

How to Overcome: Lessons from an Overcomer

By Symone Gaskin

Photos courtesy of Dr. Judy Brown-Allen

Dr. Judy Brown-Allen has served as a senior lecturer at Kennesaw State University since 2013. She is the first Black faculty member to be nominated for Faculty Member of the Year at KSU. She is also the only Black professor who was student-voted into this honor since 1964. Her story has been inducted into the library archives here on campus. Dr. Allen has made significant developments in the Sociology department, as she played a role in the construction of the Student Organization of Sociology Club, and Co-op/Internship programs within the Department. Along with supporting KSU's chapter of the NAACP, Dr. Allen developed the Dr. Judy Brown-Allen NAACP Student Retention Scholarship specifically designed to assist the retention of African American males in higher education.



Dr. Judy Brown-Allen

She is a well-regarded instructor that invests in her students' well-being. Dr. Allen sincerely describes her students as "her reason to get up in the morning, especially on days where it's difficult." She knows them by name and regards them as individuals with diverse backgrounds. Dr. Allen describes herself as a "people person," thus pursuing Clinical Sociology as a profession. However, her love for people transcends her occupation and is demonstrated in her daily life.



Dr. Judy Brown-Allen with her husband of 33 years Billy Allen.

Dr. Judy Brown-Allen humbly demonstrates her dedication to helping others as she has aided over twenty-three unhoused students and created a scholarship providing computers for Sociology students that may need them. She encourages other faculty members and administrators to exercise empathy for students, as many are dealing with unseen difficult circumstances. "It is easy to see a need in others because I've been there," Dr. Allen commented one afternoon while discussing a Black History education project I was assisting her with.

The youngest of eight siblings, Dr. Allen grew up impoverished in a small Texas town called Lamarque. She attributes much of her leadership qualities to her mother. After losing her father at age 5, her mother carried out the strenuous task of ensuring that each child felt seen and cared for. Dr. Allen often recounts stories of the extensive lengths her mother went through to provide an opportunity for her and her siblings. According to Dr. Allen, to lead is to

“empower,” encouraging others to reach their full potential and helping them pursue that goal. This is an attribute that her mother instilled in her. To be a leader is to be of service to those who may need it. Her perspective as someone who previously needed empowerment puts her at an advantage when assisting others. A survivor of Stage 4 breast cancer, Dr. Allen views her survival as a chance to fulfill her God-given purpose as a servant and teacher. She has been living with this terminal diagnosis for nearly thirty years. Her dedication to her students and family despite her health and life circumstances serves as a testament to her strength and leadership.



Dr. Judy Brown-Allen, age 16.

As a Sociology student, it was inspiring to see how people within my own field are actively making a difference. As a Black woman, it was even more gratifying to see positive representation within my desired field. The heart of Sociology is people, and Dr. Allen consistently demonstrates her immense love and care for the people around her. She positions herself as a resource and ally to those at a deficit and does so with a warm and inviting disposition, an attribute to be emulated. A perfect example of a Woman Leader, Dr. Judy Brown-Allen inspires young Black women to have enough humility to give and accept help.



Courtesy of Symone Gaskin

Student Biography: Symone Gaskin is a Senior at Kennesaw State University pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Sociology with a Social and Cultural Change Concentration. As her field suggests, Symone has an immense desire to be a vehicle for change through public policy, advocacy, and nonprofit work. She is specifically interested in environmental injustice, the intersectionality of race and gender, and mental health education. It is her hope to be of service to her Atlanta community before working internationally in developing countries.

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