



## SMU Simmons Research Leads to New App that Provides More Effective Ways to Learn Math

More than 60 students aged 8-12 enjoyed *Mathfinder* Camp at the Dallas Zoo where they explored the lives of animals through the lens of mathematics. The students' use of the *Mathfinder* app was the focus of the camp. The app, a collaborative effort between SMU Simmons, SMU Guildhall, and the non-profit organization talkSTEM, is designed to make math more engaging while sparking curiosity and creativity and instilling a lifelong love for learning in children.

The exciting new math app is currently in development by Annette and Harold Simmons Centennial Chair Candace Walkington, Ph.D. who serves as the Principal Investigator along with Simmons Associate Dean and Co-PI, Anthony Petrosino, Ph.D. The app utilizes Augmented Reality (AR) technology for use on iPads. Students used the app to watch videos that showed them how to see embedded math in the animals and habitats at the zoo. The AR feature allowed the students to insert holograms over their camera feed to see mathematical functions and representations in the zoo surroundings.

The camp was a joint effort between **SMU Simmons**, **talkSTEM**, and the **Dallas Zoo**. Dr. Walkington appreciates the collaborative effort in working for the common goal of fostering a love for math and science among children. "It was amazing to see the kids be excited to use their 'math lens' to look at the zoo exhibits and generate their own observations and questions. We are excited and grateful the camp has provided valuable data to help further the success of the app."



SMU Leon Simmons Endowed Dean Stephanie Knight is extremely pleased with all aspects of the *Mathfinder* camp. “There is nothing better than when our Simmons research is taken into the community to directly serve youngsters by heightening their interest and understanding of math, reading and technology. The fact that it is a collaborative effort with Guildhall, talkSTEM, and the Dallas Zoo makes it even more exceptional. I applaud Dr. Walkington and her team for this excellent work and look forward to the impact the app will have when completed.”

*Mathfinder* Camp was free to participants due to research associated with a \$2.4 million grant from the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) Directorate for STEM Education (DRL#2115393) and is just part of the more than \$20 million in competitive, external research funds being utilized at SMU’s Simmons School of Education and Human Development.

The *Mathfinder* team plans to run additional camps in the Spring and Summer of 2024. The team’s current set of studies is looking at the impact that AR tools in the *Mathfinder* app have on learning. The long-term goal is to create an app that could be used anywhere to ask and answer mathematical questions about the surrounding environment.

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