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University Park,
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2022

Dr. Marlon Cummings, a collaborative leader



A former science and math teacher, [Faculty Senate President Dr. Marlon Cummings](#), admits his first few teaching years and work as a non-profit leader were a training ground for becoming what he calls a “collaborative leader” in the [Faculty Senate](#), which aims to give [Governors State University’s](#) (GSU) faculty a voice on campus.

According to Dr. Cummings, that leadership style is “about getting people to buy in.”

“When they believe in what they’re doing, and they know you value their opinion, they’re willing to do work for you and maybe take on extra tasks,” he said. “They also know if they’re struggling they can come to me. If they need help, I’ll help them. It’s that understanding that we’re working together that propels them to work hard and complete the requested tasks.”

Though Dr. Cummings, a St. Louis native, is years removed from the traditional K-12 classroom and non-profit work, he continues to use the values of being open to the

thoughts and ideas of his colleagues just as he does in his role as a leader of GSU's faculty. As a result, Dr. Cummings' collaborative leadership approach has allowed him to help mold programming that's culturally responsive to the needs of both faculty and students.

The growth and success of the [Interdisciplinary Leadership Doctorate Program](#), of which he is the Director, has been a testament to this. He recalls the shape the program was in when he came into the role in 2015. He said it lacked structure and its enrollment needed a boost, with about five people admitted into the program in the 2015-2016 school year. After standardizing policies and procedures, the program enrolled a record 35 students last year.

Beyond the logistics of building the academic program, Dr. Cummings's diligent effort to accommodate the demands of the working student also contributed to its success. "The program is full of working adults, so when things come up we need to be flexible," he said.

That kind of flexibility cuts at the heart of his passion for equity in educational opportunities. He's written and researched on the importance of community partnerships in urban schools as a path to tailoring their education experiences. For Dr. Cummings, that takes "an understanding of individuals."

"It's understanding that what student A needs and what student B needs are different in order to get them to the same outcome," he said. "It's the idea that I can give everyone the same resources but still some may not access them in the same way. It takes digging deeper and looking at individual traits in order to meet those needs and to do things right, we all have a role to play."

That perspective impacts his vision for GSU's faculty too. He wants to continue to foster ways to support not only existing faculty members, but new ones, tailoring resources to align with who they are.

"I want to help them get acclimated to their new role as a faculty member, supporting them in their professions and making sure they have colleagues they can reach out to when they need that," he said. Right now, he's developing new strategies toward this goal, which he hopes to implement by August. Until then, he'll be coordinating with different colleges and community partners to obtain feedback.