

Governors State University

OPUS Open Portal to University Scholarship

Newsroom

Marketing and Communications

3-5-2021

GSU Teaches Cultural Competency to Neighboring High Schools

Office of Marketing and Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opus.govst.edu/newsroom>

University Park, IL,
March
05,
2021

GSU Teaches Cultural Competency to Neighboring High Schools

[Governors State University](#) is spreading knowledge on Cultural Competency to local school districts to start discussions on equity, inclusion, and equality.



Dean of the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) Andrae Marak is working with Northern Illinois University Professor Joseph Flynn to run workshops on Cultural Competency for School District 215.

Currently on the second wave of the workshops, groups of 50— including superintendents, administrators, teachers, staff, and paraprofessionals— meet with Dr. Marak and Dr. Flynn for three sessions culminating in four and a half hours of training.

[The School of Extended Learning](#) at Governors State provided the first set of workshops to School District 215 for free as part of [the Healing Illinois Grant](#). The school district will pay for additional waves of training, with an estimated 400-500 total participants.

This training is unique, Marak said.

“There’s a range of professional development around equity, including racial, social, and gender justice, but oftentimes it’s voluntary and usually the same people show up in the room and end up talking to each other” he said. “This training ensures everyone is exposed to the same training.”

The workshops begin by defining terms such as implicit bias and micro-aggressions. Defining terms at the outset allows participants to speak the language of cultural competency. With the groundwork laid, participants can better discuss topics such as positionality—the power dynamics in the classroom—and authentic care, a holistic approach where school professionals care about students as individuals instead of just as students.

For Flynn, the workshops are about teaching foundational knowledge.

“A lot of people know about slavery, but not how slavery had a direct impact on pretty much all of our institutions,” he said. “It dictated the drafting of the constitution and citizenship, how you could treat other humans. Slavery was an all-pervasive institution that continues to have reverberations,” he explained.

After the terms are defined, the workshops feature small group discussions, where participants discuss topics such as “Funds of Knowledge.”

Marak said these discussions create great classroom dialogue. “It’s about different people bringing different strengths to the table,” he said. “Sometimes we learn how to accomplish the same thing in different ways, and a good teacher will tap into this 'Fund of Knowledge' by bringing in the multiple perspectives in the classroom to learn from.”

This isn’t the first time Marak and Flynn have run these workshops. In the past, the duo trained high school teachers and paraprofessionals in district 205. They have also worked on rewriting educational curriculum to provide more diverse voices in subjects like literature and history.

“We’ve worked with the leaders, assistant principals, and teachers to meet their student learning outcomes while using a wider range of voices in the classroom so the students can see a better representation of themselves,” Marak said.

The goal of the workshops is that educators will work as change agents in their communities. For Flynn, schools are the best place to start.

“Schools are immersed in this context of a nation created around oppression,” he said. “The teachers, staff, and administrators in schools learn the same messages, same ideals, same half-truths, and misrepresentations so we have to work with them on how the events of the past shape today before they go into classrooms so we can create more effective and engaging practices that can help the entire community.”

At a minimum, Marak is confident that the workshops supply participants with the tools they need to help students.

“Our contribution is working in school districts where student demographics have changed, but the teacher demographics haven’t yet caught up,” he said. “We create bridges for folks who have been there a long time to give them the tools they need to understand their students and create an environment where they can learn best.”