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Four GSU Departments Collaborate to Win Healing Illinois Grant

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Four GSU Departments Collaborate to Win Healing Illinois Grant



Educators and artists from across [Governors State University](#) are collectively celebrating a recent grant to support their interdisciplinary work that promotes racial healing.

“In my nine years at GSU, this might not be the biggest grant I’ve seen come in, but it’s the most collaborative grant,” said Svetlana Rogachevskaya, Director of GSU’s [Center for the Performing Arts](#) (CPA).

Under the name "Soul of the SOUTHLAND," four departments received a total of \$30,000 in grant money from [Healing Illinois](#). The initiative of The Chicago Community Trust and Illinois Department of Human Services plans to distribute \$4.5 million to organizations across the state to foster racial healing.

At Governors State, the grant is a collaboration between the [School of Extended Learning](#), [Center for Community Media](#), the Nate Sculpture Park and the CPA. Together,

they applied for and received the grant to continue and strengthen programs already making a difference in the community.

Center for Performing Arts: [Beyond Conversation](#)

A three-part series of “virtual campfire” encounters, the program “Beyond Conversation” joined audiences together with “artists, activists, scholars, healers, change-makers, and ruckus-makers in our community.”

Discussions explored racial boundaries in the opera industry, tensions around law enforcement and race; and media approaches to Black trauma.

School of Extended Learning: “Cultural Competency for the Classroom”

These virtual sessions led by GSU experts in gender, race and cultural competency are made for educators looking to improve instruction for students around racial equity and systemic racism.

The program works to be transformative for a school’s educational structure, moving from mere tolerance to cultural competency among its staff and students. It aims to assist educators in identifying their own cultural biases, while focusing on a strengths-based approach to personal growth, rather than one predicated on problems and pathologies.

Center for Community Media: [“Southland Health and Wellness Hour”](#)

One of two podcasts produced through the GSU Center for Community Media, “Southland Health and Wellness Hour” is hosted by adjunct faculty member [Dr. Tonya Roberson](#), who is the Director of Community Engagement, Program Development, and Academic Support at GSU.

The newly launched podcast aims to reframe modern health conversations through a lens of historical knowledge, racial equity and medical expertise. It keeps a keen eye on the intersection of health and wellness specifically in South Chicago and the South Suburbs.

theNate at the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park: [Wish for the World](#)

Through Wish for the World, theNate invites community members to paint a rock, stone, stick or branch that expresses positive vibes, wishes, prayers and intentions for a better future. These artistic items are placed at the wishing tree, near the iron sculpture “Yes! For Lady Day,” which pays homage to blues singer Billie Holliday.

While this wide-reaching grant ties together these diverse programs in one way, Rogachevskaya said they all emanate from a core GSU principle. It seeks to widen conversations about racial equity by including voices from outside the university, while challenging preconceptions and predispositions, ultimately affecting change.

“You can think of audiences as simply receiving, but we work hard to have conversations that are multi-directional in ways that people can communicate in an

honest and encouraging environment,” Rogachevskaya said. “You can’t heal what you don’t know, and the only way to find out is through communication.”

In addition to the three-part “Beyond Conversation” series, CPA schedules its 150-plus performances with “intentionality.” Rogachevskaya said the venue can’t continue with the same proverbial song-and-dance routine in the face of public acts of racial injustice, such as the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.

“We’ve been doing the work of disrupting the status quo at CPA,” Rogachevskaya said.

[Dr. Andrae Marak](#) likes the idea of disrupting the status quo.

Marak is Dean of the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) and Graduate Studies at GSU, and one of two who present the program “Cultural Competency in the Classroom” through the [School of Extended Learning](#). In working to help educators recognize and shed implicit biases, he encounters enthusiasm and resistance.

“It’s pretty clear from research that people experience dissonance in what they’ve been socialized into believing and the material we present,” Marak said. “It takes a lot of sets of dissonance to get people to change.”