

JESSE M. BERNAL, PH.D.

SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

Grand Valley State University (2015 – Present)

- Vice President for Strategy & University Initiatives (2024 – Present)
- Chief Executive, **GVSU Public Charter Schools & GVNextED Innovation Co-Lab** (2024 – Present)
- Chief of Staff to the President (Operations, Strategy & Innovation) (2019 – Present)
- Vice President for Inclusion and Equity (2015 – 2024)
- Acting Vice Provost for Student Affairs & Dean of Students (2017)

REP4 Alliance (www.rep4.org)

- Chief Catalyst Officer (2023 – Present)

Santa Clara University

- Director, Office for Diversity and Inclusion (2014 – 2015)

University of California (2006 – 2013)

- Systemwide Diversity Coordinator and Special Assistant to the Provost, **UC Office of the President** (2010 – 2013)
- Educational Opportunity Program Coordinator, **University of California, Merced** (2010)
- First-Year and Pre-College Special Programs Manager, Office of Summer Sessions, **UC Santa Barbara** (2006 – 2009)

EDUCATION

- University of California, Santa Barbara: **Ph.D. in Education**, Emphasis in Cultural Perspectives in Education, *Dixon-Levy Service Award, University Service Award*
- University of California, Santa Barbara: **M.A. in Education**
- Westmont College (Santa Barbara, California): **B.A. in Political Science**, *magna cum laude*

Executive Leadership Development

- **Peer Corp Team Chair Certification**, Higher Learning Commission Accreditation (2025).
- **Foresight Thinking**, Institute of Futures Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark (2024).
- **Excelencia in Education Policy Fellows Program**, Latino Policy Fellows (2023).
- **Title IX Appellate Officer Certification**, NACCOP by D. Stafford & Associates (2023).

- **Executive Leadership Academy**, Center for Studies in Higher Education, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley (2022).
- **Title IX Coordinator Certification**, Academic Impressions (2022).
- **George Blumenthal Scholar**, Mentorship in Executive Leadership, UC Berkeley (2021).
- **FEMA Emergency Management Institute**, IS-00100.c: Incident Command System (2021).
- **Institute for Educational Management**, Executive Education Program, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University (2018).
- **Peer Review Corp Certification**, Higher Learning Commission Accreditation (2016).

SELECT RECOGNITIONS & HONORS

- Top 50 Latino Legacy Leaders of Michigan, 2025
- 25 Most Influential Latinos in Michigan, 2024
- Top DEI Leaders in Michigan, Crain’s Grand Rapids, 2023
- Notable LGBTQ Leader in Business, Crain’s Detroit, 2022
- Jack Chaille Community Philanthropy Award, 2022
- Grand Rapids Community Foundation 100 New Philanthropists, 2022
- Gillett Society, Grand Valley State University, 2020
- Aguila Latino Legacy Award, Grand Rapids Committee to Honor César E. Chávez, 2018
- 40 under 40, Grand Rapids Business Journal, 2017
- LAM Latino Network of the Silicon Valley, Member of the Month, 2014
- LGBT Advocate Award of Distinction, UC Santa Cruz, 2011
- STAR Award for Outstanding Employee Contributions, UC Office of the President, 2013
- Regent Emeritus, UC Board of Regents, 2010
- UC Santa Barbara University Service Award, 2012
- UC Student Advocate of the Year, 2008

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Administrative Positions at Grand Valley State University

GVSU attracts nearly 24,000 students from Michigan, across the United States, and around the globe. As a comprehensive institution, it offers over 300 undergraduate and graduate degree programs that emphasize academic excellence, innovation, and community engagement. With primary campuses in Allendale, Grand Rapids, and Holland, and additional regional centers in Battle Creek, Detroit, Muskegon, and Traverse City, GVSU is committed to accessibility and impact across the state. Anchored in a foundation of liberal education, GVSU fosters critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and cultural understanding to empower lifelong learners and global citizens. The university’s strategic vision, Reach Higher 2025, embodies a commitment to providing students with an empowered educational experience, fostering a culture of educational equity, and supporting lifelong learning. GVSU seeks to prepare learners for the evolving

challenges of our world through inclusive education, cutting-edge technology, and a deep commitment to community and sustainability.

Vice President for Strategy & University Initiatives

In this inaugural role as Vice President for Strategy & University Initiatives, I serve as the President's primary strategic advisor and, in her absence, her chief representative. My work centers on shaping and implementing the university's vision through cross-functional leadership, ensuring that key initiatives align with long-term institutional goals. I oversee the development of comprehensive strategic plans, and integration of digital, enrollment, and academic planning, direct central administration operations, and lead high-impact projects that drive university-wide progress. Leveraging extensive executive leadership experience, I coordinate critical decision-making processes, foster synergies across departments, manage crisis response, and enhance communication to unify teams and resources. By promoting collaboration, championing innovation, and strengthening partnerships with internal and external constituents, I work to ensure that the university's mission is advanced with efficiency and strategic precision.

I. Senior Campus Leadership as Vice President for Strategy & University Initiatives

- Executive Officer to the Board of Trustees
- Strategic Planning Executive Lead
- University Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Executive Sponsor
- Strategic Enrollment Management: Data & Evaluation Team Lead & Special Populations Teams Lead
- Cross-Divisional Academic Capacity and Growth Initiative Lead
- Shared Governance/Engagement Joint Faculty-Administration Co-Design Team

II. Major Responsibilities & Accomplishments

- **Strategic Leadership & Institutional Growth:** Led integrated strategic planning and capacity-building efforts that, through collaboration and enterprise leadership, increased new student enrollment by 28% and engaged over 100 leaders in shaping institutional strategy.
- **Academic Excellence & Resource Optimization:** Advanced academic quality and efficiency by supporting new systems to realign program offerings with market demand and driving data-informed curricular and resource decisions.
- **Financial Stewardship & Operational Management:** Oversaw \$65M+ in budgets, achieved record-breaking fundraising results, and established transparent, KPI-driven accountability systems.
- **Change Management & Innovation Leadership:** Implemented transformative change strategies that fostered innovation, institutional trust, and long-term adaptability.
- **Community Engagement & Partnerships:** Built collaborative partnerships with schools, communities, and industries to expand student pipelines, align workforce needs, and enhance crisis resilience.
- **Governance, Policy, & Advocacy:** Guided executive policy development and supported compelling advocacy campaigns that strengthened public support and demonstrated institutional ROI.
- **Innovation & Strategic Investments:** Directed multimillion-dollar initiatives and revitalized key university institutes to elevate student success and institutional impact on a national scale.

Chief of Staff to the President

In 2019, upon President Mantella's arrival, I expanded my responsibilities as Vice President for Inclusion and Equity to include serving as the President's Chief of Staff and primary deputy. In this role, I act as a strategic advisor to the President and a leader across key areas: operations, strategy, engagement, and innovation. My responsibilities encompass supporting the Employee Ombuds Office, overseeing the Educational Innovation and School Support Division (including charter school operations), directing the NextEd Accelerator/Co-Lab initiative, and managing strategic planning, innovation, and central administration budgets. Additionally, I support the President in executive hiring, team development, and high-level decision-making, collaborating with division heads and executive officers to advance university-wide goals. As a university leader, I seek to prioritize fostering effective teams, promoting engagement, and strengthening university relationships with internal and external constituents.

I. Senior Campus Leadership as Chief of Staff

- University Re-Branding Initiative
- Enterprise Learning and Talent Epicenter Team
- Capital Campaign Executive Committee
- University Budget Committee
- Ex-Officio, Staff Association (AP)
- Ex-Officio, University Academic Senate (EIC)

II. Major Responsibilities & Accomplishments

- **Executive Leadership & Strategic Vision:** Served as chief advisor to the President, leading strategic planning, governance alignment, and the Reach Higher 2025 implementation to drive institutional transformation.
- **Operational Excellence & Talent Development:** Directed central budget operations and senior leadership recruitment, enhancing institutional capacity through effective fiscal management and executive team development.
- **Innovation & Program Development:** On behalf of the President, established a \$10M Innovation Fund and partnered with industry and tech to launch inclusive, future-forward programs that reduced student costs and expanded learning access.
- **Fundraising & Grant Development:** Led major fundraising efforts to support multiple institutional campaigns, and cultivating high-impact partnerships with donors, corporations, and foundations.
- **Crisis Management & Accountability:** Supported university response to COVID-19 while building systems of accountability, performance tracking, and transparent communication across all levels.
- **Community Engagement & Faculty Collaboration:** Advanced regional development, launched faculty leadership programs, and helped build the national REP4 Alliance to position the university as a leader in equity and student-centered innovation.

Chief Executive, GVSU Public Charter Schools & Educational Innovation

In my role as Chief Executive of GVSU Public Charter Schools & Educational Innovation, I provide strategic leadership and oversight to the Educational Innovation and School Support Division, which includes one of the largest charter school authorizers in the nation and GVSU's

primary K-12 innovation hub. I drive initiatives that foster educational excellence, entrepreneurial thinking, and transformative approaches in K-12 education, ensuring that our work aligns with the university's mission and contributes to statewide educational goals. My responsibilities include guiding charter school operations, fostering innovation, and building partnerships that reimagine and elevate the K-12 educational experience. My key responsibilities and accomplishments included:

- **Oversight & Leadership:** Led Michigan's largest charter authorizing portfolio, overseeing 79 schools and \$10M in annual revenue while advancing equity, compliance, and student performance.
- **Innovation & K-12 Transformation:** Pioneered cross-sector innovation through the GVNext Co-Lab and a "network of networks" model to transform K-12 education and scale collaborative impact.
- **Strategic Partnerships & Policy Advocacy:** Forged strategic alliances and influenced state policy to promote equitable education, improve college readiness, and align K-12 efforts with workforce needs.
- **Resource Management & Financial Stewardship:** Secured sustainable funding and managed strategic investments to support charter schools and innovative educational initiatives.

Vice President for Inclusion and Equity

As Vice President for Inclusion and Equity, I led the university's strategic efforts to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus climate for students, faculty, and staff. I oversaw the Division of Inclusion and Equity, which included compliance functions such as ADA, Title IX, and Affirmative Action, along with social justice education, Disability Support Resources, and the Kaufman Interfaith Institute. Additionally, I partnered with university social justice centers, including the LGBTQ+ Center, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Center for Women and Gender Equity, and Veteran's Upward Bound, while serving as an executive sponsor for nine employee affinity groups supporting various communities (e.g., employees of color, LGBTQ+, Interfaith, Women's, and Native American groups). Under my leadership, GVSU received national recognition for advancing social mobility, LGBTQ inclusion, and support for Latinx and undocumented students, earning the INSIGHT Into Diversity HEED Award three times. As chief inclusion and equity officer, I worked with executive leaders across all divisions to embed accountability for equity, driving a shared leadership model across the university.

I. Senior Campus Leadership as Vice President for Inclusion and Equity

- Executive Officer to the Board of Trustees
- Board of Trustees Executive-in-Charge of Title IX Compliance and Reporting
- Chair, Native American Advisory Council (2015-2019), Member (2019-2024)
- Co-lead, Inclusion & Equity Accountability & Activation Team (2022-2024)
- Co-lead, Network of Advisors for Racial Equity (2020-2022)
- Ex-Officio, Equity and Inclusion Committee, University Academic Senate (2019-2024)
- Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force and Data Team (2020-2025)
- Student Retention Presidential Steering Team (2019-2022)
- Chair, Campus Climate Assessment Steering Committee (2015-2024)
- Chair, Campus Climate Action Team (2015-2024)

- Chair, Basic Needs Task Force (2016-2018)
- Chair, Gender Expression and Identity Committee (2015-2017)
- Americans with Disabilities Act Advisory Committee (2016-2019)
- Chair, Faculty and Staff Affinity Group Council, (2016-2024)
- Executive Sponsor, Undocumented/DACA Student Task Force (2016-2019)
- Enrollment Development and Planning Advisory Committee Executive Team (2018-2019)

II. Major Responsibilities & Accomplishments

- **Strategic Leadership & Policy Development:** Over more than a decade, served as GVSU’s chief diversity officer and institutional strategist for inclusion, equity, and belonging. Authored foundational policies—including the university’s first “Commitment to Inclusion and Equity” and the 15-Point Racial Equity Plan—cementing a university-wide framework that integrated equity accountability into operations, academics, and governance. Scaled the Division of Inclusion and Equity from a small unit of 12 staff and a \$1M budget to a nationally recognized operation with over 40 staff, a \$6M budget, and an externally facing, revenue-generating Inclusion and Equity Institute that extended GVSU’s DEI impact to regional and national partners.
- **Impact on Student Success & Representation:** Led institution-wide efforts to enhance student retention, sense of belonging, and equitable outcomes for historically marginalized communities. Developed and oversaw initiatives like the Latino Student Initiative, Veterans Upward Bound, and the Pathways to College Office—efforts that directly contributed to closing retention gaps for Latino students and garnering national accolades, including the Seal of *Excelencia*. Through intentional recruitment, policy change, and program development, drove a 74% increase in students of color and a 30% increase in employees of color at GVSU, with sustained national recognition for LGBTQ+, veteran, and interfaith inclusion.
- **Community Engagement & Partnerships:** Positioned GVSU as a convener and partner in advancing educational equity throughout the region. Strengthened connections with historically underserved communities, increasing access and representation in higher education. Led interfaith and social justice initiatives, expanding offices and services such as Campus Interfaith Resources and Social Justice Education, which became national exemplars of equity and civic engagement in public higher education.
- **Resource Development & Financial Stewardship:** Secured significant financial investments to sustain equity efforts and expand student support. Raised multimillion-dollar funds for scholarships—including the Lupe Ramos Montigny Si Se Puede Legacy and the Inclusion and Equity Endowed Scholarships—and generated ongoing revenue through the Inclusion and Equity Institute’s professional training offerings. These efforts advanced institutional sustainability while expanding access for underrepresented students.
- **Crisis Management & Climate Assessment:** Provided steady leadership during crises involving racial, identity-based, and national events, serving as a trusted voice in response strategy and communications. Led comprehensive campus climate assessments, identifying systemic gaps and catalyzing responsive initiatives such as gender-inclusive restrooms, an Employee Ombuds Office, and targeted pipeline programs. Under our leadership, GVSU’s climate assessment model gained national recognition and became a replicable standard for peer institutions.

- **Professional Development & Organizational Impact:** Embedded inclusion and equity competencies across the employee lifecycle by designing professional development tracks and creating internal advancement pathways for underrepresented staff. Forged partnerships across the state and country to support workforce diversity goals and further institutional transformation. These efforts helped GVSU earn national honors for inclusive excellence and demonstrated the measurable impact of inclusion and equity in organizational effectiveness.
- **Board Relations & Legislative Advocacy:** Advised the Board of Trustees and senior administration on all matters of inclusion and equity, providing regular reports, shaping institutional direction, and testifying before the Michigan State Legislature on compliance and equity-related initiatives. Played a key role in ensuring GVSU's leadership voice in statewide education policy discussions, including matters related to Title IX and public accountability.

Chief Catalyst Officer, REP4 National Alliance

As Chief Catalyst Officer of the REP4 National Alliance, I supported a transformative initiative that seeks to redefine higher education by centering learners as co-designers in innovation. REP4 (Rapid Education Prototyping for Equity, Empowerment, and Educational Transformation) is a groundbreaking alliance of nine diverse institutions across the United States, representing Hispanic-serving, Historically Black, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving, and public research institutions. Together, these institutions serve over 250,000 students, uniting efforts to elevate student voices, promote equity, and accelerate educational change at both individual and systemic levels. As the founding organizer and convener, Grand Valley State University spearheads this collective movement to build an educational ecosystem that empowers students and drives impactful, equity-focused transformation. See www.rep4.org.

Administrative Experience at Santa Clara University Director, Office for Diversity and Inclusion

As the inaugural Director of the Office for Diversity and Inclusion at Santa Clara University, I was responsible for establishing and developing the office's mission, functions, and strategic initiatives. Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, SCU is a Jesuit institution that combines high-tech innovation with social consciousness, enrolling 5,500 undergraduates and 3,000 graduate students. In this role, I created foundational programs and frameworks to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, ensuring alignment with the university's mission and values. Key responsibilities and achievements included:

- **Strategic Leadership for Diversity and Inclusion:** Advised university leadership in developing a comprehensive, mission-driven diversity and inclusion strategy that addressed recruitment, retention, and success of underrepresented groups.
- **Policy Development and Campus Climate:** Led reviews of policies impacting diverse communities, introducing changes to better support faculty, veterans, transgender students, and low-income students, and implemented evaluations to assess campus climate and guide strategic improvements.
- **Training and Curriculum Design:** Developed and delivered training on social justice education, inclusive hiring, anti-bias practices, and healthy campus environments, equipping faculty and staff with tools to support a more inclusive campus culture.

- **Fundraising and Grant Writing:** Secured funding and led grant-writing initiatives to expand diversity and inclusion efforts, including serving as Principal Investigator for the “First in the World” grant under the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), *Santa Clara Comunidad y Universidad (SCCU) Academy*.
- **Community and Corporate Partnerships:** Expanded partnerships with local organizations, schools, and corporations, strengthening the university’s ties with Silicon Valley’s diverse communities and supporting pipeline programs for underrepresented students.

Administrative Experience at the University of California

The University of California (UC) system is the largest public research university system in the U.S., with 10 campuses, five medical centers, 300,000 students, and 250,000 employees. Throughout my career at UC, I advanced diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives across campuses, ultimately serving as the inaugural Systemwide Diversity Coordinator. This role required balancing statewide policy, and community needs to enhance campus climate for California’s diverse student population.

Systemwide Diversity Coordinator and Special Assistant to the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, UC Office of the President

Appointed as the UC system’s first Diversity Coordinator, I supported systemwide diversity initiatives for 10 campuses and five medical centers, guiding UC’s response to high-profile incidents and fostering a culture of inclusion across campuses. Key responsibilities and achievements included:

- **Systemwide Strategic Planning and Accountability:** Implemented the **Diversity Accountability Framework**, a comprehensive strategic approach to diversity and campus climate, guiding policies, initiatives, and accountability for students, faculty, and staff across the UC system.
- **Policy Analysis and Development:** Served as principal policy analyst for diversity, institutional climate, and affirmative action, providing expert recommendations on legislation, policy guidelines, and strategies to senior leadership.
- **Data-Driven Diversity Assessments:** Conducted the largest campus climate survey of its kind, assessing the needs and experiences of students, faculty, and staff across campuses, and using findings to inform actionable improvements in campus climate.
- **Community Engagement and Communication:** Provided staff support and expertise to high-level committees and commissions, prepared communications for internal and external stakeholders, and shaped UC’s messaging on diversity and inclusion to media, legislators, and the public.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

- **National Board Member, Center for the Advancement of Professional Students (CAPS) Network (2024–Present):** Provide strategic guidance for advancing innovative, profession-based learning experiences that prepare high school students for future careers and education pathways through real-world project engagement.
- **Board of Directors, EQPD Learning (2024–2025):** Support a spinoff, non-profit initiative emerging from GVSU innovation efforts, delivering high-impact tutoring and professional

development seeking to bridge academic achievement gaps; returns \$500M annually to university innovation investments.

- **Ex-Officio, GVSU Public Charter Schools Advisory Committee (2023–2025):** Provide strategic guidance and oversight to ensure the effective governance, accountability, and success of the university’s charter schools, fostering high-quality education and innovative practices across the network.
- **Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Accreditation: External Reviewer (2017–2025) and National Leadership (2019–2025):**
 - Conduct institutional reviews across the HLC region, focusing on quality assurance and accreditation standards.
 - Member, **Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (2019–2025).**
 - Chair, **National Peer Review Diversity Committee (2024–2025):** Drive equity-focused strategies within peer review processes and advisory initiatives.
- **University of California Board of Regents (2008–2010):**
 - Served as Student Regent and voting member, chairing the **Student Life and Alumni Affairs Committee** and contributing to critical committees on finance, long-range planning, and educational policy.
 - Co-led initiatives on **UC Admissions Policy Reform**, sustainability, and diversity for AB 540 (undocumented) students.
 - Supported UC system-wide facilities planning, including deferred maintenance and major project approvals.
- **Strategic Planning and Affordability Leadership, University of California (2010)**
 - Member, **UC Commission on the Future**, and Co-Chair, **Access and Affordability Working Group.**
 - Conducted policy evaluations and recommendations to improve access, diversity, and financial sustainability across the UC system.
- **National Association of Chief Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) (2013–2024):**
 - Board of Directors (2019–2022): Led initiatives in professional development and philanthropy.
 - Vice Chair, **Lower Midwest Regional Chapter**, and active participant in diversity leadership nationwide.
- **Council of Chief Diversity Officers, Michigan Association of Public Universities (2017–2024)**
 - Chair (2017–2020): Fostered collaboration across Michigan’s public universities to advance equity and inclusion efforts.

TEACHING AND ADVISING

- Adjunct Faculty/Instructor, College of Education, Adult and Higher Education Program, Grand Valley State University: *Higher Education Administration and Organization* (2016-Present).
- Guest Lecturer, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University: *Walk the Talk: Institutionalizing Sustainable Systemwide DEI Anti-Racist Work* (2022).
- Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Graduate Program, Grand Valley State University: *Inclusive Leadership* (2022).
- Instructor, Social Justice Professional Development Certificate Program, Santa Clara University (2014-2015)
- Instructor, Interdisciplinary Studies, University of California, Merced: *On-Course: First-Generation Student Success Course* (Fall 2010).
- Thesis Project Advisor, Adult and Higher Education, College of Education, Grand Valley State University.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND ENGAGEMENT

Regional Leadership:

- Chair (2022–Present) and Commissioner (2018–Present), **Hispanic/Latino Commission of Michigan**: Appointed by Governors Snyder (R) and Whitmer (D)
- Mayor-Appointed Councilmember (2022–2024), **Grand Rapids Community Relations Commission**
- Chair, Diversity Committee, **YMCA Board of Directors** (2019–Present)

Community Development and Campaigns:

- **Grand Rapids Community Foundation Centennial Campaign** (2022–Present)
- Board of Directors, **Grand Rapids Public Museum** (2017–Present)

Equity and Inclusion Advocacy:

- Equity Advisor, **K-Connect of Kent County** (2016–2019)
- Practitioner, **Talent 2025** (2016–2020)

Youth and Education Focus:

- Board of Directors, **West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce** (2016–2021)
- Board of Directors, **Grandville Avenue Arts and Humanities** (2015–2022)