

Places & Events

International Student Experience Scholarship | Winter 2026

Back in India, I never had a favorite place on campus. I grew up in a village with no tall buildings, no rivers flowing through a city, and no quiet corners designed for reflection. When I arrived at Grand Valley State University in August 2024, I did not expect that specific chairs, tables, and views would become anchors for my entire experience. Yet that is exactly what happened.

I am someone who deeply values solitude, not out of loneliness, but because that is when I do my clearest thinking about goals, relationships, and who I am becoming. The five places I share here, spread across **all three GVSU campuses**, are where that thinking happens. They have witnessed my tensions, my breakthroughs, and my growth. Without them, my GVSU story simply would not exist.

"The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page." ~ Saint Augustine

PLACE 01

The DeVos Lawn: Love at First Sight



The DeVos Lawn at City Campus

August 19, 2024, my very first day at GVSU. Orientation was at Loosemore Auditorium in Building E, and as we walked toward Building C to pick up our ID cards, I caught my first glimpse of the DeVos Lawn. I could not stop staring. The lush green grass, the carefully arranged flower beds, the mature trees casting long shadows. **It was love at first sight.**

Growing up, I spent years farming alongside my family. That connection to the earth never left me. So when I see water and greenery, something deep inside me feels at home. From that first day, I made the DeVos Lawn my go-to place for working on assignments, for inviting friends to hang out, or simply for sitting quietly among the plants. Three months later, when I started my grounds maintenance job, I was actually watering those very flower pots. Caring for the beauty that had captivated me on day one felt like **a full-circle moment**. To this day, whenever I visit the library, I stop here for a few minutes on my way back. It is my hidden gem.

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks." ~ John Muir

PLACE 02

Steelcase Library: Where Aura Meets Ambition



The vintage charm of Steelcase Library at City Campus

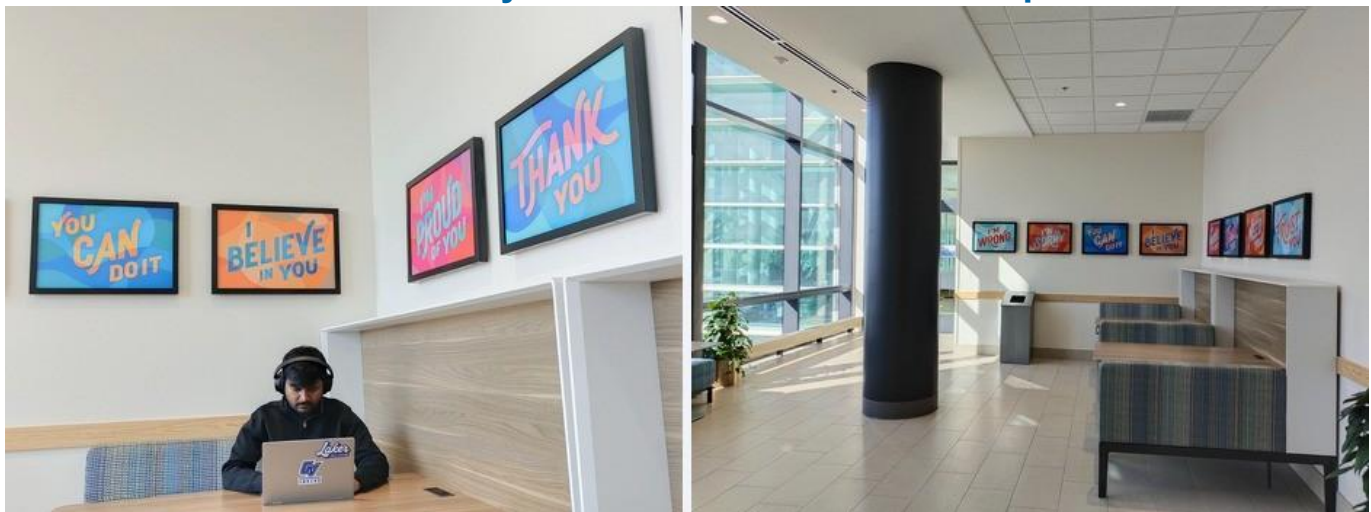
I firmly believe that when your environment is good, your thoughts become good. Steelcase Library proves that every time I walk through its doors. The vaulted wooden ceiling, the warm lighting, the dark mahogany shelves. It has a vintage elegance that makes me want to sit down and study the moment I step inside.

This is not just a place to read; it is a place that changes my state of mind. I have spiraled **eleven notebooks** here so far, each one filled with notes, reflections, and plans. The Universal Testing Center within the library is where I wrote two of my exams, and the deep quiet of that space helped me perform at my best. Whenever I need to start something fresh or organize my thoughts onto new pages, Steelcase Library is where I go.

"If your environment is clean, your thoughts are clean."

PLACE 03

The Motivational Corner: My Hidden Gem on Health Campus



Surrounded by encouragement on the third floor of Health Campus

Third floor of the Health Campus, just to the right of the elevator. That is where you will find my most personal study spot. As a graduate student, most of my classes are here, and I have a strict habit: I always read the

material before class. If a professor says we will cover a topic next week, I read it that same day. It helps me engage more deeply in discussions and gives me a stronger grasp of every subject.

What makes this corner extraordinary is what happens when I get distracted. During long study sessions, my eyes naturally wander, and instead of losing focus, they land on colorful framed signs that say "You Can Do It," "I Believe in You," "I Am Proud of You," and "Thank You." These messages speak to me like a friend cheering me on. Every serious deadline I have faced, every anxious night before an exam, I came here and stayed until the work was done. This corner has seen all of my tensions, my breakthroughs, and my quiet victories.

"Believe you can and you are halfway there." ~ Theodore Roosevelt

PLACE 04

The Window Seat at Mary Idema Pew Library: Where I Belong



My favorite seat in all of GVSU at Mary Idema Pew Library, Allendale Campus

Of every chair and table across three campuses, this one small seat tucked between the bookshelves of Mary Idema Pew Library is the place I love most. To my left, a floor-to-ceiling window frames the Allendale sky. To my right, rows of books stand like quiet companions. In front and behind me, just walls. **A cocoon of focus.**

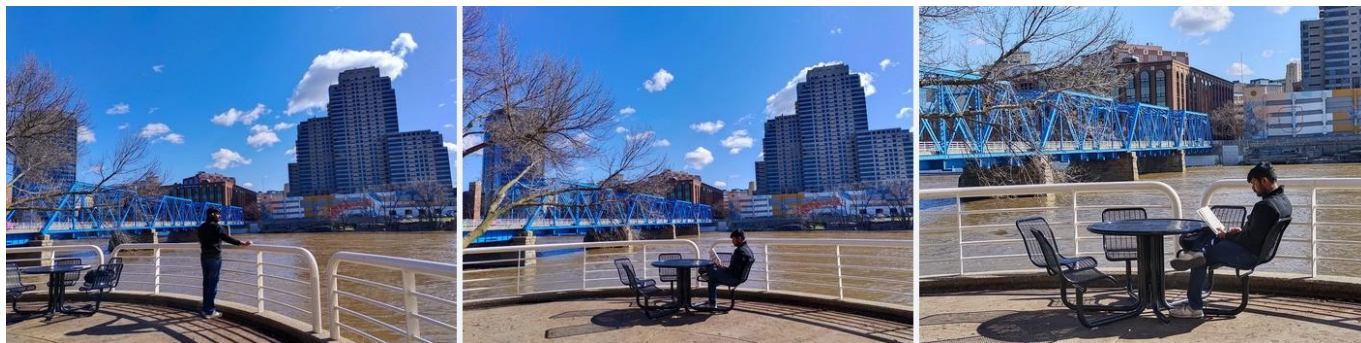
I have lost count of how many days I arrived in the morning with my lunch box, sat down, and did not leave until night, spending **seven or eight hours** at a stretch. This is where I write applications, complete assignments, prepare for interviews, and think about the future. I have developed such a deep attachment to this exact spot that I feel a small pang of disappointment when someone else sits here before me. If any single place at GVSU truly feels like mine, it is this one.

"A room of quiet is a temple of thought." ~ A.P.J. Abdul Kalam



Exploring the stacks at Mary Idema Pew Library

The Riverside Table Behind Eberhard Center



Reading by the Grand River with the Blue Bridge at City Campus

I discovered this spot on **December 12, 2024**, the exact day I started working with Grounds and Facilities at the City Campus. My supervisor assigned me to this area, and after finishing my work, I sat down at the riverside table for two hours, mesmerized. A river flowing through the heart of a city, a striking blue bridge, and tall buildings catching the afternoon light. **I had never seen anything like** it in my entire life.

Now, whenever I sit here, the first thing I do is close my eyes. I listen for two things: the sound of the river flowing and the birds singing from the trees along the bank. These two sounds have a way of dissolving every anxious thought in my mind. Only when I feel calm do I open my eyes and take in the view. Sometimes I walk across the Blue Bridge and sit on the opposite bank to watch the sunset paint the water. The combination of the flowing river and a setting sun gives me an energy that no coffee or motivational video ever could.

"When I close my eyes and hear the river, every anxious thought dissolves."

EVENT

The Leadership Summit That Changed Everything



With fellow students and keynote speaker at the Leadership Summit, February 2025

On **February 25, 2025**, I attended the Hauenstein Center Leadership Summit expecting a routine workshop. What I received instead was a turning point. Organized by the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies and the Office of Student Life, this daylong event introduced me to people and opportunities that fundamentally reshaped my time at GVSU.

During the summit, I met Eric Anangawe, who told me about the Graduate Student Association and its upcoming elections. By the end of that conversation, he had introduced me to Lauren King, the GSA E-Board President at the time. Lauren explained how the organization works, what positions were open, and encouraged me to attend the next meeting. I did, and then I decided to run for **Vice President. I won.**

One conversation with Lauren led to another door: the **Cook Leadership Academy**, a highly selective program that accepts only **fifteen graduate students** from the entire university for training in ethical and effective leadership. Lauren nominated me, I interviewed, and I was accepted. I am still part of that cohort today, learning leadership skills I never imagined I would develop.

A single event opened the door to the **GSA Vice Presidency** and the Cook Leadership Academy, two experiences that are now the pillars of my personal and professional growth at GVSU. As an international student, I have learned that showing up to one event, talking to one person, and saying yes to one opportunity can change the entire trajectory of your journey.

"The greatest leader is not the one who does great things, but the one who gets people to do great things." ~ Ronald Reagan

Reflection

As an international student, I have come to understand that finding your places and showing up to events matters more than almost anything else. The five places I described are not just coordinates on a campus map. They are where my thoughts shift, where my goals take shape, and where I find the stillness to grow. The Leadership Summit taught me that a single afternoon can redirect your entire university experience.

If another international student asked me what to expect at GVSU, I would say this: **explore every campus**, sit in uncomfortable silence until it becomes comfortable, and **never skip an event just because you do not know anyone there**. The river behind Eberhard Center, the sunset over the Blue Bridge, the motivational signs on the third floor of the Health Campus, and that one perfect window seat in Mary Idema Pew Library. These are the hidden gems that turned Grand Valley into home.

"When your places change your thoughts, your thoughts change your life."