The Graduate School Citations for Academic Excellence

Winter 2025

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

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 for the second semester 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!

Erica Hamilton, Ph.D.
Interim Vice Provost for the Graduate School
Grand Valley State University

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Winter 2025

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Winter 2025

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Congratulations to the Winter 2025

Staff and Faculty Award Recipients!

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN THE DEGREE PROGRAM WINTER 2025

College of Computing

- **Bhavya Shri Meda, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics**

  Bhavya is a standout student in the Health Informatics and Bioinformatics (HBIN) program, maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA and consistently demonstrating excellence in her graduate studies. She is not only a top-performing student in the classroom but also an active and engaged member of the academic community. Bhavya contributes meaningfully to the HIB Journal Club, offering thoughtful analyses and insights on cutting-edge research, which elevates the learning experience for her peers. In the classroom, Bhavya's curiosity, discipline, and leadership inspire others. Her collaborative spirit and intellectual humility make her a valued member of every group and a positive influence on class discussions. Bhavya's combination of academic brilliance and a strong sense of teamwork sets her apart as an exceptional student and a future leader in her field.

- **Brooke Walters**, **Data Science and Analytics**

  Brooke has consistently demonstrated outstanding academic excellence in the Data Science and Analytics PSM program. In STA 518, Brooke developed a personal portfolio that included the various projects she completed throughout the semester. What set them apart was their ability to incorporate their graphic design skills, developed during their undergraduate studies, into their data science work. She connected these projects to historical and social contexts, which added depth and meaning to their ability to merge technical expertise with creativity distinguishes them, particularly through the personal portfolio they created to highlight their projects. By integrating their background in graphic design with data science, they provided meaningful connections to historical and social contexts, adding unique depth to their work. Beyond their academic success, Brooke excels in collaborative environments, actively engaging in group projects, discussions, and presentations.

- **Fiyinfoluwa Olajide, Cybersecurity**

  Fiyinfoluwa has demonstrated remarkable dedication and academic excellence throughout her time in the Cybersecurity Master's program at Grand Valley State University. Over the past two years, she has consistently excelled in challenging courses such as information security, computer networks, cryptography, and digital forensics. Her deep understanding of complex cybersecurity concepts, coupled with her ability to apply this knowledge to real-world situations, sets her apart from her peers.
  Beyond her technical skills, Fiyinfoluwa is a strong communicator and collaborator. She thrives in team settings, contributing her expertise to group projects and promoting a cooperative and inclusive environment among her peers. Her ability to engage in meaningful teamwork and share knowledge enhances the learning experience for everyone involved.

- **Louis Marx, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics**

  Louis has demonstrated exemplary leadership and a commitment to service throughout his time in the master’s Program in Health Informatics and Bioinformatics at Grand Valley State University. His initiative in founding the Bioethics Club for graduate students reflects his dedication to fostering meaningful, inclusive discussions on ethical issues in science and healthcare. Recognizing a gap in opportunities for thoughtful, open dialogue about the ethical challenges students will face in their careers, Louis created a space where students can engage in respectful conversations about complex topics. In addition to his leadership in creating the Bioethics Club, Louis has excelled academically, maintaining a strong GPA of 3.889 in a challenging graduate program. Louis’s leadership in establishing the Bioethics Club has made a lasting impact on the GVSU community, providing a valuable resource for students in the health and science fields.

- **Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, Applied Computer Science**

  Mohammad Shafiqul Islam is an exceptional candidate for the Graduate Citation's Academic Excellence in the Major for Applied Computer Science. As he approaches the completion of his master's degree, Shafiqul has consistently demonstrated academic excellence, maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA throughout his studies. In addition to his outstanding academic performance, Mohammad has consistently exceeded expectations in his coursework. He regularly goes beyond the prescribed requirements for homework and projects, showcasing a deep understanding of the material and a commitment to producing work of the highest quality. His attention to detail, problem-solving skills, and ability to apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios have made him a standout student in every class.

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Ashmita Dhakal, Health Administration**

  Ashmita has consistently demonstrated academic and professional excellence throughout her time in the MHA program. She combines intellectual curiosity with humility, approaching her studies with thoroughness and attention to detail. Her contributions to the classroom go beyond academics, as she fosters a spirit of collegiality by challenging assumptions and encouraging her peers to think critically and engage deeply with the material. Beyond her academic achievements, Ashmita has been an invaluable resource for international students, assisting them in finding both GVSU and professional resources to support their success. She has also played a key role in planning and developing the annual Art and Science of Aging Conference for two years, showcasing her leadership and commitment to her field.

- **Bex Takacs-Britz, Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership**

  Bex is an outstanding candidate for the Award for Academic Excellence in a Degree Program, with exceptional performance in the MPNL program. Bex consistently demonstrates the ability to engage critically with complex topics, producing high-quality written work and contributing meaningfully to class discussions deeply committed to the sector. They have earned several prestigious credentials, including the Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) designation and the Advanced Certified Nonprofit Professional credential, along with pursuing various certificates and professional development opportunities. Bex's commitment to leadership and learning extends beyond the MPNL program, as evidenced by their recent acceptance into the Professional Doctorate in Philanthropy program at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University.

- **Erica Austin, Literacy Studies**

  Erica has consistently demonstrated academic excellence in the Literacy Studies program, maintaining a high GPA and excelling in coursework. Beyond strong grades, her exceptional performance has been evident through meaningful contributions in various courses. In the literacy master’s project course, she developed a well-researched curriculum incorporating evidence-based early literacy practices for lower elementary educators. Her thoughtful and conscientious approach showcased a deep commitment to educational advancement. In the literacy practicum course, Erica displayed a strong application of learning and insightful engagement, setting a high standard among her peers. A dedication to student education, coupled with an unwavering commitment to personal and professional growth, highlights an emerging leader in the field of literacy education.

- **Joseph Oosterman, Public Administration**

  Joseph (Joey) is an exceptional graduate student who consistently demonstrates excellence in all areas of his academic journey. He maintains a high GPA while delivering outstanding written assignments and projects that surpass the expectations for graduate-level work. His academic skills are evident in his meticulous attention to detail, thorough analysis, and thoughtful engagement with course materials. Joey approaches assignments with a critical mindset, ensuring that his work is not only accurate but also insightful, often exceeding course requirements. In class discussions, Joey stands out as a dedicated participant, showcasing his intellectual curiosity and commitment to deep engagement with the material. He frequently challenges assumptions and seeks a deeper understanding of the subject matter, which highlights his drive to learn and refine his knowledge. His ability to ask thought-provoking questions and contribute to group discussions makes him an asset to the classroom environment.

- **Lisa Moorhouse, Social Work**

  Lisa is an exceptional student whose academic achievements, intellectual curiosity, and unwavering dedication to her studies have set her apart as a standout candidate for the Academic Excellence in a Degree Program Award in the Master of Social Work Program at Grand Valley State University. Throughout her time in the School of Social Work, she has consistently excelled in her coursework, demonstrating rigorous critical thinking, the ability to engage in complex discussions, and a commitment to scholarship that places her among the top 1% of her peers. Lisa's maturity, confidence, and exceptional analytical abilities have earned the recognition and admiration of faculty members. Her academic excellence is complemented by her genuine kindness, authenticity, and dedication to personal growth, which have further distinguished her as a truly exemplary student. Lisa plans to pursue doctoral studies, with a strong desire to contribute to the field of social work through research, leadership, and advocacy.

- **Rashawny Alic, Criminal Justice**

  Rashawny is an outstanding graduate student who has demonstrated academic excellence, leadership, and a deep commitment to service throughout her time in the Master's in Criminal Justice program at Grand Valley State University. Graduating with an impressive 3.967 GPA, Ms. Alic's academic achievements reflect her exceptional dedication and hard work. Her ability to consistently excel in her coursework, earning As in every class, is a testament to her intellectual capabilities and strong academic foundation. Beyond her academic success, Rashawny has made meaningful contributions to both the criminal justice field and the GVSU community. As part of the Historically Black College/University (HBCU) / Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Consortium, she has brought a unique perspective and valuable insight to our program. Her involvement in the Bellamy Creek Program, where she assisted incarcerated individuals earning their GVSU degree, highlights her dedication to improving the lives of others

- **Robyn Gardner, Educational Leadership**

  Robyn is an exemplary graduate student in the Educational Leadership program, known for her outstanding academic performance and unwavering commitment to excellence. Despite managing a busy home life and a full-time teaching position as a 2nd-grade educator, she has consistently demonstrated the ability to balance multiple responsibilities while excelling in her coursework. Robyn's ability to effectively apply theoretical concepts to real-world educational settings has been evident throughout her program. She is known for her innovative teaching techniques, her focus on student engagement, and her commitment to individualized instruction. Robyn has consistently fostered positive learning environments that promote collaboration and student success.

College of Health Professions

- **Anja Whitehouse, Athletic Training**

  Anja has consistently demonstrated excellence throughout her time in the MAT program, excelling in assignments, projects, and leadership roles. She has successfully balanced the program's rigorous academic and clinical demands while completing extensive clinical learning hours with area preceptors. Beyond her coursework, Anja has taken on leadership roles in the classroom and the Iota Tau Alpha honor society. As a graduate assistant, she has further showcased her dedication and ability to manage multiple responsibilities effectively. In her culminating project, she and her partner navigated challenges in participant recruitment while maintaining high-quality work, meeting deadlines, and integrating feedback productively. Anja's strong work ethic, perseverance, and academic excellence make her a deserving candidate for the Academic Excellence in a Degree Program award.

- **Ashlee Wheaton, Clinical Dietetics**

  Ashlee is a dedicated student in the Master's in Clinical Dietetics program at Grand Valley State University, maintaining a cumulative 4.0 GPA while successfully completing 1200 hours of experiential learning across clinical, community, and food service settings. She consistently excels in her coursework, demonstrating critical thinking and the effective application of evidence-based practices in her work. Beyond her academic achievements, Ashlee has been deeply involved in extracurricular leadership. As the Diversity Chair for the Clinical Dietetics Student Association (CDSA), she has worked to foster inclusivity and awareness within the field of dietetics.

- **Brittany Daniel, Doctor of Audiology**

  Brittany is an outstanding student, consistently performing in the top 5% of her class. Her passion for healthcare is evident through her engagement in class discussions, clinical decision-making, and coursework. She accepts feedback constructively, using it to advance both academically and clinically. During her time at the Community Hearing Clinic at Grand Valley

in 2023, Brittany demonstrated exceptional preparedness, clinical independence, and patient-centered care. She effortlessly builds rapport with patients, creating a supportive environment. In addition to her clinical excellence, she served on the Executive Board for the GVSU chapter of the National Student Speech-Language-Hearing Association-AuD, contributing to its growth and leadership transition. Her commitment extends beyond GVSU, as she also volunteered with Special Olympics Michigan's Healthy Hearing program. Brittany's ability to balance academic excellence, leadership, and community service highlights her dedication and professionalism.

- **Chloe VanTassell, Clinical Dietetics**

  Chloe has demonstrated exceptional academic and clinical excellence in the Clinical Dietetics Coordinated Graduate Program. Maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA while taking full-time graduate coursework over five semesters, she has also successfully completed 1,200 hours of supervised practice, showcasing her strong work ethic and commitment to the field. In the Advanced Medical Nutrition Therapy I and II courses, Chloe exhibited outstanding critical thinking skills, particularly in nutrition assessments, enteral nutrition (EN), and parenteral nutrition (PN). She excels in clinical decision-making, carefully evaluating patient scenarios and understanding the direct impact of her choices on patient outcomes. Her ability to integrate evidence-based practice into nutrition care plans demonstrates her strong analytical skills and deep understanding of medical nutrition therapy for a variety of disease states.

- **Josiah Thompson, Doctor of Physical Therapy**

  Josiah has consistently demonstrated exceptional academic excellence throughout his time in the Physical Therapy Program. His performance in both didactic and clinical coursework has been nothing short of outstanding, consistently displaying a deep understanding of core concepts and the application of these principles in real-world practice. Mr. Thompson stands out not only for his academic achievements but also for his leadership in the classroom. He is a proactive participant in discussions, offering insightful contributions and engaging with peers and faculty in

meaningful dialogue. In addition to maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA, Josiah has been an active student researcher and a dedicated volunteer at the GVSU Pro Bono Clinic. He also served as an instructor in a transfer skills lab for nursing students, further demonstrating his leadership, teaching abilities, and dedication to the broader healthcare community.

- **Mariel Lewis, Medical Dosimetry**

  Mariel is an exemplary candidate for the Academic Excellence in a Degree Program Award, with a well-rounded combination of academic excellence, leadership, and clinical expertise that makes her a standout student in the Medical Dosimetry Program. With five years of experience as a radiation therapist, Mariel entered the program with a solid foundation but continually strives to expand her knowledge and skills. Her perfect 4.0 GPA speaks to her commitment to mastering complex didactic concepts and applying them effectively in clinical settings. She has been instrumental in securing funding for her cohort to attend the prestigious American Association of Medical Dosimetrists annual meeting, demonstrating her strong communication and organizational skills.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Aidan Rosinksi, Applied Statistics**

  Aidan is an exceptional student in the Applied Statistics Master's program, set to graduate in April 2025. Throughout his studies, he has consistently demonstrated a strong work ethic, keen attention to detail, and a deep commitment to learning. His active participation in the classroom and willingness to take on challenges distinguish him as a leader among his peers. Aidan's academic performance has been outstanding, consistently surpassing expectations. He excels in writing, presenting, and collaborating on group projects. In STA 518 (Statistical Computing with R), Dr. Andrew DiLernia commended Aidan for his enthusiasm in mastering R programming beyond the course requirements, as well as his respectful engagement and contributions to class discussions.

- **Alona Chekalina, Cell and Molecular Biology**

  Alona is an outstanding student in the Professional Science Master's program in Biotechnology, maintaining an excellent GPA in a rigorous course sequence while working as a Medical Laboratory Scientist at Corewell Health. She is highly respected by her instructors for her intelligence, strong work ethic, and exceptional time management skills. Alona effectively communicates scientific concepts both in writing and presentations, consistently delivering some of the best presentations in her cohort. Her work demonstrates scientific curiosity, critical thinking, attention to detail, and a strong sense of ownership over her learning. She excels in analyzing primary literature, approaching problems thoughtfully, and engaging deeply with course material. Her writing is consistently excellent, reflecting her subject knowledge and ability to synthesize information from multiple sources.

- **Amanda Anka, Communications**

  Amanda has excelled academically, maintaining an excellent GPA and demonstrating strong performance in her coursework, written assignments, and projects. She first distinguished herself in Ethics in Professional Communication (COM 634) and later completed an independent study, further proving her intelligence and impressive writing skills. Now, as a thesis student, she continues to stand out with her research in publishing, editing studies, and rhetoric, and she is set to defend her thesis successfully. Her academic achievements are evident in her acceptance into multiple Ph.D. programs specializing in Technical Communication and Rhetoric. Her contributions as a graduate assistant in the School of Communications have been valuable, applying her editing and writing skills to the internal newsletter, blog, and social media.

- **Ashley Grace Davies, Biostatistics**

  Ashley is an exemplary student in the Biostatistics program at Grand Valley State University, maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA as she approaches her graduation in April 2025. I have had the honor of teaching her in three graduate courses and serving as her advisor and Program Director. Throughout her academic journey, Ashley Grace has demonstrated outstanding achievement, consistently producing high-quality work in both coursework and projects. Her success is particularly notable in the way she handles complex statistical concepts, such as survival analysis and statistical modeling, and applies them to real-world data sets with precision. In her most recent project, she effectively used R programming to analyze large datasets, providing clear and actionable insights, which impressed both her peers and instructors. Ashley Grace's contributions to class discussions are also noteworthy; she often leads conversations by offering insightful perspectives and by helping peers navigate difficult concepts. Her commitment to excellence is evident in her consistent high grades and the high regard in which she is held by both faculty and classmates.

- **Natalie Aalderink, School Psychology – Master of Science and Psychological Specialist**

  Natalie Aalderink is an exceptional student who embodies the qualities of academic excellence and dedication in her field. Currently a third-year student in the school psychology M.S./Psy.S. program, she has consistently demonstrated outstanding performance throughout her graduate studies, maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA. This achievement reflects her commitment to excelling in some of the most challenging courses in the program, making her a standout among her peers. Beyond her academic achievements, Natalie has shown tremendous growth and skill in her practicum and internship experiences. Her work in local K-12 schools over the past three years has been exemplary, and she has actively contributed to the school community through volunteering with "Girls on the Run" for two years. Natalie's ability to balance her rigorous coursework, school experiences, and a graduate assistantship position speaks to her exceptional time management skills and work ethic.

Kirkhof College of Nursing

- **Elizabeth Rouse, Doctor of Nursing Practice**

  Elizabeth has demonstrated excellence in all aspects of graduate study within the Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner program. Maintaining nearly a 4.0 GPA, she has excelled even in the most demanding courses of the rigorous DNP curriculum. Her ability to produce high-quality work is evident in both formative and summative assignments, where she takes the time to fully grasp expectations and consistently meets or exceeds them. Beyond her individual achievements, she actively contributes to the learning environment by offering valuable insights, clarifying uncertainties, and supporting her peers. Faculty members across courses have recognized her dedication and strong academic performance, particularly in simulation-based learning and clinical discussions.

- **Jennifer Schnepp, Nursing**

  Jennifer is a standout student in the Master of Science in Nursing Clinical Nurse Leader program at the Kirkhof College of Nursing, and it is with great enthusiasm that I nominate her for the Academic Excellence in a Degree Program Award. As a graduate student, Jennifer has consistently demonstrated exceptional academic performance, earning a perfect 4.0 GPA while balancing a full-time job with her rigorous graduate coursework. Her dedication to excellence in nursing education, combined with her passion for serving vulnerable populations, makes her a truly deserving candidate for this recognition. Her advocacy for patients and families navigating the complex healthcare system is evident in both her professional practice and her volunteer work. As an HRSA grant awardee, Jennifer has remained steadfast in her commitment to working in underserved areas of Michigan, consistently seeking ways to improve care delivery and patient outcomes.

Padnos College of Engineering

- **Abigail Douglas, Engineering**

  Abigail is an outstanding candidate for recognition due to her exceptional academic performance and remarkable contributions to the field of mechanical engineering. Currently nearing the completion of her articulated master's program, she has consistently demonstrated an unparalleled work ethic and intellectual ability. Her impressive academic record includes a perfect 4.000 GPA in her graduate courses, building on the solid foundation of a 3.869 GPA in her undergraduate studies. These achievements reflect her ability to excel in an extremely demanding engineering curriculum. Throughout her academic journey, Abigail has proven to be a top student. Her performance in all courses was exemplary, particularly in the highly technical graduate-level course, EGR 612 – Analytical Dynamics, where she stood out as the top student, in large part due to her perfect score on the final exam. This level of excellence in one of the most rigorous courses in the program underscores her mastery of complex engineering concepts.

Seidman College of Business

- **Alan Snyder, Professional Business Administration**

  Alan is an exceptional professional MBA graduate who has demonstrated outstanding academic achievement and leadership throughout the program. His extensive experience in both a privately-owned, fifth-generation family business and his own family's company has enriched class discussions with valuable insights and real-world applications. Alan is highly goal-oriented and results-driven, ensuring that both individual and group assignments meet the highest standards. He is an adaptable leader, seamlessly stepping up when needed while also supporting others in leadership roles. Alan's strong analytical skills, strategic mindset, and collaborative nature make him a deserving candidate for the Academic Excellence in a Degree Program Award.

- **Chris Knape, Executive Business Administration**

  Chris has demonstrated exceptional academic excellence and leadership throughout the Executive MBA program. His intellectual curiosity is evident in his commitment to thoroughly exploring course material—reading extensively, preparing diligently, and engaging in deep inquiry. He not only seeks to expand his own understanding but also enhances the learning experience for his entire cohort by fostering insightful discussions and encouraging collaborative exploration of complex topics. A natural problem solver, Chris excels at navigating ambiguity and developing strategic solutions. His ability to analyze challenges and make sense of uncertainty was particularly evident in his Capstone Project, where he played a key role in clarifying and structuring a complex strategy problem for his consulting client.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR OUTSTANDING MASTER'S THESIS
Winter 2025

College of Health Professions

- **Rachael Vannette, Clinical Dietetics**
  - **Thesis Title:** Experiences and Perceptions of Lactation Support and Barriers for Women with Obesity: A Qualitative Study

Rachael Vanette is being nominated for the Outstanding Master's Thesis Award for her exceptional work on the thesis titled "Experiences and Perceptions of Lactation Support and Barriers for Women with Obesity." This critical research addresses the unique challenges faced by women with obesity in breastfeeding, including lower rates of initiation and duration compared to women of normal weight. The study identifies various barriers, such as delayed lactation, difficult birth experiences, and social obstacles tied to body size. Rachael worked tirelessly on this project, collaborating with her advisor, Dr. MacQuillan, and securing a mini grant from the Center for Scholarly and Creative Excellence to fund participant incentives. She also navigated complex approvals from both GVSU's Institutional Review Board and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Through her meticulous transcription and data analysis, Rachael has developed valuable insights aimed at creating tailored educational support for low-income mothers. Her dedication to advancing lactation support for women with obesity could lead to meaningful improvements in public health and dietetics.

Rachael's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Background: Breastfeeding has been shown to reduce the risk of obesity for both the mother and child, with exclusive breastfeeding for six months being the most beneficial. Unfortunately, women with obesity are less likely to initiate breastfeeding, begin supplementing earlier, and breastfeed for a shorter time. Women with obesity experience increased prevalence of latch and positioning issues, as well as other unique challenges to lactation. This study aims to investigate the experiences and perceptions of lactation support and barriers for women with obesity.

Methods: This qualitative phenomenological study utilized semi-structured interviews and included six participants from the Muskegon WIC area who qualified for WIC benefits at the time of the study and whose BMI was over 30 kg/m2. Data was analyzed using Giorgi's method of analysis and the researcher employed bracketing and reflexivity to support the validity of the study.

Results: Nearly all of the participants experienced issues with latching and positioning, while every participant struggled to maintain an appropriate milk supply. Adequate maternal diet was also noted to be a common barrier for participants. Support was received from family members and healthcare providers and was perceived to be helpful for overcoming lactation challenges. Participants desired more information related to lactation challenges earlier in their lactation journey. Individualized follow ups were found to be beneficial, while participants chose not to utilize breastfeeding classes or support groups, perceiving them to be unnecessary.

Conclusion: This study's findings indicate that, for women with obesity, interventions should be targeted at individual follow-ups and should address maternal diet and milk supply, along with topics of latch and positioning.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Ruth A. Yeboah, Communications**
    - **Thesis Title:** Africanism in America: Exploring Hybrid Identities of African Students in the US.

Ruth Yeboah's journey to completing her thesis is a testament to her tenacity and perseverance. From the very beginning, Ruth demonstrated her commitment to her academic work. After taking a theory class with the advisor, she asked for mentorship, but the advisor hesitated due to concerns about taking on another thesis advisee. Ruth did not let that deter her—she enrolled in another class with the advisor the following semester to prove her dedication. This determination paid off when her project in the intercultural communication class earned her the Top Debut Paper award at the Central States Communication Association Conference. Her thesis, titled "Africanism in America: Exploring Hybrid Identities of African Students in the US," emerged from this early research. Through qualitative methods such as ethnography and interviews, Ruth explored the linguistic and cultural integration of African students on a Midwest college campus. Her study illustrates the complex, fluid identities that West African students form in a space that is neither entirely African nor American. Ruth's project collected extensive data, including four months of participant observation and 12 in-depth interviews, and provides valuable insights into the challenges and experiences of these students.

Ruth's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

This study interrogates the intercultural experiences of African international students (AIS) in a US Midwestern University. With a focus on West African students, the study explores how students confront and overcome linguistic, cultural, and systemic barriers as they create new dynamic new spaces which are neither American nor African, but a mixture of both in a predominantly White institution. Drawing on the theoretical constructs of hybridity and language ideology, the findings reveal how AIS actively negotiate identity by using traditional African cultural traits, rooted in what I term Africanism—with new cultural influences, generating unique, fluid and constantly-evolving hybrid identities. I utilized ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews to better understand how the AIS engage in ongoing identity negotiation through language, food, cultural expressions, and technology. In this process I conducted 40 hours of participant observation over a 4-month period and interview 12 West African students.

Language emerges as a powerful site of hybridity, where students constantly shift between linguistic norms to balance intelligibility and cultural authenticity. These hybrid identities through active, creative processes of cultural and linguistic hybridization. The findings offer important implications for higher education, emphasizing the need for more culturally responsive support systems that recognize the distinct experiences of African students. Additionally, the study contributes to the fields of communication and migration studies by advancing a nuanced understanding of identity formation in transnational contexts. By foregrounding the voices of African students, this research challenges monolithic representations of international students and underscores the power of intercultural dialogue in fostering inclusive communities and enriching educational environments.

- **Seth Hiers, Biology**
    - **Thesis Title:** Determining the Origin of an Isolated Great Lakes Plant Species, *Agoseris glauca**.***

Seth Hiers is being nominated for his outstanding research on the population genetics and origin of a rare Michigan plant. His thesis, "Determining the Origin of an Isolated Great Lakes Plant Species, Agoseris glauca," investigates the genetic structure of Michigan's populations of the threatened false dandelion. Using a genomic sampling approach, Seth determined that Michigan's populations likely originated around 10,000 years ago during the last glacial maximum. His work also revealed low genetic variation in these plants, highlighting the need for protective measures. Seth took a leading role in sample collection, lab work, and data analysis, providing valuable insights into the biogeographical history of the species. His research has far exceeded expectations and deserves special recognition.

Seth's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Small, isolated populations often have low genetic diversity and low potential for adaptation in response to environmental changes. Alternatively, isolated communities are often more likely to display local adaptations and over time even speciation. The Great Lakes Region is home to over 50 vascular plant species that are disjunct from the species' core populations. *Agoseris glauca* (Asteraceae) is a Great Lakes disjunct and state threatened species geographically isolated from its core range by 900 km. This study uses Genotyping by Sequencing to assess the population genetics of *A. glauca* for two Michigan disjunct populations and five western populations in the core range of the species. Specific goals were to 1) determine the amount of genetic variation in Michigan populations of *A. glauca* and several populations throughout the primary range of the species; and 2) determine whether the Great Lakes populations of *A. glauca* survived the last glaciation in a glacial refugium, are present due to pre or postglacial vicariance, or are the products of more recent dispersal. Cluster analysis and hierarchical F statistics were used to assess relationships among all seven populations. In all models, populations in Montana and Utah were different than all populations east of the Rocky Mountains. Two South Dakota populations and the Minnesota population were closely related to each other, and the Michigan populations were likewise closely related. Michigan populations show genetic distance from the South Dakota and Minnesota populations in our pairwise FST, and at K=4 form their own cluster, however at the favored value of K=3 cluster with South Dakota and Minnesota populations. Future studies will be carried out to determine approximate time of divergence and possible local adaptations in the threatened Michigan populations.

Padnos College of Engineering

- **Prithwi Raj Das, Engineering**
    - **Thesis Title:** Biomechanical Assessment of Gait and Overhead Deep Squat in Scoliosis: Comparison with Controls and Pre- versus Post-Spinal Fusion Evaluation

Das's thesis, titled "Biomechanical Assessment of Gait and Overhead Deep Squat in Scoliosis: Comparison with Controls and Pre- versus Post-Spinal Fusion Evaluation," is a significant contribution to the understanding of movement biomechanics in individuals with scoliosis. His research addresses a critical gap by analyzing the impact of scoliosis and spinal fusion surgery on dynamic functional movements in adult females. Using 3D motion capture, Raj assessed asymmetries and power generation with exceptional technical skill. His findings, presented at prestigious conferences like the 2024 American Society of Biomechanics and IEEE EMBC, highlight the importance of tailored rehabilitation strategies for scoliosis patients. Raj's independent thinking and analytical approach make his work deserving of recognition.

Prithwi's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Scoliosis, a condition of unknown etiology, significantly disrupts the locomotor system and alters movement patterns. The prevalence of scoliosis increases dramatically in females after the age of 10. Despite this, there is a paucity of research examining the impact of scoliosis and spinal fusion surgery on functional movements in adult females, particularly during dynamic activities such overhead deep squats (OHDS). This study aims to address this gap by investigating the biomechanical implications of scoliosis on functional movements, with a specific focus on gait and OHDS performance.

The research involved movement analysis using a 3D motion capture system to analyze asymmetry. Three groups of female subjects were examined: a surgical group (SG), a non-surgical group (NSG), and a control group (CG). It was hypothesized that scoliosis subjects would demonstrate compromised locomotor efficiency, restricted joint angles, and reduced power generation during gait and OHDS. Results revealed significant differences in temporal-spatial parameters, joint angles, and power generation across the groups supporting the hypothesis. The study also compared pre- and post-surgical movement data of SG. The hypothesis for this comparison was that post-surgical patients will exhibit reduced movement capabilities due to the fixed spinal orientation resulting from spinal fusion surgery. The results indicated no notable changes in joint angles, and temporal-spatial parameters during gait, significant differences were observed during OHDS rejecting the hypothesis.

The findings of this study highlighted the need for early, targeted rehabilitation programs tailored to scoliosis severity, focusing on improving joint ROM, stability, and power generation to enhance functional outcomes and minimize complications.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR OUTSTANDING FINAL PROJECT

Winter 2025

College of Computing

- **Caleb Cheruiyot, Applied Computer Science**
  - **Project Title:** Data Fusion Knowledge Graph

Caleb's advisor attests to his exceptional commitment and intellectual ability. His project, focused on creating a knowledge graph for data integration, introduced an innovative system that automates data processing, manages uncertainty, and provides an interactive web tool for exploration. Caleb's technical skills were evident as he built AI components to sift through research papers and link them to a database for efficient querying, contributing significantly to the team's goals. He stood out by consistently offering thoughtful, in-depth answers and helping others in the group, demonstrating a true team spirit. Caleb's work enhances how data is accessed and understood, offering practical benefits across various fields. His excellence and initiative make him a standout candidate for this award.

Caleb's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

The use of knowledge graphs for structuring, integration, and analysis of complex datasets in diverse areas has become popular as a powerful technique. This project develops a new data fusion knowledge graph framework that takes information extraction out of the hands of the human, represents uncertainty through dynamic management, and provides an interactive user interface for real-time knowledge exploration. Our main contribution lies in an ontology-driven methodology that structures and organizes different datasets and uses human-in-the-loop AI techniques to further enrich information extraction from research papers. We train Artificial Intelligence models to identify the appropriate fusion methods and datasets from research papers. Using graph extensions to the PostgreSQL database, we also store the extracted data and query and retrieve the data using graph-based queries.

To make the system usable, we developed an interactive web application built as a Gradio-based web app, where users could search using the knowledge graph and visualize the graph in real time. Aesthetically designed UI with responsive elements to keep the things in order and easy to utilize/intuit. Intelligent search is supported by the system that offers users fusion technique, associated datasets, and dynamically visual representations of their interconnections. Moreover, the inclusion of uncertainty modeling increases decision-making by showing degrees of confidence of extracted relationships.

We demonstrate extensive testing on real-world datasets, which shows that our technique is effective in automating the data fusion, improving knowledge retrieval accuracy, as well as increasing user engagement. This proposed framework makes a scalable and adaptable solution for researchers and practitioners operating in any data driven fields. Future work will investigate advanced deep learning for additional enumeration and graph-based reasoning optimization of information extraction. Our research has and continues to contribute to the progression of knowledge graphs across disciplines.

- **Pranitha Presingu, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics**
  - **Project Title:** Evolving Determinants of Pharmacy Selection in the USA: A Longitudinal Study Comparing 2021 Logistic Regression Findings with 2015 Study

Pranitha's final project is a highly sophisticated and timely exploration of patient behavior and healthcare delivery trends. Her work showcases mastery in statistical analysis and health data modeling using R, providing critical insights into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, technological innovation, and shifting healthcare dynamics on pharmacy utilization. The project's methodological rigor, public health relevance, and longitudinal approach led to its submission to AMIA, one of the most prestigious forums in health informatics. Beyond this achievement, Pranitha's involvement in multiple research initiatives highlights her dedication, intellectual curiosity, and exceptional time management. With a GPA of 3.885, she has demonstrated consistent academic excellence and made meaningful contributions to health informatics. Pranitha's work truly embodies the caliber this award seeks to honor, and her nomination is strongly supported.

Pranitha's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Background: Longitudinal studies provide a comprehensive understanding of emerging shifts and consistent trends, offering broader insights than single-point analyses. This study examines evolving patterns in pharmacy selection, focusing on the impact of technological advancements, healthcare changes, and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
Objective: To identify stable and evolving factors influencing pharmacy choice and explore the underlying causes driving these changes, with a focus on implications for health informatics and healthcare delivery.
Methods: Survey data from the 2021 NCSME-PR were categorized into predisposing, enabling, and need factors (independent variables), with pharmacy type as the dependent variable. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression analyses were performed using R. Results were compared with findings from a 2015 study to assess longitudinal trends.
Results: Between 2015 and 2021, pharmacy-based vaccination services increased significantly (30.8% to 50.8%), maintaining a strong association with chain pharmacy use (OR=1.13 in 2015; OR=1.404 in 2021). Mail prescription services use rose from 17% to 28.7%, with consistently high odds of mail pharmacy selection (OR=73.746 in 2015; OR=30.293 in 2021). Drive-through usage increased from 34.5% to 42.3%, reflecting a continued preference for chain pharmacies (OR=3.282 in 2015; OR=2.500 in 2021). Some factors, such as OTC use and education level, lost significance, while geographic location emerged as a key determinant, with western regions showing lower chain pharmacy use (OR=0.84) and higher supermarket pharmacy selection (OR=1.139).
Conclusion: The increased adoption of pharmacy-based vaccinations, mail services, and drive-through options highlights the impact of the pandemic and technological advancements on patient behavior. Stable factors validate long-term preferences, while evolving trends underscore the influence of healthcare innovations and digital solutions. These findings are critical for health informatics, offering insights into optimizing service delivery and improving patient-centered care in a rapidly changing healthcare landscape.

- **Shannon Wasson, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics**
    - **Project Title:** AI on Trial: Benefits, Biases, and Ethical Concerns in Forensic Medicine and Criminal Justice

Shannon’s project, “AI on Trial: Benefits, Biases, and Ethical Concerns in Forensic Medicine and Criminal Justice,” is an exceptional and timely exploration of AI’s role at the intersection of criminal justice, forensic medicine, and healthcare. Through a rigorous literature review, she critically examined demographic bias in AI tools, highlighting their real-world implications on legal and medical outcomes—especially for marginalized populations. Shannon's ability to draw connections between forensic practices and biomedical informatics demonstrates both analytical depth and interdisciplinary thinking. Her leadership and professionalism have been recognized by faculty, leading to her invitation to represent graduate student excellence in the college’s annual report. Shannon's academic achievement, thoughtful research, and impact beyond the classroom make her an outstanding candidate for this award, and it is an honor to support her nomination.

Shannon’s abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used in criminal justice and forensic medicine, but these tools often exhibit demographic biases that disproportionately impact marginalized populations.

Aim: This study explores AI biases in criminal justice and forensic contexts, focusing on their effects in forensic medicine and proposing mitigation strategies.

Methodology: A literature review of peer-reviewed articles and case studies was conducted to examine biased outcomes, root causes, and implications across domains.

Results: AI tools in criminal justice—such as predictive policing and facial recognition—show racial biases leading to wrongful arrests. In forensic medicine, AI used in autopsies and toxicology reflects similar disparities. Comparable patterns occur in healthcare AI, often due to non-representative data and opaque algorithms.

Discussion and Conclusion: Biased AI in justice and healthcare raises ethical and legal concerns. Mitigation strategies include diversifying data, improving transparency, and enforcing regulatory oversight to ensure fairness across systems.

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Jaydenn Knepp, Higher Education**
    - **Project Title:** Supporting First-Generation College Students Experiencing Imposter Syndrome

Jaydenn's project demonstrates her deep understanding of how to apply college student development theory to enhance student success. While first-generation college students are often viewed through a deficit lens in higher education, Jaydenn's project takes an asset-based approach, recognizing that these students would benefit from peer mentors to help them navigate the complexities of college life. Throughout the project, Jaydenn effectively integrates theory, research, and her experience as an academic advisor to inform her intervention. This work reflects the high quality of Jaydenn's engagement in the program. She is an excellent writer and demonstrates great care in addressing the needs of first-generation college students. For these reasons, Jaydenn Knepp is strongly nominated for the Outstanding Final Project Award.

Jaydenn's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

This project investigates the impact of imposter syndrome on first-generation college students (FGCS) and explores the potential of peer mentorship, particularly horizontal mentoring, to alleviate its effects. It focuses on how peer mentorship programs, which emphasize reciprocal and collaborative relationships, can reduce feelings of inadequacy and foster a stronger sense of belonging among FGCS. By integrating peer mentorship into existing academic and support structures, this project provides a framework for university administrators, faculty, and student services professionals to support FGCS in overcoming self-doubt and promoting both academic and personal growth. The project aims to demonstrate how mentorship can serve as a developmental tool for both mentors and mentees, enhancing emotional and academic success. It offers practical recommendations for integrating horizontal mentorship without requiring extensive new resources, fostering a more inclusive and supportive campus environment. The ultimate goal is to improve retention, sense of belonging, and academic achievement for FGCS.

- **Jessica DeBoer, Literacy Studies**
    - **Project Title:** Knowledge Building Through Interdisciplinary Units

Jessica was enrolled in EDR 693, the literacy master's project course, where she demonstrated a deep understanding of the complexities involved in teaching reading comprehension. Recognizing that students must have adequate prior knowledge to effectively use comprehension strategies, Jessica focused on the positive effects of background knowledge and vocabulary development on reading skills. Her project stood out due to the extensive resources included in the appendices, grounding her ideas in literacy research while contributing original work that can be implemented in schools. This makes Jessica an emerging leader in the field of literacy education. Her dedication to student education and her own professional growth were consistently evident during her time in the Literacy Studies program at Grand Valley State University, making her a true asset to the field.

Jessica's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates that developing a strong knowledge base is vitally important for students to demonstrate comprehension in reading. Comprehension strategies are an important skill to learn but can only be utilized if a student has background knowledge of the subject. Schema theory supports the idea that knowledge is most effectively acquired through networks of prior knowledge built into the brain's long-term memory. The more vocabulary and concept knowledge a person has in their network of schemata, the easier it is for them to connect and hold onto new information. An interdisciplinary curriculum can grow students' knowledge and their comprehension skills. Students encounter integral vocabulary through connected texts around a topic. They have multiple opportunities to apply new knowledge, integrating it into long term memory and thus opening up more space in their working memory. Through interdisciplinary units, students can continuously build knowledge from one subject to another, developing connections within the brain that will support their learning throughout elementary and secondary school.

- **Miranda Young, Educational Leadership**
    - **Project Title:** Addressing Digital Equity through the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools (VILS) Program

Miranda Young, an Educational Specialist candidate in Educational Leadership and Dean of Students at Jefferson Douglas Academy, has demonstrated exceptional leadership and commitment to educational equity. Her final kimber, *Addressing Digital Equity through the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools (VILS) Program*, explores bridging the socio-economic divide in digital access using the Ambrose model of change. By incorporating vision, skills, incentives, resources, an action plan, and accountability, she provides a structured approach to effective technology integration. Her emphasis on supportive monitoring and professional learning ensures long-term success for educators and students alike. Miranda's thoughtfulness, strategic thinking, and dedication to student success make her an invaluable asset to the program. Her leadership and innovation exemplify the high standards of Grand Valley State University.

Miranda's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

This strategic planning process engages diverse stakeholders in identifying and addressing the problem of inconsistent technology integration. Through data-driven decision-making, targeted professional learning, and accountability measures, the district can successfully meet VILS (Verizon Innovative Learning Schools) grant obligations and promote digital equity. Continuous evaluation and stakeholder collaboration will ensure long-term success and systemic improvement in instructional technology practices. By implementing these initiatives, the district will strengthen technology integration in classrooms, bridge the digital equity gap, and successfully meet its VILS grant commitments.

- **Ophelia Zornu, Social Work**
    - **Project Title:** Understanding Support: Experiences of African International Students in U.S. Universities

Ophelia's research stands among the most exceptional projects reviewed, demonstrating academic excellence and profound social impact. Over the past year, she has conducted a rigorous qualitative study, completing a comprehensive literature review, developing a strong research design, and securing IRB approval. Through in-depth interviews with 20 African international students, Ophelia has provided critical insights into their experiences, earning recognition at the Michigan Academy of Arts, Science, and Letters (MASAL) Conference, where she presented alongside PhD scholars. Her exemplary research has also led to an invitation for publication in the MASAL Journal. Beyond academia, Ophelia is committed to sharing her findings with the Padnos International Center, Student Scholars Day, and the Graduate Student Showcase. Her work embodies the principles of social work by advocating for underrepresented populations in higher education.

Ophelia's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: International students contributed significantly to the cultural diversity and economic growth of higher education institutions, yet they faced unique challenges in adapting to their new learning environments. Despite initial orientations and other support services offered by host institutions, navigating services like accommodation, transportation, and healthcare remained daunting. **SUBJECT:** There was limited scientific evidence on how African international students accessed support services and what resources they relied on for their well-being. This research explored the perceptions of African international students from West Michigan regarding the resources they relied on for support and characterized the unmet needs they faced in pursuing their education. **METHODS:** Data was collected through in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 20 students using semi-structured questionnaires. Data was analyzed using the grounded theory approach, assigning codes based on themes that emerged from the interviews. **RESULTS:** The findings suggested that African students faced significant challenges navigating unfamiliar systems, workforce preparation, and cultural adjustment. Support services like university counseling and academic advising aided well-being, while student organizations and cultural events enhanced a sense of belonging. **CONCLUSION:** This research highlighted the importance of inclusive and accessible support services in enhancing African international students' sense of belonging and academic success.

College of Health Professions

- **Erika Ippel and Ashley Stroop, Athletic Training**
    - **Project Title:** Bioimpedance analysis responses to a throwing bout in collegiate baseball players

Ashley Stroop and Erika Ippel have demonstrated exceptional dedication and academic excellence throughout their time in the Master of Athletic Training program. Their research project, *Bioimpedance Analysis Responses to a Throwing Bout in Collegiate Baseball Players*, conducted under the guidance of Dr. Brian Hatzel and Dr. Ross Sherman, showcases their ability to engage in rigorous scholarly work. Through this project, they gained valuable experience in research design, IRB applications, data collection, and analysis, culminating in meaningful conclusions that contribute to the field of athletic training. Their commitment to research and its application to professional practice highlights their deep understanding of the importance of scholarly endeavors in advancing their profession. Both students consistently exhibit leadership, maturity, and a passion for athletic training, going above and beyond expectations in both academic and clinical settings. Their thoughtfulness, curiosity, and professionalism make them outstanding candidates for the Outstanding Final Project Graduate Citation. Ashley and Erika's contributions to research and their field reflect the highest standards of excellence, making them truly deserving of this recognition.

Their abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Background: Baseball pitchers are at high risk for upper extremity injuries due to repetitive, high-intensity workloads. Bioimpedance Analysis (BIA) offers objective data on tissue health, but its application in baseball remains limited. Purpose: This study aimed to assess tissue responses to pitching workloads. Methods: Collegiate pitchers from Davenport University and Muskegon Community College participated. BIA measurements (resistance, reactance, phase angle, extracellular water, and total body water) were taken at four time points. Pitching workload was tracked via the PULSE monitor, and data was analyzed using ANCOVA. Results: Phase angle and total body water in the throwing arm decreased over time, influenced by workload. Differences between schools suggest training level and recovery strategies impact adaptation. Conclusion: BIA may help monitor workload-related tissue changes in pitchers. Future research should expand sample size and track long-term workload trends. Keywords: Bioimpedance, Pitching Workload, Injury Prevention, Baseball.

- **Faith Smith, Public Health**
    - **Project Title:** Endometriosis Inpatient Hospitalization Trends and Comorbidity Burden in Michigan, 2018-2022.

Faith's master's project, *Endometriosis Inpatient Hospitalization Trends and Comorbidity Burden in Michigan, 2018-2022*, is an outstanding contribution to the field of women's health, addressing a significant and understudied area. Her research involved a large-scale analysis of over one million hospitalizations using the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project State Inpatient Database. Faith independently designed her research question, conducted complex statistical analyses, and applied advanced modeling techniques, including join point regression, to evaluate hospitalization trends and comorbidity burdens. Her exceptional scientific writing and meticulous approach to data management have earned her an invitation to present at the 20th Annual Michigan Public Health Association Epidemiology Conference in April 2025. Additionally, she plans to submit her findings for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Faith's initiative, analytical skills, and commitment to high-quality research exemplify the excellence this award seeks to recognize, making her a highly deserving candidate.

Faith's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Around 10% of reproductive-aged women are diagnosed with endometriosis. Current research is limited on recent trends and patterns in endometriosis, including the role of comorbidities. We conducted a descriptive analysis to evaluate the burden of comorbidities and trends over time for endometriosis inpatient hospitalizations in Michigan.

METHODS: Between 2018 and 2022, a cross-sectional analysis using the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project State Inpatient Database for Michigan was conducted for females aged 15-49 years. ICD-10-CM codes were used to identify primary diagnoses of endometriosis (N80.xx). Patients with female genital cancer were excluded (C51.xx-C58.xx). Comorbidities were assessed using the Elixhauser Comorbidity Index. Joinpoint Regression was used to conduct a trend analysis to estimate rates (per 1,000), Annual Percent Change (APC), and 95% Confidence Intervals (CI).

RESULTS: Among n=1,008,146 hospitalizations, 1,580 patients had a primary diagnosis of endometriosis. Endometriosis increased from 1.6 to 1.8 per 1,000 in 2018 to 2022, respectively (APC:1.4, 95% CI: -4.5-7.4). Females aged 36-45 years had a decrease in endometriosis hospitalization rates (APC: -3.5, 95% CI: -8.9-1.6), whereas all other age groups had increased rates. Endometriosis rates among Medicaid recipients increased (APC: 4.8, 95% CI: -6.5-16.7), whereas rates among those with private insurance decreased (APC: -1.0, 95% CI: -5.8-3.6). Inpatient hospitalizations with endometriosis compared to those without had higher percentages of comorbidities, including depression (14.3% vs. 13.1%) and hypertension (17.3% vs. 16.6%).

CONCLUSIONS: There was an overall increase in Michigan endometriosis inpatient hospitalization trends that varied by demographics and a higher burden for major comorbidities. These data can be used to inform future prevention efforts.

- **William Burrel, Irelyn Ankenbauer, Natalie Graber, and Rebekah Simmons, Doctor of Physical Therapy**
    - **Project Title:** Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices of Doctoral Physical Therapy Program Faculty Toward 2SLGBTQIA+ Student Physical Therapists

Willam, Irelyn, Natalie, and Rebekah have demonstrated exceptional dedication and initiative in their research project, *Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices of Doctoral Physical Therapy Program Faculty Toward 2SLGBTQIA+ Student Physical Therapists*. From conceptualization to near completion, they have independently developed their research question, conducted a comprehensive literature review, and adapted an existing survey with permission from the original authors. They sought expert feedback, successfully navigated the IRB approval process, and collaborated with the GVSU Statistical Consulting Center for data analysis. Their ability to effectively manage a complex research project while fostering an open, collaborative environment highlights their professionalism and commitment to academic excellence. Their perseverance and teamwork make them highly deserving candidates for the Outstanding Final Project Award.

Their abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Introduction. A 2024 Gallup survey reported 9.3% of U.S. adults are 2SLGBTQIA+, with the majority between 18 and 27 years old. Educational environment, faculty, and curriculum are identified barriers to learning for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, with limited research specific to Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) education programs. This study examined the influence of age and years of teaching experience in a DPT program on faculty members' beliefs, attitudes, and practices toward 2SLGBTQIA+ students. **Review of Literature.** Negative beliefs, attitudes, and practices contribute to 2SLGBTQIA+ discrimination within healthcare and the classroom. Literature supports safe learning environments and empowerment of 2SLGBTQIA+ students, with faculty playing an integral role. The influence of DPT faculty age and years of teaching experience is unknown. **Subjects.** Faculty from accredited DPT education programs in the Midwest participated. **Methods.** An eighteen-question Qualtrics XM survey was distributed over six weeks. Survey responses were collapsed and categorized into positive, neutral, or negative beliefs, attitudes, and practices toward 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Data was analyzed using Chi-square with Monte Carlo estimation to account for multiple comparisons. **Results.** Eighty-six participants completed the survey. A statistically significant relationship between age and beliefs, attitudes, and practices toward 2SLGBTQIA+ students was found with only one of fifty-five prompts. No statistically significant relationship was found with years of teaching experience. The majority of respondents reported positive beliefs, attitudes, and practices toward 2SLGBTQIA+ students. **Discussion and Conclusion.** A potential confounding relationship between faculty age and years of teaching experience on beliefs, attitudes, and practices toward 2SLGBTQIA+ students warrants further exploration. Regardless of age or years of teaching experience, multiple faculties indicated deficiencies in knowledge, resources, training, and expertise related to 2SLGBTQIA+ curriculum. Closing this gap requires a concerted effort from the APTA, CAPTE, and individual faculty to address disparities and barriers that 2SLGBTQIA+ students face within DPT education programs.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Maxwell Ritchie, Communications**
    - o **Project Title:** Forming identity and creating safe spaces though tackle football: Highlighting the contributions of female athletes in West Michigan

Maxwell has developed a multi-deliverable sports communication project highlighting the Grand Rapids Tidal Waves, a semi-professional women's tackle football team in West Michigan. His work emphasizes the need for more inclusive coverage of women's sports. Competing in the Women's Football Alliance (WFA), the team operates as a self-funded, non-profit organization with little promotional support. Utilizing his expertise in audio, video, and writing, Maxwell has conducted in-depth interviews and filmed practice sessions and games. His project includes a journalistic article exploring identity formation within the team and a natural sound package, a challenging audio-visual storytelling format. This work demonstrates his strong research skills in ethnography and interviewing. Maxwell's dedication, technical skills, and application of course concepts showcase his ability to amplify underrepresented voices in sports media. His professionalism and academic excellence, including maintaining a 4.0 GPA, make this project a significant contribution to sports communication.

Maxwell's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

In this professional communication project, I worked with the *Grand Rapids Tidal Waves*, a semi-professional women's tackle football team in West Michigan to find ways to work with female athletes to elevate their voices in a male-dominated sport. This project is the culmination of three months of onsite observational, interview, and audio-visual work. The themes from this professional research include marginalization of women's sports, the lack of resources with which many female athletic organizations must contend, and how identity formation has evolved in this welcoming atmosphere the players and coaches create.

The deliverables include audio-visual content for the team to use on their Facebook and Instagram accounts as well as a longer-format video for marketing purposes. I am also completing an in-depth journalistic article focusing on the players and coaches within the team and their role in West Michigan sports, and how the team itself acts as a refuge or safe place for these female athletes. I am also editing a natural sound package about the team during their indoor and outdoor practice sessions, highlighting their athletic prowess which is all developed without their own training facility as they raise funds just to be able to play the sport they love.

- **Sony Penupothula, Cell and Molecular Biology**
    - **Project Title:** Automating Elisa with Andrew+: maximizing efficiency in assay workflow

Sony completed her internship at Zoetis, a global animal health company, where she led the assessment of efficiency in assay workflows for automated enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). ELISA is a crucial test for detecting proteins or antibodies, but traditional manual tests are time-consuming and prone to human error. Sony evaluated the efficiency of an automated ELISA system using the ANDREW+ pipetting robot and OneLab software to detect porcine circovirus type 2 (PCV2). Her comparison of automated versus manual ELISA on 176 porcine serum samples revealed a 98% concordance, while reducing hands-on time by 30 minutes per assay. This resulted in an annual time savings of 2,280 minutes, enhancing productivity and standardization in PCV2 antibody detection, ultimately benefiting animal and public health.

Sony's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: The enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) is essential for detecting specific proteins or antibodies. This study evaluated the efficiency and accuracy of an automated ELISA protocol using the Andrew+ Pipetting Robot compared to the traditional manual approach for detecting Porcine Circovirus Type 2 (PCV2) antibodies.

CHALLENGE: Manual ELISA procedures are time-consuming and prone to human errors, affecting consistency and throughput. The challenge was to assess whether automation could enhance accuracy, reduce errors, and improve workflow efficiency.

EXPERIENCE: The study involved running 176 porcine serum samples in duplicate and triplicate using both manual and automated ELISA methods. The Andrew+ robot, programmed via OneLab software, automated sample dilution and plate preparation, whereas the manual method required hand pipetting.

OUTCOME: The automated method demonstrated a 98.3% concordance rate with manual results while reducing hands-on time by 30 minutes per assay. At the Zoetis Kalamazoo facility alone, this translates to a potential annual time savings of 2,280 minutes, increasing productivity and standardization in PCV2 antibody detection.

IMPACT: Automating ELISA assays with the Andrew+ system significantly improves efficiency, reproducibility, and data integrity. This advancement benefits both research and diagnostic workflows, setting the stage for broader applications in biological assay automation.

Kirkhof College of Nursing

- **Andrea Catto, Doctor of Nursing Practice**
  - **Project Title:** Electronic Health Record Integration at a Primary Care Medical Home: A Quality Improvement Project

Andrea exemplifies the qualities sought in this esteemed award, including intellectual curiosity, leadership, and a dedication to improving others' welfare. Her Doctor of Nursing Practice project focused on a comprehensive organizational assessment of a rural family practice in Michigan. She identified a gap and developed a digital form integrated with the electronic medical record, accessible to patients before or during their visit. This innovation addressed a significant barrier for small practices. Andrea's work showed both statistical and clinical significance, improving efficiency and sustainability. Her project, which was presented at KCON, will have a lasting impact on the practice's operations and patient care.

Andrea's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

The advent of electronic health records (EHR) provided healthcare organizations with opportunities to seek innovative solutions to improve patient care while maintaining quality and efficiency by eliminating paper-based documentation. Paper-based documentation is associated with missing, illegible or inaccurate data, integration difficulties, and delays in information processing (IOM, 1997). A primary care medical home in a rural Midwest community is exploring using an electronic form to replace their paper documentation to capture patient-reported review of systems data for adults presenting to their annual physical exams. A quality improvement project was implemented at this clinic to improve the capture of patient-reported Review of Systems data through the use of electronic tablets. A chi-squared analysis of 200 abstracted charts showed a statistically significant difference between the paper-based and electronic forms related to form completion. Electronic-based Review of Systems forms improved capture of patient-reported Review of systems data at this clinic and empirically improved patient and provider satisfaction.

- **Kimberly Cook, Nursing**
    - **Project Title:** Teach-Back Implementation to Improve HCAHPS/Press Ganey Patient Satisfaction for Medication

Kimberly's project exemplifies the core competencies of the clinical nurse leader role through the development, implementation, and evaluation of a scholarly change initiative addressing a persistent issue at her clinical site. Utilizing a 5P microsystem assessment and evidence-based strategies, she led team engagement, staff education, data collection, and practice improvements using IHI tools. Her work enhanced patient education, electronic health record documentation, and new hire training, fostering hospital-wide adoption of the teach-back method. As a HRSA grant awardee, Kimberly demonstrated a deep commitment to underserved communities, earning recognition for her leadership and impact. Her efforts contributed to significant improvements in HCAHPS patient satisfaction scores, particularly in communication about medications. Through mentorship, collaboration, and evidence-based interventions, Kimberly has made a lasting impact on patient care and nursing practice.

Kimberly's abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Effective education specific to medication(s) is an imperative part of positive patient outcomes, a deeper understanding of their care plan, compliance with medications, and overall satisfaction. According to Marks et al. (2022) increased patient engagement in understanding medication communication is invaluable in improving patient outcomes and their experience. Through analysis of the inpatient medical-surgical microsystem patient satisfaction scores in an urban hospital setting, persistent low scores in patient understanding of newly prescribed medications over the last 3 years was identified. Conducting a 5P assessment (purpose, patients, professionals, processes, patterns), several factors directly contributed including inconsistent patient education scripting, inconsistent patient education content, and underutilized teaching tools.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR OUTSTANDING PUBLICATION

Winter 2025

College of Computing

- **Ken Muchira and John Moses Bollarapu, Data Science and Analytics**
  - **Publication Title:** Status of Malaria in the African Continent - Data Mining Insights from Heterogeneous, but Interrelated Data Sources

Ken Muchira and John Moses Bollarapu are nominated for the Outstanding Publication Award for their exceptional research paper, *"Status of Malaria in the African Continent - Data Mining Insights from Heterogeneous, but Interrelated Data Sources."* This study provides a data-driven analysis of malaria trends across Africa, highlighting key challenges and actionable solutions to combat the disease. Their analysis of two decades of malaria data reveals progress in reducing infection and mortality rates while exposing disparities caused by insufficient healthcare investments and policy gaps. Their identification of the shift from effective microscopy tests to less accurate Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) underscores the impact on diagnosis and treatment. The research offers valuable policy recommendations, showcasing their expertise in data mining and public health analytics. This work is a significant contribution to global health, and Muchira and Bollarapu are highly deserving of this award.

Their abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Malaria is a life-threatening mosquito-borne infectious disease, mainly caused by the plasmodium parasites. African continent still suffers the most from this disease for many reasons such as poverty, lack of awareness, lack of investments, insufficient infrastructure and precaution measures, weak policy as well as management, and improper diagnosis practices. In this research, we have performed extensive malaria data analysis for several African countries for the period 2000- 2020 and were able to extract some key insights for actionable insights. Our analysis shows that, overall, the continent has reduced the malaria infection rate from 37% to 25% (and associated death rates from 0.15% to 0.05%) in the last twenty years - a big achievement indeed. Unfortunately, some countries couldn't follow this trend, leading the progress and the development curve to be stalled or constant and sometimes even negative for the last few years. These rates are still higher when we compare them to other parts of the world. We were also able to make some concrete associations with finances, associated investments, and the malaria diagnostics methodologies, adopted and practiced by certain countries. The overall healthcare spending (as a share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)) in Africa is way below the global healthcare spending as reported (5.6% vs 8.5%) in 2020 and (5.18% vs 9.8%) in 2019 by the World Health Organization (WHO). More larmingis, due to healthcare cuts, in recent years many countries switched from the more orthodox and elective microscopy diagnostics tests to comparatively cheaper and less effective Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) leading to severe consequences. We have made some concrete recommendations to combat malaria and to reduce infection and associated mortality rates.

Kirkhof College of Nursing

- **Sarah Geoghan, Doctor of Nursing**
    - **Publication Title:** Professional Identity in Nursing: A narrative review of the ISPIN definition and domains usage

Sarah Geoghan, BSN, RN, served as the lead author for a narrative review titled “Professional Identity in Nursing: A narrative review of the ISPIN definition and domains usage,” which was recently accepted for publication in *Sage Open Nursing Journal*. In this role, Ms. Geoghan conducted a comprehensive literature review, collaborated with GVSU health science librarian Anna White, and created a PRISMA diagram and literature review chart. She also developed a diagram exploring the strengths and gaps in the literature based on the ISPIN definition. The manuscript was completed with oversight from her mentor, Dr. Susan Strouse. This timely review contributes to the advancement of nursing science and professional identity research. Ms. Geoghan's leadership and scholarly contributions, in addition to her academic and teaching roles, reflect her determination and ability to make meaningful contributions to the nursing profession.

Sarah’s abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Established in 2020, the International Society for Professional Identity in Nursing (ISPIN) developed a definition of professional identity in nursing (PIN). This definition encompasses four domains: values and ethics, knowledge, nurse as leader, and professional comportment. *Objectives*: This narrative review aimed to summarize and synthesize identified published evidence, the extent of discussion of PIN domains, and literature gaps for the ISPIN definition of PIN. *Methods*: Sources included peer-reviewed literature published between 2018 to 2025 from CINAHL and PubMed. Gray literature through Google Scholar and ISPIN archived publications were also searched. These were identified by two researchers and a PRISMA flow diagram was developed. No registered protocol was utilized. Search and MeSH terms included “professional identity,” “nurs*,” and “ISPIN.” *Findings:* Thirty-seven articles met inclusion criteria and were extracted from 16,295 initially identified articles, with the majority with authors from the United States. There were very few research papers and a noticeable dearth using quantitative methodologies. Twenty-eight of the retrieved articles were considered expert accounts, conceptual discussion or opinions, common for a relatively new concept. *Discussion*: Nurse as leader was discussed in 34 of 37 articles. Professional comportment was discussed in 31 articles. Both knowledge and value and ethics were discussed in 28 articles. *Conclusion*: This narrative review highlights the nature and prevalence of the ISPIN definitions and its four domains in current literature and can be visualized through diagramming. Minimal quantitative studies and a higher volume of discussion articles present limitations to its strength and applicability. Results suggests the need for further research in all domains, particularly in *knowledge* and *values and ethics*, and its implications in strengthening nursing practice and education.

Padnos College of Engineering

- **Allan Ngaruiya, Engineering**
    - **Publication Title:** Accelerating Electrodeposition Simulation Using Machine Learning

Allan’s study, titled "Accelerating Electrodeposition Simulation Using Machine Learning," tackles the optimization of electrodeposition processes in electrochemical manufacturing. Using data-driven artificial neural networks (ANNs), physics-informed neural networks (PINNs), and hybrid PINNs, his research significantly enhanced the computational efficiency and accuracy of predictions for current density, deposit thickness, and ion concentration. Allan's work, accepted for presentation at the IISE Annual Conference and Expo 2025, shows up to a 120-fold increase in computational speed while improving prediction accuracy. His innovative hybrid PINN model represents a major advancement in both industrial and research applications. Allan’s research exemplifies the original, high-quality work deserving of the Outstanding Publication Award.

Allan’s abstract is on the next page.

ABSTRACT

Electrodeposition plays a vital role in processes such as electrochemical additive manufacturing (ECAM) and electroplating, where precise control over current density and deposit thickness is crucial for achieving desirable mechanical and structural properties. Traditional methods of experimentation and simulation are often time-consuming, costly, and prone to inaccuracies, limiting their usefulness in optimizing electrodeposition parameters. This study investigates the application of machine learning (ML) models, specifically data-driven artificial neural networks (ANNs), simulation-based physics-informed neural networks (PINNs), and hybrid PINNs, to accelerate and enhance the accuracy of electrodeposition parameter predictions. Baseline data was generated from a potentiostatic electrodeposition experiment and simulation models incorporating Fick's Law and Faraday's Law. Data-driven ANNs utilized experimental data, while simulation-based PINNs integrated simulation parameters with physics laws to model current density, deposit thickness, and ion concentration. Hybrid PINNs combined the strengths of both approaches, achieving superior accuracy and adaptability. The results show that ML models, particularly hybrid PINNs, can achieve up to 120 times increase in computational speed compared to traditional simulations, with superior accuracy. These models accurately captured key trends, including the dynamic behavior of ion concentration and deposit growth over time, validating their robustness through comparisons with experimental and simulation results. This study highlights the potential of ML models, especially hybrid PINNs, to revolutionize electrodeposition research and industrial applications by providing rapid, reliable, and scalable solutions for optimizing process parameters. These advancements pave the way for more efficient and cost-effective innovations in electrochemical technologies.

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

Winter 2025

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Abigail DeMeo, Public Administration**

  Abigail DeMeo has demonstrated exceptional leadership and dedication to public administration through her service on the ICMA board, where she has helped connect students with professionals and bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world experience. She organized a successful lunch and learn event with local city managers and led efforts to coordinate student attendance at the Michigan Municipal League's public service conference, securing funding to make it possible. These initiatives provided valuable networking and learning opportunities for her peers. A passionate advocate for civic engagement, Abigail consistently promotes the values of public service on and off campus. Her contributions have made a lasting impact on the MPA program and reflect her commitment to the profession.

- **Alexis Harvey, Public Administration**

  Alexis has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership and a deep commitment to serving underserved populations in both professional and academic settings. Her real-world experience enriches classroom discussions, offering valuable insights into how public administration can uplift communities. Lexi served as site program director for Team 21, supporting students from underserved backgrounds through safe, enriching after-school programs. She also contributed to Mel Trotter Ministries in a human resources role, helping the organization effectively serve individuals facing hunger and homelessness. Currently, as Director of Programming at Camp Blodgett, Lexi leads efforts to provide educational and recreational opportunities to youth in West Michigan. Through every role, Lexi exemplifies the values of public service compassion, leadership, and a commitment to positive change. Her contributions continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

- **Alyssa Beil, Social Work**

  Alyssa Beil has demonstrated outstanding dedication to community service through her work in play therapy and mental health advocacy. At THE PLAYGROUNDgr, she has led impactful programming, including a senior-focused play therapy group, and supported underserved communities with compassion and creativity. Her contributions to the "Healing Through Play" program in Grand Rapids Public Schools highlight her ability to build trust, promote emotional wellness, and honor cultural norms in school settings. Alyssa also supports THE PLAYGROUNDgr's internal growth through policy work, data collection, and event planning. Her commitment to accessible therapy and her leadership in service reflect the core values of social work. She is deeply respected by those she serves and works alongside.

- **Cole Myers, Health Administration**

  Cole Myers has shown outstanding service to the profession through active involvement in the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) and leadership within two local ACHE chapters. As President of the Healthcare Professional Graduate Student Association (ACHE student chapter), he has organized networking events and career development opportunities for fellow students. He has also played a key role in advancing the GVSU peer mentor program, fostering connection and professional growth within the MHA community. His leadership and dedication reflect a strong commitment to supporting both peers and the healthcare administration field.

- **Rashawny Alic, Criminal Justice**

  Rashawny Alic has demonstrated both academic excellence and a strong commitment to service throughout her time in the Criminal Justice master's program at Grand Valley State University, graduating with a 3.967 GPA. A graduate of Savannah State University, she joined GVSU through the HBCU/HSI Consortium and quickly became a valuable member of the university and surrounding community. She has consistently excelled in her coursework, earning high marks across both core and interdisciplinary classes. Her ability to connect theory with real-world application shows a strong potential to influence future criminal justice policy. She has also contributed meaningfully outside the classroom, notably through her involvement in the Bellamy Creek program, supporting incarcerated individuals earning GVSU degrees. Beyond her academic and professional contributions, Rashawny is known for mentoring peers and supporting new graduate students. Her dedication, leadership, and commitment to service have made a lasting impact on both the department and the community.

- **Ryan Engle, Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership**

  Ryan has demonstrated exceptional leadership and service through his role as Director of Development and Strategic Engagement for Michigan Veteran Homes (MVH). He oversees community engagement across three state facilities and has led a 44% increase in philanthropic donations from FY22 to FY23, significantly expanding support for Michigan's veterans. As legislative liaison for MVH and the Michigan Veterans Facility Authority, Ryan has successfully led state and federal advocacy efforts, including meetings in Washington, D.C., policy drafting, and collaboration with congressional representatives to ensure veterans' needs are reflected in legislation. His commitment extends beyond his professional role. He recently organized a service-learning project at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans, offering hands-on experiences for students and faculty while directly supporting the veteran community. Ryan's strategic leadership, policy advocacy, and community impact reflect his deep dedication to public service and veterans' well-being.

College of Health Professions

- **Claudia Thelen, Clinical Dietetics**

  Claudia Thelen has demonstrated exceptional commitment to community service and the field of dietetics through her academic, volunteer, and leadership roles. As a student in the Clinical Dietetics Program at Grand Valley State University, she has led wellness initiatives as President and Vice President of Catholic Student Ministries, participated in FOCUS Mission Trips, and volunteered with God's Kitchen strengthening her ability to support diverse populations. Through her supervised practice at TANDEM365 and Covenant Living, Claudia developed multi-diagnosis nutrition handouts, provided virtual consultations, and promoted patient-centered care for underserved communities. She also engaged in legislative advocacy to expand Medicare coverage for Medical Nutrition Therapy, reflecting her dedication to improving public health through policy. Her community nutrition rotation went beyond requirements, contributing lasting value through research, staff education, and innovative resources.

- **Jacqueline Clark, Public Health**

  Jacqueline Clark has shown exceptional dedication to healthcare and public health through her work as a Patient Care Technician at Munson Healthcare and her graduate studies in Public Health at Grand Valley State University. She bridges clinical experience with academic knowledge, enhancing her impact in both fields. As a board member of the Public Health Society, she has led initiatives to promote health education and improve access to care. Her leadership, mentorship, and commitment to service have left a lasting impression on her peers and community. Currently, she is a Top 7 finalist in the 77 Idea Quest competition, where she will pitch a smoking cessation app. In addition to her service, Jacqueline is recognized for her academic excellence and professionalism, consistently going above and beyond in every role she takes on.

- **Rylee Cooper, Doctor of Physical Therapy**

  Rylee Cooper has shown exceptional dedication to the physical therapy profession and broader community through her active involvement in APTA and APTA Michigan. As the GVSU Class of 2025 APTA Liaison, she promoted student membership and mentored new liaisons. She also served as Vice President and President of the APTA Michigan Student Special Interest Group, planning student engagement events such as the Fall Meet and Greet and Student Conclave. Rylee organized a National Advocacy Dinner, coordinating all aspects of the event to connect Michigan legislators with student PTs and PTAs around key healthcare issues. Her service extends beyond the profession, with involvement in the 2024 Wheel Run for Everyone, Kid's Food Basket, Red Cross, GVSU Pro Bono Clinic, Samaritas Senior Living, and Global PT Day of Service. Her leadership and commitment to service reflect an outstanding dedication to both her profession and community.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Hannah Bekius, Cell and Molecular Biology**

  Hannah Bekius has made significant contributions to public health through her work in the Molecular Monitoring (MoM) lab in the Department of Cell and Molecular Biology. Starting as an undergraduate researcher, she transitioned into a graduate internship in Spring 2024, leading efforts to monitor E. coli levels in Barry County beach waters. Her work involved collaboration with the Barry and Eaton County Health Department and EGLE. Hannah played a central role in the 2024 beach monitoring project, contributing to grant writing, budgeting, and serving as the main contact with the health department. She conducted weekly testing, trained new students, and ran molecular assays to identify contamination sources directly supporting beach closures and sewer system improvements. Her efforts have had a measurable impact on water safety and public health in Michigan.

Kirkhof College of Nursing

- **Jenifer VanWyngarden, Doctor of Nursing Practice**

  Jenifer VanWyngarden has demonstrated exceptional service to both the community and her profession through her longstanding dedication to mental health care. With a background in social work and nursing, she has worked in various roles at community mental health organizations including Network180, Cherry Health, and Touchstone Innovare, serving some of Kent County's most vulnerable populations. Her work in assertive community treatment programs reflects her deep commitment to adults with severe and persistent mental illness. Throughout her Doctor of Nursing Practice program, Jenifer has maintained her clinical role while completing her DNP project evaluating an outpatient electroconvulsive therapy clinic at Trinity Health. In addition to her academic responsibilities, she served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, supporting faculty and students with organization, insight, and leadership. Jenifer's ability to balance rigorous academic work with impactful community service highlights her passion for mental health care, nursing education, and advocacy. Her contributions have left a lasting impression on both the community and the classroom.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE TO GVSU

Winter 2025

College of Computing

- **Ian Curtis, Data Science and Analytics**

  Ian has demonstrated exceptional leadership and service to GVSU through his role as a graduate research assistant in the Data Science and Analytics master's program. From 2023 through Winter 2025, Ian co-led the development of the open-source R package **gvsu215**, which has been implemented across all STA 215 courses impacting around 100 sections annually. The package replaced the previously used proprietary SPSS software, lowering costs for students and introducing more modern statistical methods. Ian's work not only enhanced course quality but also broadened access to industry-relevant tools. In addition to his strong programming skills, Ian demonstrated excellent communication and problem-solving abilities throughout the project. His contributions have significantly enriched the student experience and curriculum at GVSU.

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Albert Okwei, Public Administration**

  Albert has made a lasting impact at GVSU through his exceptional leadership, service, and advocacy for graduate students. Albert's influence extends through his roles on the Graduate Council, the Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society Membership Committee, and as a Resident Assistant at the Mark A. Murray Living Center, each demonstrating his commitment to inclusivity, mentorship, and student success. As a Fellow Candidate in the Peter C. Cook Leadership Academy, he applies leadership lessons to real-world challenges, driving positive change.

- **Mackenzie Green, Social Work**

  Mackenzie has made outstanding contributions to the field of social work through her initiative, creativity, and commitment to service during her MSW program. In her recent role with the Partialized Hospitalization Adolescent Program, she quickly adapted to a new clinical setting, building strong relationships with clients, families, and the treatment team. Beyond her clinical work, Mackenzie has created educational materials, intervention strategies, and case management tools that have improved the quality of care and supported her team's effectiveness. Her ability to apply theory to practice demonstrates a deep understanding of social work principles and a strong dedication to personal and professional growth. Her service has also positively impacted the School of Social Work by strengthening ties with her field placement site, helping to secure future internship opportunities for MSW students. Mackenzie's leadership and proactive approach have reinforced the value of experiential learning and highlighted the strength of GVSU's graduate program.

College of Health Professions

- **Claire Lynch, Public Health**

  Claire has shown exceptional leadership and service throughout her time at GVSU. Known for her compassion, integrity, and humility, Claire consistently fosters collaboration and motivates her peers with empathy and vision. Over the past two years, she has made a lasting impact through her work with both the GVSU community and Disability Advocates, demonstrating a deep commitment to serving others. Claire's approachable nature and dedication to uplifting those around her have defined her leadership and left a meaningful impression on the university community.

- **Elizabeth Kalafut, Clinical Dietetics**

  Elizabeth has demonstrated exceptional leadership and service throughout her time at GVSU. A student in the Combined Degree Program in Clinical Dietetics, she serves as Co-President of the Clinical Dietetics Student Association, where she fosters student engagement and provides continuing education opportunities. She is also a member of the CHP Student Empowerment and Success Council, the Kirkhof Advisory Board Committee, and serves as a Campus Links Mentor. Elizabeth co-presented at the 2024 Teach-In on food insecurity, sharing meaningful insights during a panel on "Hidden Hunger on Campus." As a Senior Resident Assistant, she mentors and trains new staff while supporting campus residents. Known for her compassion, motivation, and outgoing nature, Elizabeth has consistently connected with peers and newcomers, leaving a lasting impact on the university community. Her leadership will undoubtedly continue beyond graduation.

- **Lauryn Carlisi, Clinical Dietetics**

  Lauryn has demonstrated exceptional leadership and service at GVSU through her dedication to nutrition, community engagement, and academic excellence. She has contributed to programs such as Meals on Wheels Western Michigan, Revive and Thrive Project, and Feeding America West Michigan, where she supported vulnerable populations and led educational

and research initiatives on food insecurity. At GVSU, Lauryn serves as Social Media Chair for the Clinical Dietetics Student Association and has held executive roles in Delta Zeta, including Health and Wellness Chair and Panhellenic Delegate Assistant. Her leadership style is collaborative and inspiring, and she consistently seeks out opportunities to grow demonstrated by her initiative to network with professionals and her poise during group work. Lauryn maintains a 4.0 GPA in the Master of Science in Clinical Dietetics program and is highly praised by faculty and preceptors. Her compassion, professionalism, and commitment to service make her a standout leader and role model within the GVSU community.

- **Marissa Kolp, Doctor of Physical Therapy**

  Marissa Kolp has demonstrated outstanding leadership and service through her extensive involvement in the GVSU Doctor of Physical Therapy program and the broader community. She has served as E-Board Secretary for the DPT Class of 2025, Co-Coordinator for PTs for IDEA, and Student Coordinator for the Physical Therapy Outreach Initiative. Additionally, she has contributed as a student interviewer, tutor, and tour guide for the program. Beyond campus, Marissa has volunteered with organizations and events such as Renew Mobility, Wheel Run, Kid's Food Basket, PT Day of Service, and Community Service in Learning. Her dedication to both GVSU and the community reflects her deep commitment to service and makes her a strong example of leadership in action.

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Taylor Carlson, School Psychology – Master of Science and Psychological Specialist**

  Taylor has demonstrated exceptional leadership, dedication, and service throughout her time at Grand Valley State University. As a leader within her cohort, Taylor made significant contributions as the President of the Student Affiliates in School Psychology (SASP) organization. Under her leadership, SASP successfully organized numerous cross-cohort social and professional development events, helping students connect and learn from

one another. Additionally, Taylor spearheaded efforts to honor the achievements of professionals in the field by recognizing a local school psychologist as the SASP School Psychologist of the Year. Her leadership also ensured that GVSU students had opportunities for professional growth, securing GSA funding for 18 students to attend a state conference and 10 students to attend a national conference in New Orleans.

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

Winter 2025

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Albert Okwei, Public Administration**

  Albert has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to promoting inclusion and diversity both at GVSU and within the broader West Michigan community. As Communications and Event Coordinator for the Urban League of West Michigan, he significantly increased engagement in health-related events for marginalized communities, ensuring underrepresented voices had access to vital resources and conversations. Beyond event coordination, Albert has contributed to program evaluation, GAP analyses, and grant support efforts, always prioritizing equity and accessibility. During his internship as a Workforce Development Specialist, he conducted research on systemic issues like redlining and gentrification to inform programs that expanded employment opportunities for underserved populations. Albert's dedication to inclusion extends into his daily interactions and academic life. His commitment to social justice, equitable access, and community empowerment makes him a model of inclusive leadership and a powerful advocate for marginalized communities.

- **Daniela Centeno, Social Work**

  Daniela exemplifies excellence in promoting inclusion and diversity through her lived experience, advocacy, and service in the MSW Program at GVSU. As a first-generation Latina graduate of Grand Rapids Public Schools, she has overcome significant barriers and now serves as a role model and mentor for her peers, inspiring others through her resilience and leadership. Currently interning at two of the most diverse GRPS schools, Daniela brings empathy and cultural insight to her work, building trust with students and families. Her bilingual skills enhance her ability to support Spanish-speaking families, and her advocacy for equitable education is evident in her individualized, student-centered approach. Daniela's calm presence, adaptability, and dedication to inclusive education reflect her

deep commitment to social justice. Her work continues to break down cultural and language barriers while creating opportunities for underserved communities making her a powerful advocate for equity and a strong future leader in social work.

- **Kobe Rhynes, Health Administration**

  Kobe has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting inclusion and diversity during his time at GVSU. As the first student to complete the MHA program through the HBCU Consortium, Kobe has remained deeply connected to his roots, serving as a mentor and encourager to many young Black men on campus. He has actively contributed to the university and wider community through his participation in the annual Black Men and Boys Symposium and his role in organizing a youth violence prevention program. Kobe's leadership and advocacy efforts reflect his dedication to uplifting underrepresented communities and fostering a more inclusive environment at GVSU.

College of Health Professions

- **Ashley Perryman, Public Health**

  Ashley Perryman has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting inclusion and diversity through her academic and community work as a Master of Public Health student at GVSU. Her partnership with the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute (GRAAHI) from Fall 2024 through Winter 2025 exemplifies her dedication to addressing health disparities in the local BIPOC community. Through her practicum and volunteer efforts, Ashley contributed to workshops, created culturally relevant health promotion materials, and supported GRAAHI's Health Disparities Transformational Summit. She is also developing a theory-based program on self-advocacy and patient rights for the African American community, which GRAAHI plans to implement after her graduation. Ashley's work goes beyond academic expectations, reflecting both leadership and a lasting commitment to equity. Her efforts will continue to positively impact both GVSU and the broader Grand Rapids community.

- **Mackenzie Allen, Clinical Dietetics**

  Mackenzie Allen has made significant contributions to promoting diversity and inclusion at GVSU through her leadership, volunteer work, and dedication to advancing representation in sports nutrition. As Chair and interim DEI Chair of the Clinical Dietetics Student Association, she fostered inclusive student engagement and advocacy within her program. At her supervised practice site with GVSU Athletics, Mackenzie created and implemented sports nutrition programming that had not previously existed. She met individually with over 100 student-athletes, delivered team presentations, and partnered with the Sustainable Agriculture Program to expand healthy food options. She also volunteered at multiple football games and practices, offering nutrition education and support, and trained the next clinical dietetics student for the role. Mackenzie's efforts have not only enhanced student-athlete health and performance but also empowered women in a traditionally underrepresented field. Her work reflects a deep commitment to equity, inclusion, and community impact.

- **Sydney Washington, Doctor of Physical Therapy**

  Sydney has demonstrated exceptional leadership in promoting inclusion and diversity at GVSU. As an undergraduate, she was recognized with the Exemplary Leadership Award and the I Am Grand Valley award for her consistent advocacy and engagement on campus. In graduate school, she co-founded and leads the student organization Physical Therapists for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accountability (PTs for IDEAs), coordinating meetings, newsletters, speaker events, and communication efforts. Her work has created a supportive space for underrepresented students and allies within the DPT program. Sydney also earned the Solstice Scholarship, using it to support GVSU's Replenish Basic Needs Center. Despite the demands of the DPT program, she continues to dedicate her time to service and advocacy.

Padnos College of Engineering

- **Erin Searcy, Engineering**

  Erin Searcy has shown outstanding dedication to promoting diversity and inclusion at GVSU through both academic and leadership roles. As a graduate assistant in first-year engineering courses and president of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), she has made a lasting impact on the student community. Under Erin's leadership, NSBE has become a vibrant and inclusive space, with enhanced participation in volunteer-led study tables that now serve as a hub for peer support and connection among minority students. She has also organized events such as game nights, movie nights, and resume workshops to foster community engagement and professional growth. Erin's thoughtful leadership and commitment to creating welcoming spaces have strengthened the sense of belonging for underrepresented students in engineering and across campus.

GRADUATE SCHOOL CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN SUSTAINABILITY

Winter 2025

College of Education and Community Innovation

- **Sidney Sparks, Social Work**

  Sidney Sparks is a highly deserving candidate for the Award for Excellence in Sustainability. With her exceptional intellect, dedication, and commitment to sustainable social work practices, she has consistently demonstrated her passion for making a lasting impact. Sidney's ability to actively listen, analyze, and adapt to diverse environments has earned her respect as an emerging social work professional. During her internship, she made significant contributions to client projects and internal initiatives, particularly through her work on the "Mobile Crisis Strategy Report" for the Muskegon Area Mental Health and Recovery Services Board. Sidney's research and recommendations have had a lasting impact on sustaining critical mental health services. Her unwavering commitment to social justice and sustainable solutions truly exemplifies the core values of social work.

- **Tai Verbrugge, Public Administration**

  Tai's dedication to sustainability is demonstrated through his directed studies project, where he researched strategies for preserving the Great Lakes water supply. His work, both academically rigorous and practical, explores solutions to protect this vital resource. Tai also serves as a utility financial officer for the City of Grand Rapids, ensuring sustainable funding and clean water provision. His financial management role reflects his commitment to both economic and environmental sustainability. Additionally, Tai serves as treasurer for New City Neighbors, a nonprofit empowering youth through urban farming initiatives. His work fosters social sustainability, helping to create resilient, sustainable communities.

College of Health Professions

- **Mary Fournier, Doctor of Physical Therapy**

  Mary's passion for sustainability led her to found the non-profit organization *To: Africa From U.S. (TAFU)*, which has built strong, trusting relationships with the communities of Kyotera and Biikira. TAFU has successfully raised funds to support sustainable initiatives, including providing large water tanks for the village of Biikira and local schools, opening a library, and building dormitories and classrooms. They also funded livestock, farming equipment, bicycles, student schooling, and healthcare infrastructure, raising approximately $95,000 for these efforts. In addition to her work with TAFU, Mary has volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, God's Kitchen, Kid's Food Basket, Access West Michigan, Special Olympics, and various community clean-ups.

- **Skylar Clark, Clinical Dietetics**

  Skylar has been an outstanding student in the Clinical Dietetics Program at GVSU since Fall 2023, showing exceptional leadership and dedication to both the university and the dietetic profession. As the Co-President of the Clinical Dietetics Student Association, she organized monthly meetings featuring dietitian speakers from diverse specialties. Skylar also attended the 2023 Food and Nutrition Expo (FNCE) Conference in Denver and led student participation in the 2024 FNCE Conference in Minneapolis, securing funding through the Graduate Student Association to reduce financial burdens for students. Additionally, she hosted a student-led event where dietetic students created cooking demonstration videos and recipe guides for the Grand Rapids LGBTQ+ Healthcare Consortium. After completing her graduate practicum at the Revive and Thrive Project, Skylar was offered a grant specialist position and recently accepted a full-time role as the first Registered Dietitian at the same organization upon graduation in August 2025.

- **Terin Hieftje, Public Health**

  Terin, currently enrolled in the MPH program at Grand Valley State University with an anticipated graduation date of April 2025, has demonstrated a profound commitment to health and long-term change. Through her research, “Mindfulness in the Collegiate Classroom,” in collaboration with a peer and faculty, Terin has shown dedication to understanding the need for mindfulness practices in collegiate spaces, particularly in public health classrooms. Over the past two years, her research has significantly impacted classroom success, student socialization, and mental health. Her work, which included multi-semester data collection and analysis, was showcased at the Michigan Premier Public Health Conference. Terin’s dedication to creating sustainable results for student well-being truly exemplifies excellence in sustainability.

Kirkhof College of Nursing

- **Chelsi Linzner, Nursing**

  Chelsi, a Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) grant awardee, has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to serving her community in the rural Thumb region of Michigan. Starting her scholarly project in Fall 2024, Chelsi identified a critical issue at her clinical practicum site: the lack of interprofessional bedside rounds to address transitions of care from the hospital to the community. Faced with high readmission rates and patient dissatisfaction, she engaged an interprofessional team to implement evidence-based best practices, improving workflows and patient engagement. Her efforts resulted in the successful replication of interprofessional bedside rounds in two rural hospitals, enhancing patient satisfaction, reducing readmissions, and strengthening the hospital’s reputation. This innovative work has created a lasting impact on care delivery and community sustainability.

- **Samuel Terranova, Doctor of Nursing**

  Samuel Terranova is enthusiastically nominated for the Award for Excellence in Sustainability in recognition of his innovative reminder system and standardized ordering system for colorectal cancer screening. Through this initiative, Samuel has demonstrated exceptional leadership in promoting sustainable healthcare practices. By integrating the reminder system into electronic medical records and standardizing orders, he created a scalable solution that improves screening rates while reducing long-term healthcare costs. His project addresses both economic sustainability, by lowering costs through early cancer detection, and social sustainability, by improving patient outcomes and access to preventative care. Samuel's work serves as a model for impactful, data-driven sustainability initiatives. He consistently displays dedication, resilience, and adaptability, fostering a positive and inclusive environment, and inspiring others through his collaborative spirit and meaningful contributions.

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

Winter 2025

College of Health Professions

- **Heather Koster, School of Interdisciplinary Health**

  Heather is an Academic Coordinator for the School of Interdisciplinary Health at Grand Valley State University. She has made an extraordinary and lasting impact on the Master of Public Health program and the broader graduate student community. Her unwavering dedication, leadership, and student-centered approach have significantly shaped the culture of support, inclusion, and collaboration within the School of Interdisciplinary Health (SIH). Heather's work transcends administrative duties. She is the heartbeat of graduate student support, consistently going above and beyond to create an enriching, welcoming environment for all. She is instrumental in organizing key program events such as practicum boot camps, new student orientations, project presentations, and workshops that serve both students and the wider community. A master communicator and problem-solver, Heather maintains weekly newsletters that include program updates, job opportunities, important dates, and helpful reminders

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION OUTSTANDING TEACHING AWARD
Winter 2025

Kirkhof College of Nursing

- **Dr. Emily Bemben, Nursing**

  Dr. Bemben has made a profound impact on the Psychiatric Mental Health DNP graduate coursework since joining the Grand Valley State University faculty. She actively seeks and incorporates student feedback, fostering a collaborative and engaging learning environment. Her dedication to curriculum improvement is evident in her innovative assignments, which make complex concepts accessible and intellectually stimulating. Beyond coursework, Dr. Bemben is consistently available, kind, and compassionate, demonstrating a genuine commitment to student success. She employs evidence-based teaching practices, such as mid-semester surveys and course evaluation feedback, to refine her courses while maintaining academic rigor. Her responsiveness and flexibility ensure that students feel supported, even amidst the challenges of balancing graduate studies with full-time work and personal responsibilities. When students expressed concerns about program demands, she elevated their voices rather than dismissing them, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to education and student well-being. Her leadership, empathy, and dedication make her an invaluable asset to the program and the broader academic community.

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION OUTSTANDING MENTORING AWARD
Winter 2025

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- **Dr. Anthony Spencer, Communications**

  Dr. Spencer's mentorship extends far beyond research, actively fostering professional growth for his students. He has recommended students as reviewers for academic conferences, shared job opportunities, and encouraged them to pursue instructional and industry roles, demonstrating his trust in their potential. His support is not limited to advising as he equips students with the confidence and skills necessary to excel as scholars and educators. A defining aspect of Dr. Spencer's mentorship is his dedication to removing barriers to student success. He also encouraged attendance at the National Communication Association (NCA) conference, introducing students to key scholars and connections that have led to Ph.D. program admissions. His impact is evident in students' academic achievements, including awards and research presentations. His thoughtful gestures, such as bringing back books from conferences, further highlight his investment in student growth. Dr. Spencer does not just instruct, he models excellence, guiding students through research, refining their ideas, and fostering their professional development. His transformative mentorship has empowered countless students, making him an outstanding candidate for this award.

GRADUATE STUDENT PRESIDENTIAL RESEARCH GRANT RECIPIENTS

Winter 2025

Kreger, Maisley. College of Health Professions, Speech-Language Pathology.
Title: “Improving Resilience and Self-Perceptions in Children with Speech Disorders: A Six-Week Bibliotherapy Intervention”

Lynch, Claire. College of Health Professions, Public Health
Title: “Strength in Inclusion: Fitness Programming for College Students with Disabilities”

Martin, Sarah, Buchner, Jenica. College of Health Professions, Physical Therapy and Athletic Training
Title: “Burnout and Workplace Stress in Secondary School Athletic Trainers”

Shutz, Kyle. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Cell and Molecular Biology
Title: “Testing Between the Gravitational Pressure and Statolith Models”

Smith, Grace. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Biomedical Sciences
Title: “Neurophysiological Alterations in Crayfish in response to Common Inhibitory Drug”

Zornu, Ophelia. College of Education and Community Innovation, Social Work
Title: “Understanding Support: Experiences of African International Students in U.S. Universities”

Fall 2024

Kelley, Jaylyn. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Biomedical Sciences.
Title: *Storage Optimization for Kidney Transplant*

Olszewski, Mitchell. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Biology – Aquatic Sciences.
Title: *Freshwater fish as a bioindicator for Escherichia coli (E. coli) in contaminated river systems in Michigan*

Smith, Alyssa. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Biology – Aquatic Sciences.
Title: *Investigating Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Food Web Dynamics using a Novel Stable Isotope Tracer Approach*

Wiler-Beltman, Maisie. College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Biology.
Title: *Lady's slipper orchids and fire: examining occurrence, mycorrhizal associations, and the influence of fire in Cypripedium spp*

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

President: Lauren King, Higher Education

Finance Officer: Albert Okwei, Public Administration

Communications Officer: Mae Zurita, Higher Education

Administration Officers: Afu Asante and Francis Monari

Advisors:
Dr. Matthew Christians, Cell and Molecular Biology
Dr. Sarah Nechuta, Public Health
Dr. Tonisha Jones, Criminal Justice

GRADUATE COUNCIL OFFICERS

Chair:
Dr. Amy Campbell, Psychology

Vice-Chair:
Dr. Lara Kessler, Accounting

Policy Subcommittee Chair:
Dr. Amy Campbell, Psychology

Curriculum and Program Review Subcommittee Chair:
Dr. Mark Staves, Cell and Molecular Biology

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL STAFF

Erica Hamilton, Ph.D., Interim Vice Provost for the Graduate School

Jennifer Moore, Ph.D., Interim Assistant Vice Provost

Trista Shumway, Assistant Director of Programming and Communication

Sheri DeVries, Administrative Assistant to the Vice Provost for the Graduate School

Graduate Assistants:

Skye Gerald, Applied Computer Science
Aruna Karkee, Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership
Samsriti Satyal, Applied Computer Science

Student Assistant:

Katelyn Keech, Health Communications (undergraduate)

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