



THE ROBERT NELSON FOUNDATION

Honoring Mr. Nelson's legacy by helping students with their education by providing opportunities and resources to do so.

Grand Valley State University Impact Report
May 2026



Students broadcasting on The Whale, a student-led radio station, at Grand Valley State University

Thank You for Your Generous Support

The Robert Nelson Foundation,

We extend our sincere appreciation to The Robert Nelson Foundation for its continued partnership and support. Your generosity continues to expand opportunities for our students by supporting scholarships and experiential learning opportunities that enrich their academic experience and prepare them for what comes next. It is because of your commitment that students can pursue their goals with confidence, deepen their learning, and contribute meaningfully beyond the classroom. Thank you for your ongoing investment in their growth and success.

The following pages include the impact of The Robert Nelson Foundation's support for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Thank you,
Andrew Bixel
Senior Director of Community Engagement & Alumni Experience
616-331-5619

YOUR IMPACT

On this page and the next page are the thank-you notes from faculty and staff members who work with the students who received your gifts



The Movement Science Unified Sports Fund

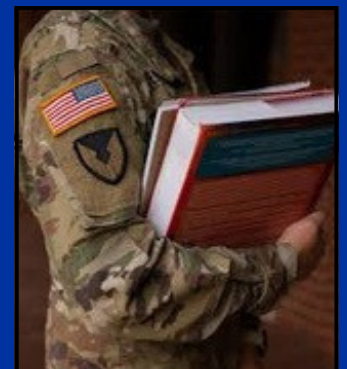
What began as a "chance conversation" has grown into a thriving culture of belonging. Unified Sports is an inclusive course that pairs university students with peers from local community partner transition programs. This program promotes acceptance and ability-based sports participation, enabling participants to learn and compete on the same team. During Fall 2025, the Unified Sports course continued to thrive, expanding its impact and extending inclusive programming to 14 additional young adults. Building on this, a new course has been developed, known as Unified Fitness, launching in fall 2026. In addition, we will be hosting a Special Olympics training session to prepare future educators for inclusivity. - Karol Tiemersma and Carrie Zeilstra

The Robert Nelson Foundation College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Nonprofit Fellowship

During the 2025-2026 academic year, support from The Robert Nelson Foundation provided critical internship funding for students through the Center for Experiential Learning. These funds removed financial barriers for students completing unpaid fellowships in non-profit organizations. This ensured equitable access to high-impact, career-connected learning opportunities across a range of majors. By supporting students as they gain real-world experience, this investment continues to strengthen academic and professional pathways. Our goal is to build on this success by expanding internship funding for both the academic year and the summer months. - Dana Hebreard and Debbie Herrington

The Military & Veterans Resource Center

We are grateful for the continued support of The Robert Nelson Foundation and its commitment to military-connected students at Grand Valley State University. In partnership with the Ottawa County Veterans Services Department, we created a Family Fun Day which connected military students and their families with an opportunity to gather, connect, and feel supported at no cost. Your support also strengthened the Military & Veterans Resource Center by enhancing the Military & Veterans Resource Center's Lounge on the Allendale campus that better supports students in navigating college. Through these investments in both space and community, the Foundation continues to make a meaningful impact on the students and families we serve. - Shane Scherer



YOUR IMPACT

The Robert Nelson Foundation Fellowship

We are deeply grateful for the continued support of The Robert Nelson Foundation and its investment in students in the Journalism, Broadcasting, and Digital Media program at Grand Valley State University. Your support for fellowships continues to remove financial barriers, allowing students to pursue hands on, career-critical experiences that would otherwise be out of reach. We are also grateful to the Foundation's support for student-run media outlets and introducing future students to media studies. As the program continues to grow rapidly, this sustained support plays a crucial role in ensuring students can explore, create, and confidently prepare for careers in media.- Len O'Kelly



The Robert Nelson Foundation College of Education and Community Innovation Nonprofit Fellowship

Thanks to The Robert Nelson Foundation's generosity, students in the public and nonprofit administration programs were able to pursue meaningful, hands-on internship experiences this year that strengthened both their professional skills and their commitment to service. Students shared that these opportunities enhanced their leadership development, reinforced the importance of nonprofit work, and affirmed the value of hands-on learning as they prepare to enter the workforce. One student reflected on how the experience deepened their motivation "to serve people," while another student shared gratitude for the opportunity to "gain knowledge" during their final semester. Thank you for continuing to help students live your values - to give and to grow - through impactful experiential learning. - Neal Buckwalter

The Robert Nelson Foundation PK-12 and Community Engagement Fellowship

We are grateful to The Robert Nelson Foundation for its continued support of our special education students throughout the 2025-2026 academic year. The Robert Nelson Foundation PK-12 and Community Engagement Fellowship played a critical role in reducing financial barriers at two pivotal points in students' preparation. One is supporting undergraduates engaged in early field experiences, and the second is sustaining student teaching interns during their final, most demanding, semester. Eight undergraduate special education students began structured classroom visits in local special education programs to strengthen their readiness for future educational experiences during their student teaching experience, which helped these students confirm their commitment to do this important work. In addition, 15 special education student teachers received awards, allowing for focus and enter the profession with confidence. The Foundation's investment affirms our students' commitment to special education and reinforces their sense of being valued as emerging professionals. - Jennifer DeWaard



Student Thank Yous

On this page and the next page are students' thank-yous for their fellowship or involvement in other programs

"The Robert Nelson Foundation funding has taken a huge amount of stress off my shoulders and has allowed me to truly focus on and enjoy my fellowship experience. Because of this support, I can be more present, engaged, and confident at my internship, without the added pressure or stress." - **Lillian**

"Through this internship, I will be able to practice real-world skills and make invaluable contributions and connections within the GVSU Film & Video Alumni network. I am truly grateful for the Robert Nelson Foundation's support in this endeavor. Thank you." - **Eli**

"My experience as State Coordinator for the Student Basic Needs Coalition has furthered my leadership skills and my motivation to help college students across Michigan. Being born and raised in Michigan has shaped my perspective of higher education as a pillar to success. I want to continue doing this work so people from all walks of life can honor their desire for growth through pursuing an education" - **Imelda**

"Through this fellowship, I have gained hands-on experience operating professional broadcast equipment and have had the opportunity to film and help broadcast several basketball games. These experiences have strengthened both my technical skills and my confidence in professional environments." - **James**

"My internship experience has been absolutely incredible. I've truly enjoyed working with a real-world organization and learning how an organization operates day to day. Working with the Red Cross has given me an opportunity to see how a nonprofit functions while making a meaningful impact. This rewarding experience has given me a strong start as I prepare to enter my professional career." - **Ellen**

Support from The Robert Nelson Foundation allowed me to fully engage in my internship at Equest Center for Therapeutic Riding without worrying about travel and related expenses. Seeing participants gain strength and confidence through therapeutic riding has been incredibly rewarding and has reinforced my passion for work that supports and empowers others." - **Ella G**

"Through my internship, I am developing a passion for helping others become the best version of themselves and gaining firsthand experience in the impact of exercise and community wellness. Thank you." - **Ava**

"This fellowship allowed me to complete my internship. Through my experience with the Marketing and Communications team at University of Michigan Health-West, I gained valuable professional skills in press writing, media coordination, and storytelling that extended far beyond the classroom. Thank you" - **Owen**

Student Thank Yous

"Support from the fellowship fund allowed me to fully engage in a unique undergraduate internship under a school psychologist without financial barriers. I am sincerely grateful for this opportunity, which has strengthened my preparation for graduate study and a future in psychology."

- **Samantha**

"Thank you so much for the fellowship award. This generous award will help me complete the semester of my student teaching and begin my professional career" - **Emma E**

"Thank you so much for The Robert Nelson Foundation fellowship This means so much to me as a future educator who is so excited to enter the profession. I am so grateful for all of my student teaching experiences that Grand Valley has provided me. I'm so excited to make a difference in the field of special education with everything I've learned at GVSU." - **Ellie G**

"Thank you for your generous support, which allowed me to fully immerse myself in my internship at K105.3 with the McKibbin Media Group. Through hands-on experience voicing commercials, assisting with sales, and managing technical tasks, I gained valuable skills and clarity about a future career in radio. Your support made this opportunity possible and has been instrumental in my professional growth." - **Savannah**

"My internship at WoodTV8 was an unforgettable experience that allowed me to develop strong technical and reporting skills while learning from journalists across the newsroom. I am deeply grateful for the support that made this unpaid opportunity possible, giving me a foundation of confidence and experience as I begin my career in journalism. Thank you!" - **Kelsie**

"I want to express my gratitude for the generous award As I prepare to graduate and begin my career teaching, your generosity has provided me with a sense of hope and support for a great career. Thank you!" - **Matt**

"Thank you for your generous gift. It has been such a transformative experience going through the education program at Grand Valley and I can't wait to see what the future holds. This journey has been full of many blessings and challenges but all of them together have formed me into the educator I am today. Thank you for being a part of my journey! - **Gabriella**

"Support from The Robert Nelson Foundation has allowed me to pursue my career goals as an illustrator and gain professional experience in the animation industry. Through my internship with Throttle Media, I am developing real-world skills in character design, collaboration, and revision that are preparing me for a creative career after I graduate from GVSU. I am sincerely grateful for the investment in my work and my future." - **Emily**

The Robert Nelson Foundation Scholarship



THANK YOU

Scholarship Student Thank Yous

This and the following page are the spring semester thank you notes from your four scholarship recipients for the 2025-2026 academic year

Thank you for selecting me as one of this year's recipients for this scholarship. I am majoring in Journalism, Broadcasting, and Multimedia at Grand Valley State University.

By receiving this scholarship, it has allowed me to limit my working hours and focus more on my studies. I am very grateful to be able to participate in extracurricular activities and take the classes that are more time-consuming because of this scholarship. After I graduate, I plan to work at a broadcast news organization. Thanks to your generosity, I have been able to focus on making that dream a reality. Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Hewitt

My name is Grace Tuss, and I am a senior at Grand Valley State University, majoring in Journalism, Broadcasting, and Digital Media. I am writing to express my sincerest gratitude for being selected as a recipient of the Robert Neslon Foundation Scholarship. I am deeply honored to have been awarded this scholarship, and I want to extend my appreciation for your generous support.

For many years, I dreamt of pursuing a career in journalism, and with the help of this scholarship, I am making that dream come true. That dream began my freshman year of high school when I had the opportunity to take a newspaper class. It was then that I knew journalism was the career for me. I have always had a deep passion for journalism and craved the opportunity to share stories from around the world. Receiving this scholarship has not only alleviated the financial burden of pursuing my education but has pushed me to strive for excellence in my academic endeavors. As I embark on my last semester here at Grand Valley, I want to express my everlasting gratitude for the opportunities that have been presented to me because of this scholarship. With that, my educational pursuits would not have been possible without the support of the Robert Nelson Foundation Scholarship. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Grace Truss

Scholarship Student Thank Yous

Thank you so much for your support this semester. I cannot express how grateful I am in a letter but I will try. Thanks to your generosity I have spent the year 100% devoted to my schoolwork and have flourished with the opportunity. I aced my classes last semester and recently secured an internship for this upcoming summer. Without this scholarship I would be working 40 hours a week to afford school and now I don't have to worry about it. It has given me the opportunity not just in academics but socially and spiritually and for the first time in my life I feel like I'm on the road that I am meant to be on. So I thank you, my family, and I hope I can prove myself worthy of it in the future

Thank you again.

Drew Burlingae

Thank you for choosing me for this scholarship and ultimately believing in me to achieve great things even when I am sometimes uncertain. I switched majors at the end of my sophomore year, going into my junior year of college. While I may have followed my love for all different types of media, it was still one of my biggest life decisions to leave the certainty of the science field. It felt like I was thrown headfirst into a new major with everyone around me starting college with the intent of getting the same degree in multimedia journalism. I struggled mentally with imposter syndrome, thinking I was not at the same writing level or greatness as my peers, but the faculty of GVSU's journalism department helped me. Two professors, especially Professor Lowenstein and Professor Ford, and now you. This scholarship will not only help my education and love for communication media but also act as a daily reminder that I am worthy and will do great things for this line of work. Once again, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Sincerely,

Chloe



Thank you again to
The Robert Nelson Foundation
for your generous support of
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