
GV appoints nation's first community philanthropy chair

By Stephanie Brzezinski

The Grand Valley State University Johnson Center for Philanthropy and a national committee have chosen Jason Franklin as America's first endowed W.K. Kellogg chair for community philanthropy.

Franklin said he has had many experiences in the community philanthropy field that make him qualified for the new position. In addition to having a Ph.D. from New York University, Franklin has served as the director of Bolder Giving, an organization that promotes philanthropy, and has been a board member for 21 Century School Fund, which supports education and communities.

Although he does not begin his work as the new chair until June, Franklin expressed his excitement to get started – especially the opportunity to move to Grand Rapids after being in New York for 14 years.

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As the Kellogg chair, Franklin plans to focus on “how we give collectively to the community we care about” while in his role as adviser, speaker and researcher at GVSU.

“It’s really a new opportunity to craft a community research agenda,” he said. “It’s not just community foundation, but community philanthropy more broadly.”

GVSU President Thomas Haas said he was pleased to announce Franklin’s appointment.

“I am honored and appreciate that the Kellogg Foundation created and invested in the chair,” Haas said. “We wanted to ensure we could get the best individual who could continue as chair. To get an individual at the stature of Dr. Franklin shows the stature of the university overall.”

He added that he thinks Franklin will be a good fit because he will “help the community be the best place it can be.”

Beverly Grant, associate director at the Johnson Center, was a member of the committee that reviewed and interviewed Franklin and the other candidates. Grant said they were looking for someone who has a Ph.D. or equivalent experience, five or more years in the nonprofit zone, scholarship or reflection in the field and outstanding research and teaching.

“Jason’s experience, knowledge and relations within the field of community philanthropy made him stand out,” she said.

The position was created at GVSU to increase understanding of philanthropy, and it shows GVSU’s commitment to community at a local and state level, Grant said.

“We are setting the pace for community philanthropy from an academic institution,” Grant said. “This position will evolve into a national thought leader in communities. It encompasses not just a foundation but community-based organizations and different groups it has an influence in.”