of the world and our place within it.

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination...  
announcing your place  
in the family of things.”

Thank you for being part of the vibrant community that makes our college thrive.

~Sherril Soman  
CECI Dean



# CECI Unit Spotlight



On February 27, more than 200 teacher interns from the **CECI Teacher Education Programs** participated in the seventh **Teaching for Equity** professional development event, marking the fourth year of this bi-annual event hosted by CECI and the Teaching for Equity Planning Committee. Interns from four teacher preparation programs—Birth–Kindergarten (BK), Graduate Teacher Certification (GTC), PK-6 Education, and Secondary Education—came together for a full day of learning focused on building more inclusive and equitable classrooms.



The professional development event, titled **“Teaching for Equity: Inclusion, Accessibility, Belonging, and Identity,”** is designed to prepare future educators to work with a diverse range of students, families, and communities. Its mission is to introduce and expand conversations around equity, identity, belonging, and access so that teacher candidates enter the profession as thoughtful, reflective educators committed to creating just learning environments. Participants engage in discussions grounded in humility, curiosity, and openness to multiple perspectives as they consider how their teaching practices can support all students.



The day began with opening remarks from Dean Soman, followed by a keynote address from Roselyn Charles-Maher, principal of Orchard View Elementary in Forest Hills Public Schools. In her keynote, *Teaching with Relentless Possibility*, Charles-Maher shared insights from nearly three decades in education, emphasizing that equity is not a program or initiative, but a daily commitment to ensuring every student feels seen, supported, and challenged.



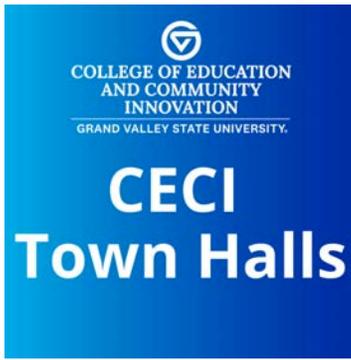
Following the keynote, interns attended three rounds of breakout sessions covering topics such as culturally responsive literacy instruction, supporting multilingual learners, practicing allyship for LGBTQ+ students, understanding trauma-informed approaches for foster youth, and designing inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities. Additional sessions explored difficult conversations about equity, linguistic diversity in classrooms, and strategies for educators to challenge inequitable systems. Presenters were GVSU faculty, staff, and community members who all share a passion for justice education.



The day concluded with reflection and closing remarks from Dr. Daisy Fredricks, Assistant Dean and Director of Teacher Education, who encouraged interns to translate their learning into meaningful, actionable steps toward advancing equity in their future classrooms and careers. Through collaboration, dialogue, and reflection, the Teaching for Equity conference continues to prepare GVSU teacher candidates to create classrooms where all students experience inclusion, accessibility, and belonging.

If you are interested in joining us for the eighth Teaching for Equity professional development event on Friday, October 23, 2026, as a presenter, please reach out to **Megan Freudigmann**, senior affiliate faculty in the **Teaching and Learning (T&L)** department, at [freudigm@gvsu.edu](mailto:freudigm@gvsu.edu) for more information!

# CECI Events



**Two CECI Town Halls are scheduled to discuss S26 adjunct/overload budget.** All CECI faculty/staff are invited to attend. These meetings are a follow-up from the CECI Town Halls that took place during the F25 semester. Please consider attending one of these Town Halls as your schedule allows.

**Wednesday, March 18 | 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. | [Zoom](#)**

**Thursday, March 19 | 9 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)**

Please contact Shawn Evans at [evanssha@gvsu.edu](mailto:evanssha@gvsu.edu) if you have any questions or concerns.



**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

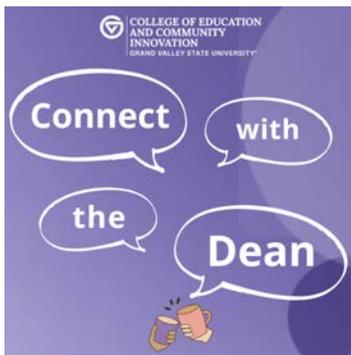
8:45 a.m. - Breakfast served

9:00 a.m. - Meeting begins

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



Faculty and Staff are invited to attend **Educational Foundations' (LEFT) annual Film and Speaker event on Tuesday, March 24, at 6 p.m. in the Loosemore Auditorium on the Pew Campus.** This year's film is, [Can't Look Away: The Case Against Social Media](#). A panel discussion will take place after the film screening, and panelists include: Dr. Stephanie Tong and Dr. Vaibhav Diwadkar from Wayne State University, and Melinda Holohan from Western Michigan University. Reception to follow. [RSVP for the event here.](#)



**Connect with the Dean:** CECI faculty and staff are warmly invited to connect with Dean Soman in a casual setting. Mark your calendars for the last Connect with the Dean of the Winter 2026 semester. No RSVP needed.

- **Donuts with Dean Soman**  
Thursday, April 2 | 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.  
University Club (107C DEV)

# Celebrations



**COMMUNITY  
IMPACT EVENT**



**RESULTS!**

Thank you to everyone who decorated Kids' Food Basket (KFB) sack supper bags and attended the CECI Community Impact Event held in February. The bags looked amazing and we are impressed with the artistic abilities of our colleagues! We are happy to report that a total of **4,075 decorated bags** are being delivered to Kids' Food Basket after this year's competition.

Drum roll, please! **CONGRATULATIONS** to the **Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology (LEFT)** department on winning the **G.O.A.T.** trophy this year! Their unit submitted a total of 1,732 decorated sack supper bags.

**CONGRATULATIONS** also goes to the **Educational Leadership and Counseling (ELC)** department for winning this year's **Cash C.O.W.** trophy, with a total of \$400 donated to KFB.

Both units will be recognized during the CECI Year-End Winter Meeting on Monday, April 13, in the Seidman Center.



**CONGRATULATIONS** again to the **2026 Faculty Award recipients from CECI!** Faculty members were celebrated by their colleagues and presented with their awards last month at the 19th Annual Faculty Awards Convocation, an event that honors the outstanding contributions of our faculty. All recipients of University Awards for Excellence and Pew Awards for Excellence can be found on the [Faculty Awards Convocation website](#).

## **2026 CECI Faculty Award Recipients:**

- **Dr. Kathy Bailey**, SCCJLS, Outstanding Community Service Award
- **Dr. Jen DeWaard**, T&L, Outstanding Advising and Student Services Award
- **Dr. Karyn Rabourn**, ELC, Outstanding University Service Award
- **Dr. Lindsay Stoetzel**, LEFT, Pew Teaching Excellence Award



**Pictured from left to right:** Dr. Kathy Bailey, Dr. Jen DeWaard, Dr. Karyn Rabourn, Dr. Lindsay Stoetzel.



**Zohra Asad**, assistant professor in the **School of Social Work (SSW)**, successfully defended her dissertation, "Experiences of social workers working with people with harmful sexual behaviors," on February 24, 2026.



Two **Teacher Education alumni** have been selected as [Michigan Regional Teachers of the Year](#). **Brandis Bean** (pictured left) and **Angela Jackson** (pictured right) are among ten winners across the state and are now finalists for Michigan Teacher of the Year. Brandis is an elementary teacher at University Preparatory Academy in Detroit and Angela is an elementary teacher at Woodland Developmental Center in the St. Clair County RESA.

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**Carrie Buist**, associate professor in the **School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS)**, received a \$34,000 grant from the Michigan State Police to support the **SCCJLS Cold Case Program**. The funds will go to support new equipment for the program, software subscriptions, and wages for a student worker. Buist launched the Cold Case Program in 2022, partnering with Michigan State Police--6th District; since then, students have worked on four different cases and assisted on a cadaver search.

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**Adrian Copeland**, associate professor in the **School of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Legal Studies (SCCJLS)**, collaborated with the [GVSU Law Society](#) to host a "Careers in the Law" panel event for students on February 17. Panelists included two GVSU alumni, as well as distinguished professionals in the local legal community.

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**Shay Gallagher, 2016 MPA (SCLD) alum**, has been [named the new city manager](#) of the City of Walker. Gallagher is a two-time Laker grad, earlier earning his bachelor's degree in political science and government in 2013, and has held a variety of roles with local municipalities, including his most recent position as deputy city administrator in Kentwood.

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**Leanne Kang**, associate professor in the **Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology (LEFT)** department, with the support of the CECI Dean's Office, selected two undergraduate research assistants--Melanie Avila and Avri Marihugh-- to participate in the [Council on Undergraduate Research \(CUR\) 2025-2026 Students Transforming Research \(STR\) Program](#) in Washington, D.C.

[Avila Reflection](#)

[Marihough Reflection](#)

Before convening on the Capitol with other colleges and universities across the country, the GVSU team participated in monthly webinars, preparing them to discuss with our legislators about the [GRPS Uncovered Project](#), and to advocate for Congress to maintain support for undergraduate research. While there, they met with staffers in the offices of Senator Gary Peters, Senator Elissa Slotkin, and Representative Hillary Scholten.

For Melanie and Avri's perspectives on their experience, you may read their reflections via the links to the left. CECI faculty and students are encouraged to consider applying

for this program in the future.

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**Chris Marco, 2024 MPA (SCLD) alum**, was named the community development director for Lakeshore Advantage, the economic development organization for Ottawa and Allegan counties. Marco previously worked at the Michigan Economic Development Corp. (MEDC), and before that, he was the community development specialist for the city of Grand Rapids. In his new role, Marco will specialize in workforce housing. Read more about Chris Marco's new position in [Crain's Grand Rapids Business](#).

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**Kelly Margot**, associate professor in the **Teaching and Learning (T&L)** department, received a grant from the State of [Michigan's Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential \(MiLEAP\)](#), for \$431,840. This grant will support after-school, weekend, and summer enrichment at schools in the Detroit metro area. This programming will engage gifted learners in advanced academic and creative experiences to build confidence, leadership, and connection to school.

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**Pearlette Merriweather, 1995 Public Administration (SCLD) alum**, was offered a permanent contract to be the city manager of Muskegon Heights. The city has been without a manager since January 2023. Merriweather was named interim city manager in August 2025, and in her time in that position, has worked to balance the city's budget and plan future investments, like the city's aging water plant. Read more about the appointment in [MLive](#).

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**Ronke Olawale**, assistant professor in the **School of Social Work (SSW)**, is the **2026 EqualiTEA keynote speaker**. Tea has a rich history as a catalyst for women's organizing, social justice, and collective care. By bringing people together around tea in celebration of Women's History Month, EqualiTEA reclaims tea as a tool of resistance and a practice of healing, connection, and empowerment in the ongoing pursuit of gender equity. This year's event takes place on **Tuesday, March 17 at 11:30 a.m. in the Grand River Room - Kirkhof Center on the Allendale Campus**. [2026 EqualiTEA event poster](#).

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**Allison Phillippe**, assistant professor in the **Teaching and Learning (T&L)** department, was selected as the 2026 recipient of the [Graduate Student Award for Literacy Research Excellence](#) from American Educational Research Association (AERA) [Research in Reading and Literacy Special Interest Group \(SIG 11\)](#). This award recognizes outstanding research in the field of reading and literacy and was presented in recognition of her 2025 dissertation, *Integrating Transformative SEL and Literacy with Read Alouds: A Design-based Study*.

# Campus Events



The AI Steering Team will host two **AI Town Halls** which will allow you to share your thoughts as GVSU's first comprehensive strategy for responsible and mission-aligned use of AI is developed. These sessions are being designed around feedback received from the recent AI survey and will allow you to engage in discussions on multiple focus areas.

## Town Hall Details:

### AI Town Hall Session #1

Monday, March 16 | 1 p.m.  
Seidman Center | Pew Campus

### AI Town Hall Session #2

Thursday, March 19 | 9 a.m.  
Kirkhof Center | Allendale Campus

Each session will have a similar format and [you can RSVP for either session here.](#)



**Supporting Career Readiness at GVSU:** The Replenish Basic Needs Center, in partnership with Career Services, Alumni Relations, and Student Senate, is launching a **Professional Clothing Swap** — a pilot initiative designed to support Grand Valley students as they prepare for life after graduation.

**How to Support:** We are accepting **new or gently used interview and office wear**, including:

- Suit jackets
- Dress pants
- Knee-length skirts
- Sweaters and cardigans
- Polo shirts
- Button-up dress shirts
- Belts
- Dress shoes (flats or heels up to 2 inches)
- Ties

**All donated items should be clean, professional, and in good condition.**

**Donation Deadline: Monday, March 23.** Drop-off locations are available on both the Allendale and Pew campuses.

For questions about donations, please contact the Replenish Basic Needs Center at [replen@gvsu.edu](mailto:replen@gvsu.edu)

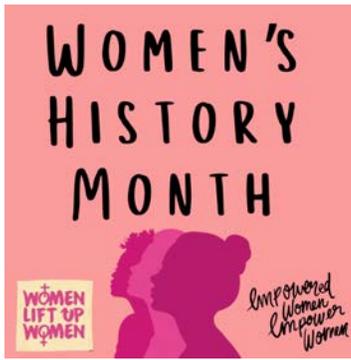
## Donation Drop-Off:

### **Allendale Campus:**

- Student Senate Office (KC 0008)
- GVSU Alumni House

### **Pew Campus:**

- Career Center (101B), DeVos Center



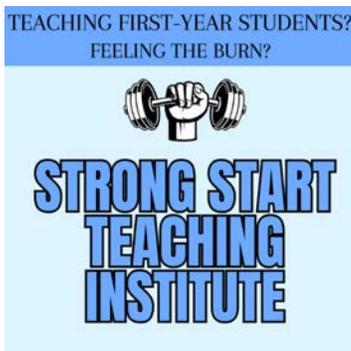
Happy [Women's History Month](#), GVSU Community! This month, you are encouraged to intentionally celebrate the women in your life and in our GVSU community who have paved the way and continue to shape our world.

- **EqualiTEA** | Tuesday, March 17 | 11:30 a.m. | Grand River Room (Kirkhof Center). [Information and EqualiTEA RSVP.](#)
- **Craftism! Banner Making for Women's History Month** | Tuesday, March 17 | 3-5 p.m. | 1201 & 1240 Kirkhof Center
- **We Fem the Past to Fem the Future: From Harriet Tubman to America's Founding Feminists** | Thursday, March 19 | 1 p.m. | Pere Marquette Room (Kirkhof Center)
- **Women's Commission Reflections Leadership Panel** | Thursday, March 26 | 4 p.m. | Loosemore Forum (Seidman Center). [View this year's panelists and RSVP.](#)
- **Equal Pay Day** | Women's Commission will be tabling across campus during the day.



**GVSU's Day of Giving returns on Thursday, March 26**, and it is an opportunity for our community to unite in support of the people and programs that shape Grand Valley. Community support allows the university to advance its mission and create meaningful impacts for students, and your participation is essential to that effort.

By [making a gift](#), you can help unlock special challenges and matching opportunities that significantly increase the impact of your support. We need the entire Laker community's help to make this day a success. You can help make a difference for Grand Valley this Day of Giving!



How can we ensure that students begin their GV career with a **strong start**? [The Strong Start Teaching Institute](#) focuses faculty attention on best practices for engaging students in first-year undergraduate courses.

**Where:** DeVos Center for Interprofessional Health (DCIH) 445  
**When:** Monday, May 11 (8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.) and Tuesday, May 12 (8:30 a.m. - Noon)

Together, we'll explore key themes: **Clarity** in academic expectations; **Belonging** at GV and in the classroom; **Student resources** and how to connect them; **Active learning** to boost engagement and achievement.

*Note: Limited to 40 participants. Preference given to adjunct, affiliate, and visiting faculty, and first-time attendees.*

Whether you are teaching a course for the first time or are looking to strengthen a course to best engage students, we invite you to participate. The in-person and asynchronous components of this Institute will apply to a range of instructor experience levels and disciplines. [See the Strong Start page for more details.](#)

*Publications/Presentations*



**Tova Hartle**, assistant professor of **Educational Leadership and Counseling (ELC)**, authored a book chapter titled, "Counseling through a Cognitive Lens," forthcoming in the text, *Theories and Approaches of Counseling: An Integrative Perspective*, through Kendall Hunt Publishing.

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**Didar Hossain**, assistant professor in the **School of Social Work (SSW)**, co-presented "Corporate social responsibility of financial institutions and business enterprises and women's empowerment in Bangladesh: A systematic review," and, "Social work education and practices in South Asia," at the [25th Annual East-West Center International Graduate Student Conference](#) in Honolulu, HI. He was also invited to the Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health Ph.D. student seminar to present, "Meaningful PhD experiences shape the future in academia."

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**MaryJohn Pachuta-Rysak**, assistant professor in the **Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology (LEFT)** department, had their manuscript entitled, "Living Through Fieldwork Duration: Rhythm as Temporal Apparatus," accepted for publication in [Qualitative Inquiry](#).

Pachuta-Rysak was also recently elected to be the 2026-2028 program chair of the [Critical Posthuman and Postfoundational Studies in Education - AERA SIG 45](#).

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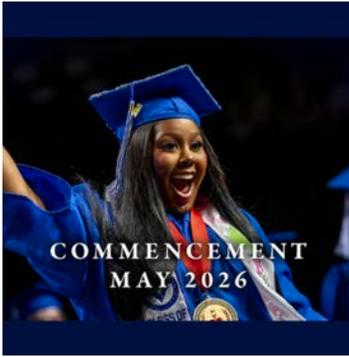


**Melissa Villarreal**, associate professor in the **School of Social Work (SSW)**, along with her current and former graduate assistants, Nicholas K. Stevenson and Angel M. Burns, had their paper, "[Navigating Civilian Life After Combat: Veterans' Perspectives](#)," accepted for The Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) 2026 Annual Meeting. Villarreal and Stevenson also had their paper, "Post-Pandemic Perspectives on Children's Social-Emotional Development," accepted for the meeting, as well.

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*Important Notices*

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Join our graduates in celebrating their academic achievements when you process during the **May Commencement Ceremonies!** Your participation in the ceremony procession will make this milestone even more special as Lakers mark the culmination of their hard work and begin the next chapter of their professional and personal journeys.

**CECI Commencement Ceremony: Friday, May 1 at 7 p.m. | Van Andel Arena**

Please [RSVP by April 22](#) if you plan to attend and process during the ceremony.

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## University Governance

[CECI University Committees](#)

[Representation Slidedeck](#)

[Representation List](#)

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## College Governance

[CECI Governance Committees](#)

[Governance Website](#)

[Representation List](#)



The **CECI Technology and Innovation Committee** invites you to attend our March Big Byte webinar: **ADA compliance and SAR-related topics.**

Join us for a supportive, hands-on conversation about creating accessible learning experiences during finals and beyond. Representatives from the Student Accessibility Resource office will walk us through common accommodations, ADA expectations, and best practices for making assessments and course materials more inclusive. Whether you're finalizing your exams or planning next semester's classes, you'll gain practical tips and resources to help every student thrive.

**Presenter:** Barbara Stevens and Tim Mohnkern

**Location:** Zoom Webinar - [Link](#)

**Time:** March 24, 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

**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.

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## Important Dates

## IMPORTANT DATES!



- March 16 - GVSU AI Town Hall | 1 p.m. | Seidman Center (Pew Campus)  
March 17 - EqualiTEA | 11:30 a.m. | Grand River Room - Kirkhof Center  
March 18 - CECI Adjunct/Overload Budget Town Hall | 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. | [Zoom](#)  
March 19 - CECI Adjunct/Overload Budget Town Hall | 9 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)  
March 19 - GVSU AI Town Hall | 9 a.m. | 2204 Kirkhof Center  
March 23 - Workday @ GVSU Town Hall | 2 p.m. | Grand River Room - Kirkhof Center  
March 24 - CECI Big Byte - *ADA Compliance and SAR-Related Topics* | 11:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)  
March 24 - Educational Foundations' Film and Speaker Event | 6 p.m. | Loosemore Auditorium  
March 26 - GVSU's Day of Giving | All Day | [Online](#)  
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 | 8:45 a.m. | 1008 Seidman Center**  
April 22 - [RSVP deadline](#) for W26 Commencement  
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 March 2026 edition of *CECI Connections*:

Carrie Buist, Rita Cooper, Jackie Doyon-Martin, Megan Freudigmann, Bill Herbst, Janelle Grant Ashbaugh, Tova Hartle, Mark Hoffman, Didar Hossain, Noah Houchlei, Jamie Langlois, MaryJohn Pachuta-Rysak, Allison Phillippe, Lynnea Santoyo, Sherril Soman, Victoria Stubbs, Melissa Villarreal.

Submit a story for the April 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](mailto:herbstw@gvsu.edu), and/or Victoria A. Stubbs, Office Assistant, at [stubbsvi@gvsu.edu](mailto:stubbsvi@gvsu.edu).

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

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