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MOVING FORWARD | THE DEAN'S VIEW



Learning and Leading Through the Pandemic

The big question emerging from the pandemic is how to continue our mission in the midst of so many challenges. Can we open our campuses and provide a safe environment for students, faculty, and staff? Can we continue to engage in meaningful teaching and learning, cutting-edge research, and thoughtful community outreach? None of us had been prepared for this kind of challenge – there is no blueprint or protocol for how to lead a college or university during a pandemic, and there certainly is no room for failure.

Formulating plans over the summer kicked into high gear at SMU and continue during the Fall semester. We moved with considerable deliberation and energy to examine potential existential challenges to the university. Uncertainties may characterize our days, but the upside is new opportunities and creativity in finding answers.

For instance, to teach our students, SMU created two approaches: *SMUFlex* courses, taught in our classrooms and offered simultaneously to students in person and online, and *Virtual* classes taught online only. Classroom protocols are strict and include wearing masks and keeping social distance in and outside of the buildings. We delineated pathways for moving through halls, improved filters and air flow in buildings, and developed cleaning protocols to be used between and after classes.

During unfortunate occasions when students come down with COVID-19, there is isolation for those diagnosed and quarantine for those exposed who live on campus, and self-isolation and self-quarantine for those off campus. So far, the result has minimally impacted faculty and staff.

In Simmons, our professors are reviewing outcomes of the pedagogical approaches for current teaching, revising instruction to improve current and future classes, and continuing to seek grants and work on existing research projects. I am especially grateful to our staff for providing the infrastructure that supports everyone's success. We want long-term advantages for our students and seek to engage them in learning in the best ways possible.

If I could sift through everything that has happened, two lessons that stand out to me are the need to be transparent and involve others in decision making. The bottom line is that we need each other.

We are not only going to survive – we are going to thrive – because we are getting through this together.



Leon Simmons Endowed Dean

ENGAGE



IES Awards a Total of \$7.8 M to Simmons Researchers

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education, is awarding significant funding to four Simmons professors: **Jill Allor**, **Stephanie Al Otaiba**, **Aki Kamata**,

and **Candace Walkington**. The funding total, including two additional sub-grants, is \$7,841,791.

Three reading projects are included and range from evaluating a literacy intervention designed to enhance reading and language outcomes for elementary students with intellectual and developmental disability; developing a computer-based oral reading fluency (ORF) assessment system; and designing an innovative whole-class read aloud intervention to improve kindergartners' vocabulary and reading comprehension. The grant for mathematics education supports the development of an augmented reality/virtual reality game for learning geometry based on the novella *Flatland*.

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AERA Names Stephanie Al Otaiba a Fellow for 2020

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) recently recognized **Professor Stephanie Al Otaiba** with top honors for her substantial research accomplishments in the field. She was inducted as an AERA Fellow, September 1, 2020. She is the Patsy and Ray Caldwell Centennial Chair in Teaching and Learning.

AERA established the fellows program to “honor education researchers with substantial research accomplishments, convey the Association’s commitment to excellence in research, and to enable the next generation of emerging scholars to appreciate the value of sustained achievements in research and the breadth of scholarship worthy of recognition.” **Watch AERA’s tribute video.**

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Leanne Ketterlin Geller To Edit *Assessment for Effective Intervention*

Professor **Leanne Ketterlin Geller**, Texas Instruments Endowed Chair in Education and Director of Research in Mathematics Education, has been selected as the next journal editor of **Assessment for Effective Intervention** (AEI). She will be handling new submissions starting October 1, 2020.

The journal focuses on practical applications of assessment, with an emphasis on assessment considerations for special populations. The empirically sound manuscripts have important implications for practitioners. The publishers are the Hammill Institute on Disabilities and SAGE in association with the Council for Educational Diagnostic Services.

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INNOVATE



Simmons Scholars Respond to Pandemic's Impact on Education for Annenberg Institute's Ed Research for Recovery Project

Three faculty members from the Department of Education Policy and Leadership were selected by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and Results for America to help policymakers, parents, and educators understand education challenges posed by COVID-19. Through policy briefs released by **Ed Research for Recovery Project**, professors **Alexandra Pavlakis**, **Meredith Richards** (pictured above), and **Dominique Baker** (pictured below) made evidence-based recommendations for supporting students.

Pavlakis and Richards are working with postdoctoral fellow J. Kessa Roberts to examine the effects of student displacement in the Houston Independent School District caused by Hurricane Harvey and now COVID-19. They note student homelessness was increasing before the pandemic hit. Their brief, co-written with Kathryn Hill and Zitsi Mirakhur from Research Alliance for New York City Schools, suggests practices to support a growing homeless population. **[Read policy brief here.](#)**



Dominique Baker's brief, written with Sade Bonilla (University of Massachusetts at Amherst) and Celeste K. Carruthers (University of Tennessee at Knoxville), synthesizes ways to support and guide students moving into their post secondary education. One of the concerns is that college or career-bound students are at risk of losing momentum. [Read policy brief here.](#)

Department of Teaching & Learning Welcomes STEM Ed Professors



Quentin Sedlacek recently joined Simmons as an assistant professor of STEM education. His interdisciplinary research applies frameworks from social psychology, sociology, and linguistic anthropology to examine STEM education and teacher education from elementary school through adulthood. He seeks to understand how science teaching influences opportunities for student empowerment.



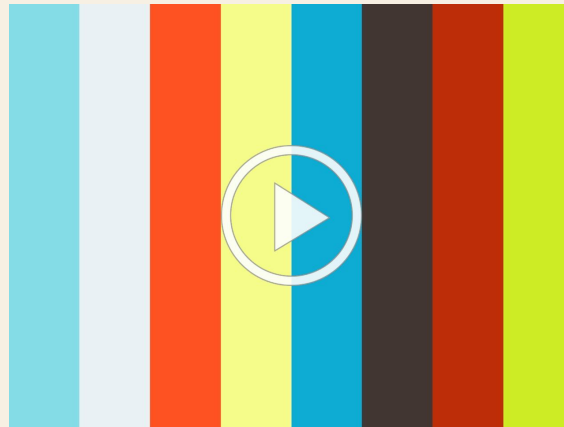
Jeanna R. Wieselmann, assistant professor of STEM education, began work at Simmons this fall. Her research focuses on integrated STEM education at the PreK-12 levels. She also conducts research on the development of STEM-focused schools and is involved in the design of the **West Dallas STEM School**, a collaborative project between SMU, Dallas ISD, Toyota, and the West Dallas community.

He holds a B.A. in Physics from Harvard University, an M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Mississippi, and a Ph.D. in Race, Inequality, and Language in Education and Teacher Education from Stanford University.

She holds a B.S. in Elementary Education Foundations, B.A. in Child Psychology, M.Ed. in Elementary Education, and Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, all from the University of Minnesota.

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Advancing Last Planning Phase for New West Dallas STEM School



Envisioning a new, industry-informed STEM school for PreK-8 grade students in West Dallas was more than a notion for Dallas ISD, Toyota USA Foundation, and SMU Simmons. A partnership between them and community members took shape in 2018 to make plans work.

The goal of the school is to prepare students for college and the workforce and to establish a model that can be replicated for the benefit of other schools and communities.

Now entering the third year of planning, the school is on track to welcome students in August 2021. The work has been led by six design teams, which are responsible for identifying a variety of key resources, curricula, and practices.

Milestones include the hiring of master principal **Marion Jackson**, finalizing architectural designs and building use, and recruiting a state-wide working group of curriculum designers to focus on problem-based learning.

As plans are put in place, L.G. Pinkston High School students and science teacher Elizabeth Blue-Allen talk about the importance of having a STEM school serving West Dallas families in the video above.

PonyPower

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