

Waterfalls

The TLC Newsletter from Simpson College



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Vol.2

A Note from Mark,

This is a good time of the semester to think about midterm student course evaluations. Midterm evaluations are a great way to connect with your students, show that you value their feedback, and think through tweaks that can improve the last week of your courses. If you are looking to improve your student response rate with evaluations, this is also a proven method for doing so.

Pooja Agarjwal, author of *Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning*, keeps a public blog and has shared the following template and questions that you can take. The following is from her entry titled “Here’s how to request mid-semester feedback that’s refreshingly helpful.”

Quick tips: Keep it informal; keep it optional; it does not need to be anonymous; and report back to students with the feedback you received. Take a look and feel free to borrow.

- [Click here to view the Google Form template](#)
- [Click here to copy the template directly to your Google Drive to edit the form](#)
- [Click here for more context and tips on my blog, retrievalpractice.org](#)

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Faculty Development News



- Want to get calendar invites to faculty development workshops? Email mark.pleiss@simpson.edu, and he'll add you to the list.
- Want some fresh ideas for your class? Book a teacher observation with Mark.
- For the full list of Fall Workshops, see: [Fall 2023 Workshops.docx](#).
- We do not record live sessions, but we can share notes and slides.
- **PLEASE** apply for travel funding **BEFORE** spending money on travel. Email Mark with questions.
- Want to lead a faculty reading group this fall or spring? Reach out to Mark.

Upcoming Plans for Spring

- Current Date for Spring Faculty Development Day: January 5, 2024 (Mark's Birthday!)
- Annual Faculty Writing Group(s) with the National Council for Faculty Development and Diversity and Wendy Laura Belcher's Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks
- Lilly Conference Presentations by Lindsay Ditzler and Jeremy Griffin
- Additional Workshop Series

RSC Grant Reports from 2022-2023

Mike Eckerty, Piano Technology and Tuning

During the 2022-23 School year I was awarded an RSC grant to pursue training in Piano Technology and Tuning through the Piano Technician Academy. Over the course of the year, I completed the training and am now recognized as a Certified Piano Technician by the Academy. This covers the skills of tuning, regulation, and basic repairs of pianos. I can also practice these skills to hopefully become a Registered Piano Technician with the Piano Tuners' Guild. I have already been able to work with a couple students to introduce the concepts of repair and troubleshooting. One student helped me find a problem with the piano in Madsen. I would be interested in setting up some sort of formal course of study for students in the future (there are currently no tuning courses in the Midwest). My enhanced tuning skills have also helped me go even deeper in the processes and theories we use to tune our band and orchestra.

Justin Nostrala, All-Campus Inclusivity Exhibition 2021/2023

The original title of the awarded RSC Grant was "Varied Ethnic Perspectives." Eventually, the name was changed to "All-Campus Inclusivity Exhibition Project." Also, the original proposers of the project were Katrina Cummings, Education Department, and Justin Nostrala, Graphic Design Department. Professor Cummings resigned from Simpson College before the project was complete, so the project was completed by Nostrala with assistance from Kara Raphaeli, Theatre Department, and Tisha Carter-Smith, Associate Director for Multicultural and International Affairs. The first part of the project included a survey that was sent out to a wide variety of Simpson campus-members (students, faculty, and staff). The survey included questions that were intended to get a sense of how community members feel about inclusivity on Simpson's campus. A main question on the survey was, "Please briefly explain how you feel about the degree of inclusivity on Simpson's campus." Many people responded to the survey. The original intention of the project was for Katrina and Justin to create an exhibition in the Simpson College Gallery that attempted to reflect or represent the survey responses. As time went by, Nostrala realized that it would make more sense to use the exhibition as an opportunity for campus members to come together to create a campus wide exhibition. On January 25, 2023, 35 participants painted group-murals, built mobiles, or created individual works of art. The event was a wonderful demonstration of community involvement, and the exhibition was a wonderful success. (Various people continued to contribute to the exhibition after January 25, up through February 1).



Maeve Callan, Manuscript Research in Europe and the UK

With the generous support of my colleagues, the academic dean, and faculty development funds, I spent much of 2023 immersed in the Middle Ages—specifically the eleventh through fifteenth centuries. Two of the months I spent in Europe: a week in Rome/the Vatican, followed by ten days in Scotland (Edinburgh, then the Orkney Islands, then Glasgow, then the Isle of Iona), a few days in Cornwall, most of a week in Wales, a long weekend on the Isle of Man, then about three weeks in Ireland, a few days in London, and a few days in Canterbury, where I presented at the European Society for Textual Scholarship's annual conference, before flying back home. I was able to consult multiple manuscripts and archival records as well as explore several archaeological sites in each country and also met with people navigating sectarian divides in Northern Ireland. This enabled me to start drafting my third book, "Our Tribe's Complicity": Religion, Racism, and Ethnic Identity in Medieval Britain and Ireland.



Eduardo Magalhaes, Reacting to the Past & The Brazilian Constituent Assembly

For the last three years I have been working on a project to create a Reacting to the Past game set in the Brazilian Constituent Assembly of 1987-88. In support of this project, I received an RSC Grant to pay for translation services. As a result of this grant, my translator has provided me with translations of numerous important documents that represent a significant portion of the primary sources students need in order to participate in a Reacting game. I also received translations of a speech on each side of the major issues being debated in the Assembly, including whether to establish a presidential system or a parliamentary system, and what role the military should play in politics. These speeches will be important for students as they prepare their own speeches for the Assembly. My translator also found and translated a resource that provides me with essential biographical information on the delegates that is the foundation for the role sheets students will use to prepare to act as their assigned delegate. And finally, I was able to arrange an interview between my translator and someone who attended the Constituent Assembly as a delegate, which will provide the foundation for a first-person narrative that will appear in the beginning of the Game Book. Since my Portuguese is very, very weak, I never would have been able to accomplish all this without the support of an RSC Grant.

Faculty Spotlight: 3 Questions for Jeremy Griffin, Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing

1. What are you excited about this year?

I'm teaching some new courses on topics I've been interested in for a long time. For example, I'll be teaching a course on Creative Nonfiction in Spring, which is a field I really enjoy and have always wanted to investigate further. I'm also really pleased by how engaged my students have been; it makes me eager to try out new activities and assignments. Also, we will be featuring some excellent visiting writers soon, and that is very exciting.

2. What are you changing from last year?

I'm trying to establish better boundaries between my work and home life. I love my work immensely, but it is easy to get lost in reading and planning sometimes, so I'm approaching this year's courses with that awareness. I'm also reevaluating the way I conduct creative workshops. I've used the same model for a while, and while it works fine I feel like it's time to try a new approach to see what kind of results it offers.

3. What are you trying this year for the first time?

As I said, I'm teaching some content that I've never taught before, but in doing so I'm trying to get students to think beyond the campus. That is, I'm looking for ways to connect the content of my courses with the community at large and to incentivize students to take on roles within it. At previous institutions I wasn't afforded that opportunity, but Simpson and Indianola are ideal for cultivating a relationship between the school and the community, and so I'm working to build a bridge between my course content and students' surroundings.

4. What else should we know about you?

I prefer *Friends* to *Seinfeld*.

Workshop Notes

Notes from *Faculty Behaviors to Support Growth Mindset Cultures at Simpson* (Sal Meyers, Brian Smith)

- PowerPoint from session can be found here: [Faculty Behaviors to Support Growth Mindset Cultures SIMPSON modified.pptx](#).
- Students fare better (grades, motivation) when faculty provide a context conveying a growth mindset message - one that says everyone can develop their abilities and succeed in this course.
- Participants generated examples supporting four ways in which we provide that context:
 - a. Through messages about success
 - b. By providing opportunities for practice and feedback
 - c. By our response to student struggles
 - d. By valuing growth and development over flawless performance

Notes from *Questioning Questions* (Maeve Callan)

- PowerPoint from session can be found here: [Questioning Questions.pptx](#).
- Consider starting class with low-stakes questions that can be asked while taking attendance.
- Students can respond with “pass” or “come back in a bit” if they aren’t comfortable or have a response right away.
- Look at the PWPT above for ideas for questions and other ways of driving student engagement.

