

# CHANGING MINDS

## Message from the Dean

**The Spring 2024 semester has been exceptionally busy and rewarding. We are very pleased to have once again risen in the *U.S. News & World Report* national rankings.**

Simmons remains in the top 50 and is now ranked #48 out of 255 participating public and private graduate schools of education around the country. That is an improvement from #49 last year. **Simmons is number 11 among top private education grad schools in the country and first in Texas.** We are committed to taking Simmons onward and upward!



I am so grateful for our exceptional Simmons faculty researchers and our involvement in some exciting projects. Those factors combined with our exceptional graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows reassure us that the future of the Simmons School of Education and Human Development is indeed very bright. As graduation nears, we are excited to see the future contributions to the world we know will be made by our Simmons grads and faculty.

**Stephanie L. Knight**  
*Leon Simmons Endowed Dean*

## Meet SMU Simmons Newest Faculty Researcher



**Dr. Sandra Frost Waldron** joined Simmons School of Education and Human Development in January as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership.

Dr. Waldron's research focuses on the politics of education, particularly how various stakeholders participate in the policy process. She uses qualitative methods and theories from political science and public policy to help understand how language, images, and other symbols convey explicit and implicit messages about education policies and stakeholders. She also considers how the local political context is influenced by state and national politics. Her recent work examines how

the news media portrayed teachers on strike and how national political conversations about banning Critical Race Theory in K-12 settings has influenced local and state politics.

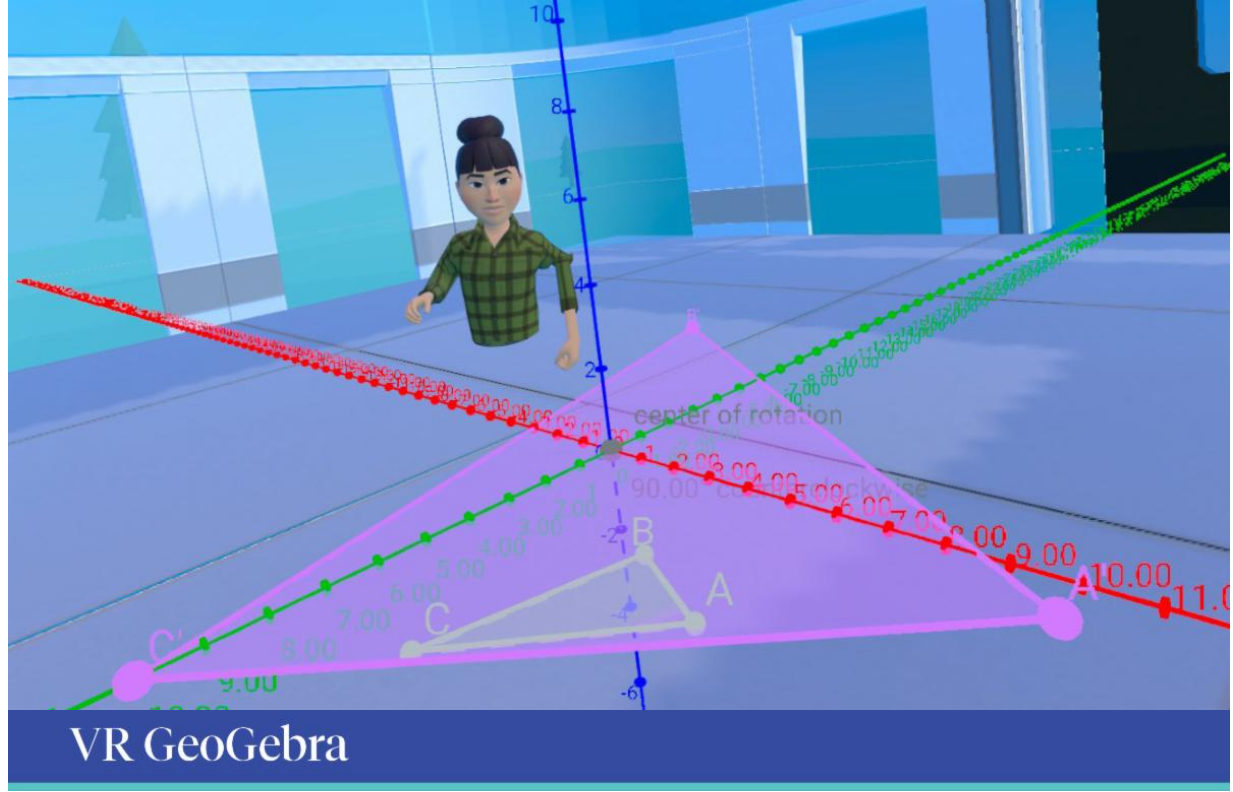


## Research at Garcia West Dallas STEM School

Simmons continues its involvement at the newly renamed Dr. Elba and Domingo Garcia West Dallas STEM School in partnership with the Toyota USA Foundation, Dallas Independent School District, and the West Dallas community.

In addition to assisting with curriculum development at the school, Simmons professors have had the opportunity to conduct important research that has led to improvements in the way students learn math and reading.





Middle school math students struggling to catch up with their peers benefited significantly from tutoring via virtual reality according to new research by SMU math education pioneer **Dr. Candace Walkington**.



Walkington, a professor of teaching and learning at SMU Simmons, along with her team, recruited 38 seventh and eighth graders from after-school programs at two Dallas urban schools. Ten miles away on the SMU campus, SMU undergraduate student tutors met their students remotely as avatars. Meeting in a virtual math classroom, student avatars could virtually stretch, condense, and even crawl inside the prisms, pyramids and other geometric shapes they were studying.

Students are drawn to the playful aspects of VR tutoring, Walkington says, but research shows they also benefit from embodied learning, or the movement the technology enables that illustrates mathematical concepts. Read more **HERE**.

## Other Notable News



**Associate Dean Authors Bookon**

## Simmons Professor City's New Poet Laureate

**Dr. Mag Gabbert** was announced as the City of Dallas' Poet Laureate on April 10 by Mayor Eric Johnson. Gabbert is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Human-Centered Interdisciplinary Studies in

## Project Based Instruction in STEM

Simmons Associate Dean **Dr. Anthony Petrosino**, along with SMU Endowed Chair and Ford Research Fellow Dr. Candace Walkington and their colleague Denise Ekberg, published their new book *Frameworks for Integrated Project-Based Instruction in STEM Disciplines*. The book synthesizes over 25 years of practical research and teaching experience nationwide.

The book presents an engineering design philosophy and the accountability highlighted in a standards-based environment. Features include deep coverage of four topics in PBI: scaffolding, student-driven inquiry, driving questions, and development of lessons based on national and state standards. Petrosino says the focus will ensure a deep understanding by the reader of project-based instruction, which will allow the reader to create strong and meaningful lesson experiences for their students. Learn more about the book **HERE**.

the Simmons School teaching doctoral and master's courses such as Transformational Narratives; The Art of Creativity and Expression; and Translations and Interpretations Across Art Forms.

According to Dean Stephanie Knight, "With her many literary awards and published works in national and international reviews, we are not surprised she would achieve this impressive honor. Knight went on to say, "Dr. Gabbert's students know her as an outstanding professor and now they have further confirmation they are being taught by the best a poet laureate." Read more **HERE**.



### Onward. Upward. Always.

The Simmons School of Education and Human Development is changing minds – and challenging the way we think. As a transformative leader, our commitment to rigorous, research-driven programs promotes evidence-based, effective practices and policy. Fresh thinking and breakthrough research will drive meaningful change in the fields of education and human development.

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