

SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION
Technical Soil Services
Northeast Region



Grand Rapids, MI (12-GRR) MLRA Soil Survey Office

Providing External Input for Grand Valley State University

Purpose

On March 30, Matt Bromley, 12-GRR Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Soil Survey Office (SSO) Leader, attended an External Technical Advisory Committee meeting for the Natural Resources Management (NRM) program at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) on the main campus located in Allendale, Michigan (Figure 1). The meeting was designed to solicit input from professionals in fields related to natural resource management. Other attendees included five professionals in natural resource related fields: MI NRCS State Office, MI Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI), Land Conservancy of West Michigan, and Kent County Parks Department. Faculty members from GVSU provided information on the program and current curriculum.

After introductions, a round table discussion included each natural resource professional answering the following questions:

- What skills are important for graduates to have for successful employment?
- When you review job applications, how do you identify qualified and capable individuals?
- What skills do you think will be important for professionals in your field in 5 or 10 years?
- What do you see as strengths and weaknesses in our program? Is our program preparing students to be competitive?



Figure 1. Grand Valley State University campus in West Michigan

Key Outcomes

GVSU is the fourth largest university in Michigan with a student body of over 22,000 and is located West Michigan just 17 miles west of the 12-GRR SSO. This event was a great opportunity to share the requirements to qualify for Soil and Plant Science Division (SPSD) positions as well as suggest subject areas that would benefit students when applying for positions within SPSP. Matt emphasized the importance of providing students with opportunities to gain a variety of experiences including field and laboratory work, GIS, statistics, and database management. While GVSU does not currently offer enough soil courses to reach the minimum 15 credit hours required for soil scientist positions, Matt explained that it may only be a matter of a student taking one online soils course through another university, and they would then qualify. Other SPSP positions, like Ecological Site Specialist and GIS Specialist, were also mentioned as possible entry level positions for GVSU graduates. Matt also explained the Pathways Internship and Recent Graduate programs, and the faculty responded very favorably saying they want to make it a point to get more of their students applying for these positions. The 12-GRR MLRA SSO staff look forward to more cooperation with GVSU and their newer soils instructor who is starting up their first soil judging team and looking to expand their soil course offerings.