The Graduate School Citations for Academic Excellence

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY®

Fall 2026

Presented by The Graduate School
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in collaboration with the
Graduate Student Association (GSA)

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear friends and members of our graduate education community,

At the end of each academic semester, we have the great pleasure to honor those students, staff, and faculty who have distinguished themselves in graduate education at Grand Valley State University. The Graduate School Citation Awards for Academic Excellence and the Graduate Student Association Faculty Awards are proud Grand Valley State University traditions that began in 2006 thanks to the combined efforts of the University Graduate Council and the Graduate Program Directors. The Graduate School and the Graduate Student Association serve as co-sponsors for this event.

The Graduate School Citation Awards recognize excellence in academic performance in several categories. Graduate students are nominated for these awards by staff or faculty members, advisors, graduate program directors, and departmental chairs or school directors. Each recipient receives a certificate of recognition and a graduate honors cord. We are excited to continue the Jennifer Rose Palm Memorial Award for Excellence in Service to Graduate Education, which honors GVSU staff who demonstrate exceptional dedication to supporting graduate students. Additionally, the Graduate Student Association honors members of our graduate faculty who have distinguished themselves in mentoring and supporting our students at Grand Valley. Their noteworthy dedication helps to create a vibrant and engaged learning community.

Grand Valley State University is extremely proud of the accomplishments of these graduate students, staff, and faculty members. I commend each of our award winners and wish them a very successful future.

Congratulations!

Trista Shumway

Trista Shumway
Director of Graduate Education
Grand Valley State University

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GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATIONS RECIPIENTS FOR FALL 2026

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN THE DEGREE PROGRAM

College of Computing

- Jaweher Hichri, Artificial Intelligence
- Malek Abida, Applied Computer Science
- Sri Rakumari Mendu, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics

College of Education and Community Innovation

- Ausar Martin, Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration
- Kennedy Scott, Public Administration
- Lauren Gerrtitsen, Health Administration
- Lindsay Bowen, Literacy Studies
- Nicole Ott, Instruction and Curriculum - Early Childhood Education
- Rachel Ramont, Educational Leadership

College of Health Professions

- Alison Tucker, Physician Assistant Studies
- Ashley Snyder, Speech-Language Pathology
- Courtney Aloul, Public Health
- Ella Acton, Occupational Therapy

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Elisabeth Hatfield, Cell and Molecular Biology
- Kenleigh West-Wing, Communications

Seidman College of Business

- Katherine Austin, Professional Master of Business Administration
- Shane Hitchcock, Executive Master of Business Administration

OUTSTANDING MASTER'S THESIS

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Anna Davis, Communications
- Eamonn Powers, Biology
- Grace Forthaus, Biology - AWRI

OUTSTANDING FINAL PROJECT

College of Computing

- Mohamed Iheb Soltana, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics

College of Education and Community Innovation

- Erika Yersak, Literacy Studies
- Sara Weeks, Literacy Studies
- Rachel Ramont, Educational Leadership

College of Health Professions

- AJ Walstra, Public Health
- Ashlyn Johnson, Elly Mills, Isabel Culling, Joanna Mentzer, and Maggie Shermak, Occupational Therapy

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Fadzai Katanda, Communications
- Muhammad Qasim, Cell and Molecular Biology

OUTSTANDING PUBLICATION

College of Computing

- Ghofrane Bousbih, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics

EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY OR PROFESSION

College of Education and Community Innovation

- Jason Rottman, Public Administration

College of Health Professions

- Talia Swayze, Physician Assistant Studies

EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE TO GVSU

College of Education and Community Innovation

- Alyse Cross, Public Administration
- Protiva Talukder, Health Administration

College of Health Professions

- Ella Kargle, Speech-Language Pathology

EXCELLENCE IN PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT GVSU

College of Education and Community Innovation

- Rachel Robinson, Public Administration

College of Health Professions

- Erin O'Neil, Physician Assistant Studies

EXCELLENCE IN SUSTAINABILITY

College of Health Professions

- Jackson Gutowski, Physician Assistant Studies

Congratulations to the Fall 2026
Graduate School Citation Award Recipients!

GRADUATE SCHOOL JENNIFER ROSE PALM MEMORIAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE TO GRADUATE EDUCATION

Fall 2026

College of Health Professions

- Diana Briggs, Occupational Science and Therapy

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION FACULTY AWARDS

Fall 2026

OUTSTANDING TEACHING AWARD

College of Computing

- Sara Sutton, Information Sciences and Technologies

College of Health Professions

- Sri Nandamudi, Speech-Language Pathology

OUTSTANDING MENTORSHIP AWARD

College of Education and Community Innovation

- Mary Bair, Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology

C**ollege of Health Professions**

- Katie Aurand, Physician Assistant Studies

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Matthew Cooper, Biology

Congratulations to the Fall 2026
Staff and Faculty Award Recipients!

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN THE DEGREE PROGRAM

Fall 2026

College of Computing

- **Jaweher Hichri, Artificial Intelligence**

  Jaweher has maintained a perfect 4.0 GPA throughout her graduate studies, demonstrating not only mastery of complex technical content but also the intellectual curiosity and analytical depth that distinguish truly exceptional students. She approaches every challenge with genuine enthusiasm for learning and consistently goes beyond course requirements to explore problems more deeply. Jaweher's leadership and work ethic set her apart. She balances Her academic excellence with meaningful service, demonstrates genuine commitment to helping others succeed, and approaches every responsibility with dedication and integrity.

- **Malek Abida, Applied Computer Science**

  Malek is a highly dedicated student who has maintained a cumulative GPA of 4.0 throughout her degree program. She demonstrates exceptional intellectual curiosity, initiative, strong technical skills, and commitment to academic and research excellence. Her research accomplishments to date include a paper submitted to the ICLR 2027 conference, and she is preparing an additional manuscript for submission based on her ongoing research. She approaches challenging problems thoughtfully and connects theoretical concepts with practical applications, thoroughly demonstrating her ability to conduct high-quality research and contribute to her field.

- **Sri Rakumari Mendu, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics**

  Sri Rakumari has showcased impeccable academic abilities across several settings. She has consistently gone above and beyond course expectations and demonstrated the qualities of scholarship, initiative, and leadership. Her high GPA reflects sustained academic achievement, with her written assignments and projects exceeding standards. She approaches her work thoughtfully, develops clear arguments, and connects academic concepts with questions relevant to health informatics. What distinguished her was the consistency of this excellence across classes and types of assignments. Her applied experience reinforces the relevance of her academic preparation and proposed ethical framework for healthcare AI.

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Ausar Martin, Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration**

  Ausar exemplifies the highest standards of graduate scholarship through his exceptional intellect, disciplined work ethic, critical creativity, and consistent engagement across all aspects of his academic work. In the classroom, Ausar navigates complex socio-academic dynamics with apparent comfort and ease. Ausar's written work stood out from the start because of his poetic style, relying on metaphor and rhythmic prose to relay otherwise academic ideas and arguments. Ausar has distinguished himself as one of the most outstanding students in his program through his intellectual promise, dedication to learning, and thoughtful engagement with others.

- **Kennedy Scott, Public Administration**

  Kennedy's academic record demonstrates sustained high performance across coursework, written analysis, and applied projects, reflecting both intellectual rigor and a consistent capacity to meet demanding graduate-level expectations. Her GPA provides a quantitative indicator of this achievement, while the quality of her work demonstrates an ability to analyze complex problems, synthesize evidence, and develop well-reasoned conclusions. Moreover, Kennedy contributes meaningfully to the academic environment through substantive class participation, thoughtful engagement with competing perspectives, and effective leadership in collaborative projects, strengthening the quality of collective inquiry and supporting the academic development of her peers.

- **Lauren Gerritsen, Health Administration**

  Throughout Lauren's tenure in the MHA program, she has worked full-time in a health-related organization where she has progressively increased in her leadership responsibilities. In addition to working full-time Lauren has been a classroom leader, team leader, and served as an officer in Healthcare Professional Graduate Student Association (HPGSA). As a student, Lauren has performed at the highest levels in her written and oral academic work, working on and successfully serving as a leader of student teams and projects. Upon completion of her MHA, she will be a two-time GVSU graduate with both her bachelor's and master's degrees from GVSU – a double Laker for a Lifetime.

- **Lindsay Bowen, Literacy Studies**

  Lindsay is a talented educator and a true asset to the field, demonstrating academic excellence by maintaining a high GPA and achieving high grades in her courses. She wrote a distinguished master's project that addressed a critical gap in special education teacher preparation by developing a research-based, year-long professional learning series focused on effective sentence-level writing instruction for K–8 students with high-incidence disabilities. Additionally, Lindsay participated in the Literacy Studies Mentoring into the Profession program, which culminated in a presentation at the Michigan Reading Association conference in March 2026.

- **Nicole Ott, Instruction and Curriculum – Early Childhood Education**

  Nicole does more than acquire new knowledge; she thoughtfully integrates it with her professional experience, reflects on her assumptions, and considers how new perspectives can strengthen her teaching. She embraces graduate study as an opportunity for continued growth, approaching learning with both confidence in her expertise and a willingness to question and evolve. Nicole works with her preschoolers with enthusiasm, flexibility, patience, and a real commitment to acknowledging, celebrating, and using their cultural and academic diversity to help them excel as scholars.

- **Rachel Ramont, Educational Leadership**

  Rachel completed her master's project in August of 2026, graduating with a 4.0 GPA. She demonstrates an admirable work ethic, strong interpersonal skills, ability to effectively communicate, and great potential to be an impactful school leader. Rachel's project, titled "Social-Emotional Learning Deficits and Student Behavior in K-5 Classrooms," addresses a very real problem many elementary teachers face. In resolution, she developed a standards-based K-5 Social-Emotional Learning Teacher Toolkit complete with ready-to-implement lessons that equip teachers to address these issues, along with tools to evaluate the success of implementation.

College of Health Professions

- **Alison Tucker, Physician Assistant Studies**

  Alison has maintained a 4.0 grade point average throughout the PA program, demonstrating discipline, intellectual curiosity, and a deep commitment to mastering the material. Her academic skills clearly exceed what is expected of a graduate student. Her written work is clear, organized, and well supported by literature, which is exactly the standard that is hoped for when students document patient encounters, develop assessments and plans, and communicate with the wider healthcare team. She approaches projects with care and thoroughness, appraising evidence critically before applying it to practical questions about patient care.

- **Ashley Snyder, Speech-Language Pathology**

  Ashley exemplifies consistent engagement and strong performance in academic and clinical courses. Ashley not only demonstrates excellent engagement in graded/more visible work, as evidenced by her 4.0 GPA, but she also regularly seeks meaningful clarification and offers synthesis and suggestions across coursework, class discussions, and meetings with instructors. She has maintained this high level of performance across all semesters of the accelerated program. She is also an excellent representative of the SLP program, being described as respectful and considerate of her fellow students, course instructors, and clinical preceptors.

- **Courtney Aloul, Public Health**

  Courtney possesses key professional attributes, including humility, strong analytical capabilities, and a collaborative approach, that will undoubtedly make an immediate and lasting contribution to the field of public health and beyond. In addition to her dedication to graduate-level coursework and exemplary work ethic, she consistently demonstrates the capacity to bridge methodologies, integrating environmental, social, and systemic perspectives to analyze complex community health challenges. Her ability to synthesize diverse disciplinary viewpoints ensures she graduates not just as a practitioner, but as a transformative leader.

- **Ella Acton, Occupational Therapy**

  Ella excels in the classroom, in her fieldwork placements, and in her research group. Her positive attitude, attention to detail, and thoughtful approach to her work have contributed greatly to her success in the program. She consistently goes beyond meeting expectations, demonstrating a desire to understand concepts in depth and apply them meaningfully. Ella currently holds a high GPA, has volunteered her time to help with departmental events such as admissions interview days, and brings compassion, professionalism, and strong interpersonal skills to her academic work and interactions with others.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Elisabeth Hatfield, Cell and Molecular Biology**

  Elisabeth has been recognized by all faculty in the Cell and Molecular Biology Department, not only for her perfect GPA in the degree program but also for the in-depth and insightful analyses of scientific questions and literature, the enthusiasm and talent for tackling complex problems, dedication to academic excellence, and impressive work ethic she has demonstrated while balancing family and job obligations. Elisabeth was recently hired by Corewell Health: pediatric genetics and genomics, as a clinical research specialist.

- **Kenleigh West-Wing, Communications**

  Kenleigh has an outstanding academic record, exhibits important professional communication competencies, displays excellent knowledge of theory, and has robust research methods skills. Kenleigh has applied what she learned in her classes to her interests in sports and strategic communication, working heavily in sports branding and market identity. She has grown immensely as a communication professional over the last two years and is a delight for professors to have in the classroom.

Seidman College of Business

- **Katherine Austin, Professional Business Administration**

  Katherine began her graduate school journey with demonstrated career success and professional polish. She is driven and unwavering in her academic work, applying rigor, asking questions, and seeking to understand course content well beyond the completion of assignments. Katherine is conscientious, steady, and dependable, serving as a leader in her group – graciously lifting her group members and guiding them with confidence. By blending the technical with the human skills – both quantitative and qualitative learning and experiences – Katherine exemplifies the standards those in the Professional MBA program strive to meet.

- **Shane Hitchcock, Executive Business Administration**

  Shane has developed beyond expectations for Executive MBA students throughout his time in the program and has motivated others to do the same. He is never the loudest in the room or the first hand in the air. He is contemplative in the classroom and processes information before speaking, and when he speaks into the discussion, the entire cohort listens intently and is eager to hear what he has to contribute. Shane demonstrates thoughtful insights, quiet persuasion, and humble leadership in both the quantitative and qualitative learning and experiences the program provides, exhibiting mastery of content by blending technical and human skills within his work.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR OUTSTANDING MASTER'S THESIS
Fall 2026

College of Liberal Atrts and Sciences

- **Anna Davis, Communications**
  - **Thesis Title:** Living in the Upside Down: Conformity Gate and Reality Construction in Stranger Things Fandom

Anna is a remarkable graduate student and is knowledgeable across a wide spectrum of human knowledge. She has a broad and integrated understanding of human nature and communication and displays all the desirable characteristics of a liberally educated person. These qualities are on full display in her thesis "Living in the Upside Down: Conformity Gate and Reality Construction in Stranger Things Fandom." Anna's thesis applies the framework of externalization, objectivation, and internalization to analyze how truth manifests online through interpretation, repetition, and communal reinforcement. The guiding hypothesis in her thesis is that Conformity Gate exemplifies behavior in which reality is produced through circulation and collective validation, then internalized as legitimate knowledge through participation and belonging in digital spaces. Anna's thesis provides an important contribution to the understanding of human perception and social dynamics involved in popular mediated culture.

ABSTRACT

In late 2025 into early 2026, fan theories about the finale of Stranger Things spread widely online under the title "Conformity Gate," which centered on an alleged secret final episode that would resolve loose ends identified by fans throughout the show's final season. Showrunners denied any additional episodes, yet the theory persisted. Ultimately, the "secret" episode never materialized. This thesis examines Conformity Gate as a case study in the social construction of reality within online fan communities, where information often lacks traceable sources yet achieves legitimacy through algorithmic amplification and a desire for belonging. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's The Social Construction of Reality (1966), this thesis applies their framework of externalization, objectivation, and internalization to analyze how truth manifests online through interpretation, repetition, and communal reinforcement. The guiding hypothesis is that Conformity Gate exemplifies behavior in which reality is produced through circulation and collective validation, then internalized as legitimate knowledge through participation and belonging in digital spaces. A qualitative, directed content analysis of Reddit threads, TikTok videos, and YouTube content from December 2025 through January 2026 is employed to examine how fan theories are externalized as meaningful responses to narrative uncertainty, how algorithmic infrastructure objectifies unverified claims as credible knowledge, and how in-group and out-group dynamics shape internalization and personal identity. Fan cultures are microcosms of human behavior and are powerful forces in driving internet discourse. Because of this, their analysis is productive for the academic study of community interaction in the digital age.

- **Eamonn Powers, Biology**
  - **Thesis Title:** Non-Invasive Hydroacoustic Monitoring of Spring-Migrating Lake Sturgeon in the Lower Grand River, Michigan, with an Automated Detection-and-Tracking Pipeline

  Eamonn's thesis research project focused on the State Endangered fish, the Lake Sturgeon (Acipenser fulvescens). His project involved development of a data management tool that dramatically speeds up the process by which sonar data (and really any form of remote detection data) is parsed. This makes it feasible to collect months of continuous data and legitimately scan the entire dataset for targets of interest. Historically, this process would have been done visually and would take 10's to 100's of hours of time, depending on the length of recording. Eamonn's data management tool, named "Thalweg" was unique enough to justify going through the US Patent Office and is now protected by a 1-year provisional patent. The scope and breadth of his project far exceeded expectations—both on the part of his GVSU graduate committee, as well as the funding sources and partners. He has made a groundbreaking intellectual contribution that has the potential to be groundbreaking with respect to species restoration and biodiversity protection.

ABSTRACT

Hydroacoustic surveys are a valuable, non-invasive method for monitoring fish in larger rivers, yet split-beam datasets are slow to turn into usable information when processing and interpretation require substantial manual effort. Our lake sturgeon research team, based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, presents a simpler workflow that speeds the path from raw split-beam recordings to summarized fish tracks ready for review, export, and further analysis. We collected data in the Grand River during the spring lake sturgeon migration using an HTI (Hydroacoustic Technology, Inc.) Model 241 split-beam echosounder with a 2.5° × 10° elliptical-beam transducer. The workflow is designed for routine use during the field season: it produces track candidates quickly and organizes them so that an analyst can confirm positive observations and move on to the next file with minimal repetitive effort. We summarize processing speed and track yield across representative fifteen-minute survey segments and organize the outputs so that confirming positive observations of the target species is straightforward and consistent. We discuss how faster turnaround can support monitoring and conservation in a large, acoustically challenging environment. The outputs are formatted for common monitoring questions tied to lake sturgeon — where and when fish are encountered, and how movement patterns vary with season and environmental conditions. This approach demonstrates a practical path toward making split-beam hydroacoustics scalable for riverine monitoring of fishes while keeping the results easy to interpret.

- **Grace Forthaus, Biology- AWRI**
  - **Thesis Title:** Attack of the Clones: Current and Future Population Dynamics of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (Adelges tsugae) Populations in Eastern North America

Grace's research examined the population genomic structure of hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) across its invasive and native ranges. They used whole-genome sequencing to compare invasive populations in eastern North America with native populations in southern Japan. The study confirmed that North American invasive populations originated from a single successful introduction event. Despite rapid range expansion and population growth, invasive populations remain genetically bottlenecked. Grace also developed future habitat suitability models to predict HWA distribution under climate change over the next century. Their findings improve understanding of the genetic and environmental factors contributing to HWA's invasive success. The research provides valuable insights into the adaptive potential of invasive species. These findings can inform HWA management and conservation strategies across eastern North America. Grace's work successfully integrates basic genomic research with practical applications in conservation. The project advances scientific understanding of HWA adaptation and its potential for future range expansion.

ABSTRACT

Invasive species are considered one of the leading causes of extinction of plants and animals throughout the world. These nonnative organisms can outcompete native communities and thrive in novel environments, sometimes with highly limited genetic diversity. Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), Adelges tsugae Annand, is an invasive insect in eastern North America that was introduced from southern Japan. This insect has spread across much of the range of the eastern hemlock, Tsuga canadensis (L.) Carr., and has caused widespread mortality of these foundation trees. The mechanisms allowing for this broad range expansion and potential continued movement and adaptation to a variety of climates throughout North America are not fully understood. While HWA has an alternate host and cycle of sexual reproduction in its native range, the invasive population is entirely clonal.

Using low coverage whole genome sequencing, we analyzed the genomes of individuals throughout six populations of HWA in the invasive range and three in the native range in Japan to describe the population structure and genetic diversity at an increased resolution. We found divergence between the North America and Japan populations, but all the North American populations showed no genetic differentiation. This information supports a single introduction as the source of the entire North American invasive population.

We modeled future range expansions under different future climate scenarios using T. canadensis occurrence as a basemap to pair this invasive species with their native host to create a more integrated habitat suitability model. In these models, we found that the difference between the yearly minimum and maximum temperatures and precipitation were the variables of highest importance for suitability. We also predict that cold tolerance may not continue to be a strong selection pressure in the future due to the increasing temperatures in northern habitats. Describing HWA population dynamics can help us understand mechanisms contributing to the survival and adaptation of invasive populations.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR OUTSTANDING FINAL PROJECT
Fall 2026

College of Computing

- **Mohamed Iheb Soltana, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics**
  - **Project Title:** Forensic Health Informatics: Immersive VR Simulation for Training Clinical Decision Support Error Investigation

Mohamed's final project, "Forensic Health Informatics: Immersive VR Simulation for Training Clinical Decision Support Error Investigation," demonstrates a thoughtful application of informatics to an important educational challenge. In his work, Mohamed developed two virtual reality scenarios. The scenario featured in this final project allows learners to investigate a simulated medication error involving electronic health record data and clinical decision support logic. The scenario incorporates data based on Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR), connecting the learning experience to the information structures used in healthcare. This work is especially relevant to the Health Informatics concentration because it combines clinical decision support, interoperability, human-computer interaction, and patient safety within a single applied project. The simulation gives students a setting in which to examine an error without exposing patients to harm. By focusing on the investigation of CDS failures, Mohamed addresses a skill that matters wherever clinicians depend on automated recommendations and alerts. Mohamed will present this work at the American Medical Informatics Association's 2026 Annual Symposium as a LIEAF poster presentation, Poster 169.

ABSTRACT

Background: Clinical decision support (CDS) failures can compromise medication safety through incorrect rule logic, incomplete data, and missing validation safeguards. Opportunities for students to investigate these failures in operational electronic health records (EHRs) are limited by privacy and security restrictions. Immersive virtual reality (VR) may provide a practical environment for developing forensic health informatics skills. Objective: To evaluate student performance, perceived learning, usability, and engagement following an immersive VR simulation focused on investigating CDS failures and medication safety incidents.

Methods: A cross-sectional educational evaluation included 31 students enrolled in health informatics and related healthcare programs. Developed using Unity, the simulation positioned students as informatics investigators examining two system failures: a false methotrexate alert resulting from incorrect CDS rule logic and an unsafe amoxicillin dose accepted because of a missing dose validation rule. Students reviewed simulated EHR data, CDS alerts, and structured medication orders to reconstruct the incident and identify contributing factors. A post-activity questionnaire assessed prior familiarity, investigation accuracy, perceived learning, usability, and engagement. Composite scores were summarized using descriptive statistics on five-point scales. Institutional review board approval was obtained before study initiation. Results: Participants were predominantly aged 25–32 years (83.9%), female (74.2%), and international students (80.6%); 29% reported previous VR experience in healthcare education. Mean composite scores were 3.97 ± 0.62 for perceived learning, 3.70 ± 0.71 for usability, and 3.84 ± 0.66 for engagement. Most students identified the appropriate structured data source for medication dose entry (90%), and 71% recognized the missing dose validation rule. However, only 35% identified the CDS logic failure underlying the false methotrexate alert, and 35% identified the primary contributor to alert fatigue.

Conclusions: Immersive VR simulation offers a promising approach to experiential education in forensic health informatics. Favorable participant perceptions and stronger performance on data source and validation tasks support further development. Lower accuracy in CDS logic analysis highlights the need for targeted instruction and debriefing. Because this evaluation used a small cohort without baseline performance testing or a comparison group, findings do not establish learning gains or superiority over conventional instruction. Future studies should assess learning, retention, and transfer to informatics practice.

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Erika Yersak, Literacy Studies**
  - **Project Title:** Building Fluent Readers: Developing Comprehensive Reading Fluency in K-2 Classrooms

Erika's project addressed the need to better prepare K–2 teachers to provide comprehensive reading fluency instruction that supports comprehension and academic success. She developed a research-based guidebook to help teachers move beyond teaching fluency as reading speed or an isolated skill. The guidebook connects established reading and learning theories with practical classroom strategies. It includes explanations of fluency, instructional strategies, and grade-level lesson enhancements across multiple content areas. These areas include English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Erika also provides authentic practice passages and feedback forms to support teacher reflection and instructional decision-making. Her approach emphasizes accuracy, automaticity, and prosody as essential components of reading fluency. A key contribution is integrating fluency instruction across disciplines rather than limiting it to English language arts. Her practical resources help teachers strengthen students' reading fluency and comprehension throughout the curriculum. Overall, Erika's work offers a valuable contribution to literacy education and demonstrates her commitment to improving early reading instruction.

ABSTRACT

Despite extensive research establishing reading fluency as essential to literacy development, many early elementary students fail to achieve grade-level fluency, compromising their reading comprehension and academic success. Fluency instruction has been narrowed to measuring reading speed, dismissed beyond third grade, and taught as an isolated skill disconnected from authentic reading across content areas. While research demonstrates that fluency encompasses accuracy, automaticity, and prosody and should be integrated meaningfully across disciplines, many K-2 teachers lack practical resources and guidance for implementing comprehensive fluency instruction in their classrooms.

To address this gap, this project presents a research-based fluency integration guidebook for K-2 teachers. Grounded in Automaticity Theory, component-based fluency frameworks, Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development, and Schema Theory, the guidebook includes foundational fluency explanations, integratable fluency strategies, grade-differentiated lesson enhancements across English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, authentic practice passages, and teacher and administrator feedback forms designed for purposeful student and teacher engagement. The application of these resources ultimately aims to shift teacher practice by bridging the research-to-practice gap and supporting comprehensive fluency development that strengthens reading comprehension and academic achievement across disciplines.

- **Sara Weeks, Literacy Studies**
  - **Project Title:** Developing Confidence and Motivation in Writing Through Authentic and Collaborative Writing Approaches

Sara's project focused on preparing upper elementary teachers to provide intentional writing instruction that develops students' identities as writers. Her work emphasizes fostering writing stamina, self-efficacy, and joy among students. Rather than simply increasing writing time, Sara highlights the importance of creating supportive conditions for writer development. To address this need, she developed The Writing Lab, a year-long professional development series for educators. The program encourages teachers to explore and reflect on their own identities and experiences as writers. A key strength of Sara's project is its focus on authenticity, purpose, collaboration, revision, and reflection. These principles guide both teacher learning and the development of student writers. Her approach allows teachers to experience effective writing practices rather than simply learn about them theoretically. Sara effectively connects research and educational theory with practical, meaningful professional learning. Overall, her work demonstrates a strong commitment to teacher growth, student success, and transformative literacy education.

ABSTRACT

Writing is an expressive and complex process that takes time to develop, yet writing in middle school classrooms is primarily used as a way to demonstrate mastery of content rather than develop writers. Writing instruction is limited or used inefficiently in today's classrooms, which gives students fewer opportunities to engage in authentic writing experiences. As a consequence, middle school students report a lack of confidence and motivation to write. These conditions contribute to stagnant writing achievement for middle school students. Research suggests that improving student writing outcomes requires writing environments that provide authentic, collaborative, and process-oriented writing experiences. However, these environments are dependent on teachers who feel confident as writers and teachers or writing.

This project is grounded in sociocultural theory and culturally responsive pedagogy, which positions writing as a social process to gain knowledge and skills that writers need to develop confidence. Improving writing instruction for middle school students requires supporting teachers' confidence as writers and instructors of writing. To address this need, The Writing Lab presents eight professional learning sessions centered around the factors that contribute to writing development. Teachers should experience the same writing conditions they create for their students, therefore teachers will write, participate in collaborative inquiry, and develop their instructional writing practice throughout the sessions. Participation in the professional learning community seeks to provide teachers with knowledge and experience to develop writing environments to increase students' confidence as writers in their classroom.

- **Rachel Ramont, Educational Leadership**
  - **Project Title:** Social-Emotional Learning Deficits and Student Behavior in K-5 Classrooms

Rachel completed her master's project in August of 2026, graduating with a 4.0 grade point average. Rachel's project, titled "Social-Emotional Learning Deficits and Student Behavior in K-5 Classrooms," addresses a very real problem many elementary teachers face (i.e., challenging student behaviors and a population of students that have ever-increasing, social-emotional needs). After a thorough review of the literature, Rachel developed a standards-based K-5 Social-Emotional Learning Teacher Toolkit, complete with ready-to-implement lessons that equip teachers to address these issues with their students, along with tools to evaluate the effectiveness and success of implementation. Both her written work and oral presentation demonstrated the immediate, positive impact her project could have on K-5 classrooms by equipping teachers with the tools needed to support students with social-emotional needs and proactively address student behavior issues in a way that promotes a better learning environment for all students. Rachel distinguished herself in the presentation of her work, the substance of what she created, and the significant potential her project has for immediate, positive impact in the school where she teaches.

ABSTRACT

Elementary educators are increasingly faced with challenging student behaviors while also addressing students' growing social-emotional needs. Research indicates that although social-emotional learning (SEL) improves students' behavior, emotional regulation, and academic success, many teachers report limited preparation and insufficient access to practical, research-based instructional resources. The purpose of this master's project was to develop a K–5 Social-Emotional Learning Teacher Toolkit that provides educators with ready-to-implement lessons aligned with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework. The toolkit consists of fifteen original lessons organized around the five CASEL competencies and includes instructional supports designed to promote consistent implementation. In addition, a Teacher Evaluation Form and a Student Behavior Observation Checklist were developed to provide a framework for evaluating the curriculum if implemented. The project is intended to assist elementary teachers in explicitly teaching social-emotional skills that support positive classroom behavior while increasing teacher confidence in SEL instruction. By translating current research into practical classroom resources, this project seeks to help bridge the gap between evidence-based SEL practices and everyday classroom implementation.

College of Health Professions

- **AJ Walstra, Public Health**
  - **Project Title:** Needs Assessment of Faculty Familiarity with Neuroinclusive Environments: A Survey Study on Faculty Development

AJ demonstrated exceptional initiative, intellectual curiosity, and discipline throughout the Master of Public Health program. As lead author, they conceptualized the project, synthesized complex information, and communicated findings effectively. Their research addressed the need to create proactive, neuroinclusive learning environments in higher education. The study used an established neuroinclusion audit framework to assess faculty familiarity across five key domains. These domains included sensory wellness, social balance, predictability and clarity, safety and security, and flexibility and adaptability. AJ's work highlights the connections between environmental accessibility, faculty development, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The project identifies gaps in faculty knowledge and recommends workshops on accessibility and UDL applications. It emphasizes that meaningful inclusion requires institutional and environmental changes beyond individual classroom accommodations. AJ's research offers practical strategies to improve student participation, accessibility, and academic success. Their professionalism, perseverance, and collaborative spirit reflect a strong commitment to advancing neuroinclusion in higher education.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated higher education faculty's familiarity with neurodiversity and the components necessary to design a workshop to support neurodivergent students. A survey instrument was designed based on a neuroinclusive audit developed by Dr. Kati Peditto. Faculty members at one Midwestern higher education institution ranked their familiarity with concepts related to neurodiversity and neuroinclusion, including sensory wellness, social balance, predictability and clarity, safety and security, and flexibility and adaptability. A total of 151 individuals responded to the survey, with 44.4% (n = 67) reporting that they had never received formal training on neurodiversity and inclusivity. Across themes, levels of "extreme familiarity" with inclusive campus environments were low. In the social balance category, 21.7% (n = 26) of individuals reported extreme familiarity with forming small groups, while only 5.9% (n = 7) of faculty felt the same about social boundaries. Under predictability and clarity, 13.4% (n = 15) of individuals recognized the need for visual clarity, compared to 6.5% (n = 7) of faculty familiar with color-coding. For safety and security, 31.5% (n = 34) of individuals recognized trip hazards, while 15.0% (n = 16) of faculty noted visible safety measures. Findings inform the design of faculty workshops grounded in neuroinclusive principles.

- **Ashlyn Johnson, Elly Mills, Isabel Culling, Joanna Mentzer, and Maggie Shermak, Occupational Therapy**
  - **Project Title:** Stress reduction and occupational balance in equine-assisted therapy for adults with Parkinson's Disease: A quantitative study

The group's study examined the therapeutic effects of Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) on stress and occupational balance in adults with Parkinson's disease (PD). Their research addressed the physical, psychological, and daily-living challenges associated with PD. The project identified a need for holistic, sensory-based interventions beyond traditional motor-focused rehabilitation. The researchers conducted a quantitative, repeated-measures study over a six-week intervention period. They evaluated both physiological stress markers and participants' self-reported stress levels. The study also assessed changes in occupational balance among participants with PD. Findings showed meaningful reductions in physiological and self-reported stress. All six participants who completed the program demonstrated clinically relevant improvements in occupational balance. The project highlights the potential of EAT as a community-based occupational therapy intervention for individuals with chronic neurological conditions. Overall, the group demonstrated strong clinical reasoning, research skills, methodological rigor, and a commitment to advancing occupational therapy practice.

ABSTRACT

Title: Stress reduction and occupational balance in equine-assisted therapy for adults with Parkinson's Disease: A quantitative study. Purpose: Parkinson's disease (PD) can affect physiological functioning that may negatively impact mental well-being and elevate stress levels. Increased stress may further affect quality of life and occupational balance. Equine-assisted therapy (EAT) is an emerging intervention that can positively address these physiological effects through the rhythmic movements generated by a horse's gait. This study aims to examine the effects of EAT on stress and occupational balance in adults with PD. Design: This quantitative, repeated-measures approach involves six adults with PD who participated in a six-week EAT program. Methods: The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was administered before and after riding sessions. Researchers recorded heart rate before and after each session. The Occupational Balance Questionnaire (OBQ) was administered before the first and after the final session. Results: All six participants completed the program. Findings indicated reduced physiological stress after sessions, decreased self-reported stress, and improved occupational balance. Conclusions: These findings suggest that EAT may reduce stress and mitigate some of the negative effects of Parkinson's disease symptoms on overall well-being. These supports EAT as a potential intervention within OT practice to promote well-being and lower stress in individuals with PD. Further research into larger samples and more robust measurement methods is needed to clarify its potential benefits. This study explores EAT as a potential occupation-centered intervention for adults with PD, contributing to research on stress management, well-being, and occupational balance in OT practice.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Fadzai Katanda, Communications**
  - **Project Title:** Finding my Shona Voice in an English-Speaking World: An Autoethnographic Study of Poetry Performance

  Fadzai, a poet from Zimbabwe, has crafted a creative and timely final project aimed at creating cultural awareness and making shared connections through poetry. In this project, “Finding my Shona Voice in an English-Speaking World: An Autoethnographic Study of Poetry Performance” Fadzai takes a decolonial approach to language and performance. This project includes triangulation of research methods from autoethnography, performance studies, and qualitative data collection to create a methodologically complex illustration of cross-cultural communication through the arts. In addition to the academic work involved in this project, Fadzai organized the costuming and sets for the performance, planned the event, and incorporated audience feedback into her final written product.

ABSTRACT

Poetry is more than an artistic expression for me; it is a way of communicating my thoughts, emotions, experiences, and cultural identity. As a Zimbabwean Shona poet living in the United States, I navigate the challenge of performing poetry for English-speaking audiences unfamiliar with my language and its cultural expressions. My poetry draws on Shona idioms, metaphors, imagery, and cultural knowledge that may lose meaning through translation. Guided by Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, this autoethnographic study explores how I negotiate language, culture, and identity while communicating my poetry across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Through a live performance of four Shona poems, English contextual explanations, audience feedback, and personal reflection, In this project, "Finding my Shona Voice in an English-Speaking World: An Autoethnographic Study of Poetry Performance", I examine how audiences interpret my poetry and how I can improve their understanding. Ultimately, this study explores how I find space for my Shona poetic voice in an English-speaking environment without compromising its linguistic and cultural integrity.

- **Muhammad Qasim, Cell and Molecular Biology**
  - **Project Title:** Testing a novel drug in clearing amyloidosis associated with Alzheimer's disease

  Muhammad has been working with Drs. Finneran and Morgan at the Michigan State University Department of Translational Neuroscience on new therapies for Alzheimer's disease using a mouse model. Muhammad contributed to multiple projects and his work involved a variety of experimental techniques: immunohistochemistry, mice behavior studies, mice necropsy, intracranial injections, and surgeries. His project focused on testing a new drug and its efficacy in clearing beta-amyloid plaques in a mouse model of Alzheimer's disease. His results show promise and Muhammad is conducting follow up experiments. Ultimately, this work contributes to developing new pharmacological therapies for this devastating and increasingly common neurodegenerative disease.

ABSTRACT

The accumulation of the amyloid beta plaques is an early sign of Alzheimer's disease which later leads to the formation of tau tangles. In this study, a novel drug was tested to target these plaques. Stereotaxic intracranial mice surgery was performed and the drug was injected in two dilutions (high dose or low dose in DMSO) on one side of brain (into hippocampus) while the vehicle (same high dose or low dose concentration) was injected on the other side of both transgenic (n=5) and non-transgenic (n=3) mice. The mice were euthanized and brain tissue samples were collected after a week. Following the sucrose cryoprotection, brain tissue samples were sectioned. Tissue sections were then stained with Congo red for amyloid plaques. In transgenic mice we observed slight improvement in amyloid plaque clearing in the brain side which received the drug as compared to control. However, the result was not statistically significant since one transgenic mouse had many more plaques on the drug injected side. It is possible that the plaques were caused by DMSO toxicity. These preliminary findings are promising but they do not constitute proof of the drug effectiveness in clearing amyloid beta plaques, thus more tests with lower concentrations of DMSO and with more mice will be performed. Additionally, the change in inflammatory biomarkers will also be studied.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR OUTSTANDING PUBLICATION
Fall 2026

College of Computing

- **Ghofrane Bousbih, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics**
  - **Project Title:** From Smear to Screen: Harnessing Machine Learning and Deep Learning to Transform Automated Malaria Diagnosis: A Systematic Review

Ghofrane has made a significant contribution to interdisciplinary research through her first-authored publication on machine learning and deep learning for malaria diagnosis. Her review analyzed 173 studies that used microscopy images to detect malaria. The paper critically evaluated not only model performance but also the quality and reliability of the supporting evidence. Although many studies reported high accuracy, 88.4% relied on a single publicly available dataset. Only 12.7% included external validation, and just 4.6% reported prospective clinical evaluation. These findings highlight the gap between promising research results and proven effectiveness in clinical practice. Ghofrane's work emphasizes the need for diverse datasets, independent validation, and clinically relevant evaluation. Her review provides researchers with a valuable synthesis of existing evidence and identifies priorities for future studies. The publication effectively bridges computing and healthcare while emphasizing responsible diagnostic technology development. Ghofrane demonstrates strong scholarly ability and contributes meaningful insights toward improving the clinical reliability of AI-based malaria diagnosis.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to critically evaluate the current state of machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL) approaches for automated malaria diagnosis using microscopy images, with a particular focus on methodological rigor, validation practices, and clinical applicability. Results: A total of 173 studies were analyzed. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) dominated the field, appearing in 65.3% of studies and achieving a mean accuracy of 96.0% and AUROC of 97.6%. However, dataset usage was highly concentrated, with 88.4% of studies relying on a single publicly available dataset. Only 12.7% of studies performed external validation using independent datasets, and prospective clinical evaluation was reported in just 4.6% of cases. Discussion: Despite high reported performance, the findings reveal substantial methodological limitations that constrain real-world applicability. The reliance on homogeneous datasets and internal validation strategies suggests that many models may be overfitted to specific data distributions rather than capable of generalizing across diverse clinical set tings. This creates a gap between benchmark performance and clinical reliability, raising concerns about the true readiness of these systems for deployment. Conclusion: While ML and DL models demonstrate strong potential for automated malaria diagnosis, current research remains largely confined to controlled experimental conditions. Advancing toward clinically viable solutions requires a shift toward multi-site data collection, rigorous external validation, and integration of real-world deployment constraints. Emphasizing generalizability and translational rigor will be essential for achieving meaningful impact in global malaria control.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY OR PROFESSION

Fall 2026

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Jason Rottman, Public Administration**

  Jason has demonstrated a strong commitment to public service and effective local government through his leadership in information technology, first as IT Director for the Cities of Walker and Grandville and now as Assistant Director of IT for the City of Wyoming. His work helps ensure that city employees have the reliable systems, tools, and technical support necessary to serve residents, manage resources, and deliver public services efficiently. Jason's professional contributions and commitment to public administration exemplify the dedication, collaboration, and service-oriented leadership embody the spirit of the Master of Public Administration degree program.

College of Health Professions

- **Talia Swayze, Physician Assistant Studies**

  Talia currently serves as the Volunteer Chair for RPC within the Physician Assistant Studies program. In this role, she has demonstrated a commitment to identifying meaningful service opportunities and organizing fellow students to participate in initiatives that benefit the greater Grand Rapids community. Her efforts extend beyond simply volunteering her own time, as she actively encourages others to recognize the importance of giving back and making a positive impact on the communities around them. What makes Talia's contributions particularly meaningful is her ability to bring others together in service. Through her leadership, she has created opportunities for her classmates to become involved in the community while reinforcing the importance of volunteerism.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE TO GVSU
Fall 2026

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Alyse Cross, Public Administration**

  Alyse serves as the Student Director of GVSU's Speech Lab, demonstrating exceptional leadership and a commitment to helping others develop the communication skills necessary for personal, academic, and professional success.Through her leadership, she works to support students as they strengthen their public speaking abilities, build confidence, and learn to communicate their ideas effectively. These skills are essential not only to academic achievement but also to effective leadership, civic engagement, and public service. Her dedication to the Speech Lab reflects a genuine investment in the success of her fellow Lakers and the broader university community.

- **Protiva Talukder, Health Administration**

  Protiva has showcased exceptional organizational skills, teamwork, and leadership support. As an assistant for the planning and execution of the annual Art and Science of Aging Conference in 2025 and 2026, she played a vital role in coordinating with committee members and facilitating the development of the registration process, program brochure, and event marketing. Additionally, Protiva collaborated closely with another faculty to prepare materials for and assisted with the administration of MHA Leader Rounding simulations. Her contributions included assisting in the development of simulation scenarios and protocols, preparation of pre-simulation materials, and documenting students' simulation experiences.

College of Health Professions

- **Ella Kargle, Speech-Language Pathology**

  Ella has maintained a 4.0 GPA during the accelerated program while regularly volunteering for additional service opportunities that benefit others, including meeting with prospective SLP program students to answer questions and share her experience. She will present a technical session at the upcoming American Speech-Language-Hearing Association convention in Indianapolis, Indiana. Volunteer opportunities she participated in that benefited the greater community included the Healthy Young Athletes Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) clinic in the Upper Peninsula, which was 2 days of AAC awareness at the Special Olympics and the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Caregiver Lab where she provided education and support.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT GVSU
Fall 2026

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Rachel Robinson, Public Administration**

  As a staff member at GVSU's Kaufman Interfaith Institute, Rachel advances inclusion and diversity through work that connects interfaith engagement with the broader institutional goals of student development, civic participation, and community building. Through her work in interfaith education and leadership development, she helps students develop the skills to navigate differences, engage in constructive dialogue, and build relationships across communities. Her progression from student leader to educator reflects a sustained investment in developing the capacity of others to contribute to a more inclusive university environment.

College of Health Professions

- **Erin O'Neil, Physician Assistant Studies**

  Erin currently serves as Chair of the Physician Assistant Studies Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee. In this role, they have demonstrated a commitment to moving beyond conversations about inclusion and translating those discussions into meaningful action. Erin has taken the initiative to organize meetings, engage fellow students in thoughtful dialogue, and create opportunities for students to share their perspectives and experiences. By helping connect students with community organizations and opportunities for engagement, Erin contributes to building meaningful relationships and encouraging future healthcare professionals to better understand the communities they will ultimately serve.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN SUSTAINABILITY
Fall 2026

College of Health Professions

- **Jackson Gutowski, Physician Assistant Studies**

  Jackson serves as the elected Student Officer for Health and Wellness, encouraging classmates to make room for physical activity and connection alongside the demands of graduate education. These efforts address an important need: supporting the people who are preparing to care for others. He has also demonstrated leadership by sharing what he has learned with the incoming Student Officer for Health and Wellness. By passing along his experience and practical guidance, he has helped prepare his successor to continue this work. His willingness to invest time and energy in his classmates and the next generation of student leadership demonstrates initiative and concern for the broader program community.

JENNIFER ROSE PALM MEMORIAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE TO GRADUATE EDUCATION
Fall 2026

College of Health Professions

- **Diana Briggs, Occupational Science and Therapy**
  - **Nominated By:** Kelly Machnik and Scott Truskowski

  Diana Briggs demonstrates an exceptional commitment to graduate education through her extensive support of students, faculty, and the Occupational Science and Therapy Department. She plays an integral role in student admissions, onboarding, academic progression, and graduation while fostering a welcoming environment through thoughtful communication, events, and community-building activities. Her institutional knowledge, resourcefulness, and collaborative approach allow her to anticipate needs, navigate complex university processes, advocate for students, and develop effective solutions. Through her professionalism, warmth, and dedication, Diana strengthens departmental operations and creates a supportive graduate experience that promotes student success and belonging.

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION OUTSTANDING TEACHING AWARD
Fall 2026

College of Computing

- **Sara Sutton, Information Sciences and Technologies**
  - **Nominated By:** Lilian Jepngetich Sing'oei, Victor Bungei, and Michael N. Mbugua

  Dr. Sara Sutton demonstrates a strong commitment to graduate student success through engaging instruction, individualized attention, and hands-on learning. She creates an inclusive classroom that accommodates students with diverse backgrounds and experience levels while emphasizing practical applications of Linux, Python, and cybersecurity concepts. Through constructive feedback, challenging lab assignments, and encouragement to utilize the Cyber Range, she helps students develop technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and confidence. Her supportive teaching and mentorship inspire students to pursue continued education and professional opportunities in computing.

College of Health Professions

- **Sri Nandamudi, Speech-Language Pathology**
  - **Nominated By:** Ashley Snyder and Sylvie Haywood

  Dr. Sri Nandamudi demonstrates a strong commitment to student success through engaging instruction, individualized support, and hands-on learning opportunities. She incorporates diverse teaching methods, including simulations, demonstrations, and interprofessional activities, to accommodate different learning styles and bridge the gap between classroom concepts and clinical practice. She actively seeks student feedback and creates a supportive learning environment where students can build confidence, strengthen practical skills, and develop clinical competencies. Her thoughtful course design and dedication to student growth prepare future speech-language pathologists for successful clinical experiences and professional practice.

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION OUTSTANDING MENTORSHIP AWARD
Fall 2026

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Mary Bair, Literacy, Educational Foundations, and Technology**
  - **Nominated By:** Alana Maffesoli

  Dr. Mary Bair demonstrates exceptional mentorship through her ability to recognize and cultivate students' potential, often beyond what they initially recognize in themselves. She provided a graduate assistantship opportunity to a student outside her department, fostering an interdisciplinary collaboration that encouraged shared learning, independent thinking, and advanced research. She empowered the student to lead an intensive systematic review, providing valuable experience in research methods, scholarly collaboration, and preparing work for presentation at the MWERA conference. Through her encouragement and support, Dr. Bair strengthened the student's confidence, expertise, and motivation to pursue continued academic and professional growth.

College of Health Professions

- **Katie Aurand, Physician Assistant Studies**
  - **Nominated By:** Sam Purifoy, Alexis Jaggi, Amy Rushlow, Andrew Palmer, Charlotte Ellis, Gabe Miller, Katie Perez, Lily Ewing, Maggie Stevenson, and Maya Dean

  Dr. Katie Aurand demonstrates a strong commitment to student mentorship through academic instruction, research, professional development, and personal well-being. She continually improves her clinical medicine curriculum, provides individualized support, and promotes student wellness and work-life balance. She established a clinical research lab in Traverse City to address gaps in rural healthcare research, creating opportunities for Physician Assistant students to lead projects, develop research skills, and engage with community partners. Through her collaborative approach, encouragement of leadership, and continued support, Dr. Aurand fosters confident, compassionate clinicians committed to serving their communities.

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

- **Matthew Cooper, Biology**
  - **Nominated By:** Madison Stibel

  Dr. Cooper exemplifies outstanding mentorship through his dedication to graduate student success, professional development, and well-being. When a graduate student's principal investigator transitioned to another university, he willingly assumed advising responsibilities and supported the continuation of the student's externally funded research, despite it being outside his area of expertise. He actively supports professional growth through grant and conference applications, employment recommendations, teaching opportunities, and research experiences that help students publish their first scholarly projects. Through his Scientific Methodology course, he further equips incoming Biology graduate students with tools to navigate graduate school while fostering a supportive environment that prioritizes student success.

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

President: Andrew Wanyeki, Data Science and Analytics

Vice President: Rajeshwari Galugu, Applied Computer Science

Finance Officer: Bushra Rashrash, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics

Communications Officer: Ivy Lily Muriungi, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics

Administration Officers: Gloria Grace, Data Science and Analytics; and Nana Akua Amponsah, Health Administration

Advisors:

Dr. Matthew Christians, Cell and Molecular Biology

Dr. Sarah Nechuta, Public Health

Dr. Mohammed Hossain, Social Work

GRADUATE COUNCIL OFFICERS

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Dr. Amy Campbell, Psychology

Policy Subcommittee Chair:

Dr. Gregory Warsen, Educational Leadership and Counseling

Curriculum and Program Review Subcommittee Chair:

Dr. Mark Staves, Cell and Molecular Biology

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GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY®

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