

January 2015 Featured Professional Development Fellow Rich Underwood

Hello and welcome to KCELT's fifth installment of our monthly podcast series featuring our Professional Development Fellows or PDFs. I am your host Jeremy Slagoski and with me today is Rich Underwood, Professor of Speech in the Department of Arts and Humanities. Welcome, Rich.

Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Can you tell us what brought you to Kirkwood Community College and what interested you in becoming a Professional Development Fellow?

Wow! I have to go way back in time for the first part of it because I've been at Kirkwood since 1986. And to be quite honest, I came to Kirkwood because I was looking for a job out of graduate school, and the person who ended up being the best man at my wedding saw this position. I started at Kirkwood as a television broadcaster. I taught in the Communication Media area and then moved over to the Speech area almost twenty years ago now. So I kind of started here in a different area, had a family, so I couldn't put in the extra hours so that I was able to transfer over to the Speech department.

I wanted to become a Professional Development Fellow because quite honestly, Jeremy, I wanted to help other people. I found out that one of the great things about Kirkwood is that everybody wants to help everybody, everybody wants to try to help everybody, and I wanted to be in a situation where—I don't have that many more years at Kirkwood. And I can see my retirement, and so I want to be able to give back. I think it's exciting to be a Fellow because it allows you to not only work with people to help them grow as faculty. I am a co-facilitator for the first year MTP (Master Teacher Program) faculty, so I deal with them right out of, a lot of times, business and industry. Or they were adjuncts and now they're full time. So I'm helping them. That's why I really wanted to become a Fellow, just to give back.

In addition to being a Professional Development Fellow, Rich earned an Endowed Faculty Chair Award for this academic year. Can you tell us about the project you are working on and what inspired you to work on the project?

I applied once before and was turned down. I thought, OK, well, that's fine. But then I really—and it was kind of through the work of a Professional Development Fellow to see how technology was really beginning to effect classroom teaching. You have to understand, Jeremy, that I came from a time when you walked in a classroom, professor gave you a lecture, you wrote notes down, you studied for a test; that's how you did it. And I did it that way for several years, but then I thought to myself, I don't want to do it that way anymore. Students change. Technology changes. And so I wanted to change with it as well.

So I wanted to see how technology could be used to teach basic communication skills. When we think of basic communication skills, we think of perception, we think of language, we think of listening, we think of nonverbal communication, we think of culture. So I wanted to come up with something where I could examine how technology could be used to teach these skills. Business and industry, they love our students, but the one criticism they have is that they don't understand how to communicate with people. And then, quite honestly, through being a Professional Development Fellow, I took part in the first iPad Initiative, which, as a faculty member, everyone should take advantage of that because it's just a great

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opportunity to learn about technology. And so when I started to work with the iPad, I started to ask myself a question. What can I do to take this piece of technology and use it in the classroom? And that's how the Endowed Chair proposal came about. And I'm in the second semester of it.

Part of it is research, but I also have a great opportunity to—there's a new technology classroom here at Kirkwood called the MALIE (mobile active learning immersive environment) room. It's up in [Benton] Hall. And there are only four of us that are going to use it to start with, and I'm one of them. So it kind of all tied together real nice. So I'm looking forward to teaching the class this semester. We're also teaching humanities up in that room. We're also teaching communication—three or four sections of that. I'm really looking forward to the opportunity. One thing that faculty need to understand is that everything goes together. The Endowed Chair came about through being a Fellow, which came about through the iPad Initiative, which came about with me wanting to grow with my students. And so that's why it all came together.

Now let's talk about your colleagues. What has impressed you about working alongside our new and experienced Kirkwood faculty?

During my time as a Fellow, I had the opportunity to work with first-year faculty. And when you are working at Kirkwood, there are so many responsibilities that you have: faculty responsibilities, committee responsibilities. You don't get the opportunity to see what others do. And so during the past two years, I've had that opportunity to see what other faculty members do. And it kind of helped them through the rough spots. I think what impresses me the most about new faculty is their enthusiasm because community college is different. They really care. You can tell that they care because they ask questions. They are really concerned because they try to do the best job possible. We talk often about best practices. And to see their enthusiasm I think helps me too. I always tell people, "I want to learn from you just like you learn from me," and I think that's real important.

Working with Professional Development Fellows and working with new faculty has helped me in my own department. Trying to—I ask more questions now. What are you doing? How are you using this? How important is what you're doing right now? It's given me a renewed enthusiasm for what I do.

What excites you about teaching our Kirkwood students?

It's changed. As I said, I've been here twenty-eight years. The knowledge that they have has really grown, but what a lot of people don't understand is that I will have students that still don't know how to attach a document to send as an email. Everybody thinks, "Oh, today's generation, they know everything. They've got smartphones. They've got this and their Twitter and their Facebook and Instagram and you name it, there's something out there now. The thing that excites me about Kirkwood students, Jeremy, is that they are in different places. They're in different places educationally. They're in different places professionally. They're in different places personally. And that's a challenge.

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Kirkwood faculty don't just teach. I'm not just a teacher. I'm a counselor. In some cases, I, at a certain level, am their friend in a sense that I help them through rough spots. Maybe it's roommate issues. Maybe it's—I have students that have ADD, OCD, ADHD. I have students who don't know why they're in college, so I try to help them along. I kind of jokingly say sometimes I'm Dr. Phil, not by choice.

At Kirkwood, you just don't teach your classes and leave. And you just don't teach a class and have office hours and maybe some committee work. You have to wear many different hats. And sometimes that's hard for, not only faculty, but also people outside the Kirkwood family to understand. That's what I try to do, try to show them, especially first-year faculty, you are going to wear a lot of different hats. It's an exciting time but you have to keep it in perspective.

And it goes along the line of Learning is Social.

Oh yeah! Absolutely! I think it's real important. You know I'm at the age where I could just go through the motions to a certain extent. And I don't want to. The nice thing about Kirkwood faculty is, I would say an overwhelming majority, they don't want to either. They want to continue to grow and continue to learn because we want to keep up with our students. We don't want our students to come just to a certain spot and that's it. We want to take them to the next level. That's challenging, but it's also exciting as well.

What advice would you give to our faculty who may be considering a Professional Development Fellowship?

I think that anybody who has the opportunity should apply to be a Fellow. Now I have to say, Jeremy, there are a couple of things I've learned over the past couple of years that are important to mention. First of all, it's not an easy type of position because you really want to be able to help others because you are the representative not for your department but for the college as a whole. You're helping other people. That's not everybody's strength, but I think you will learn more as a Fellow, then what you put back out. We've had Fellows for I think going on about nine years, and this is the most exciting time that it has ever been, and just in the last couple. We've expanded. People like yourself and Wilson Rojas, who's another person at KCELT. We're expanding our technology. We're getting a technology room here in KCELT that could be used by faculty.

I think being a Fellow is great. I've so much enjoyed my time. I've grown, and I think that's important. You're not just there; it's an important position, and people recognize you as a Fellow. So you have to use that position that you're given. So Jeremy, if it sounds like I'm on a soapbox, I am. We are trying to have representatives from everywhere on campus, and we are the people that start the process, and it's just exciting. I hope that people understand how great of an opportunity this is. You work hard, but the reward far outweighs the work.

Thank you, Rich, for sharing your passion for teaching and learning with us.

Thank you, Jeremy. I enjoyed the time. Thanks a lot!

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That was Rich Underwood, Professor of Speech here at Kirkwood Community College.

This has been a KCELT production of the Professional Development Fellows Interview series. Rich Underwood was interviewed on Tuesday, January 13th, 2015. For more information about KCELT and the Professional Development Fellows, please visit our website at kcelt.org or follow us on Twitter, Google+, and coming soon Facebook. If you are a faculty member, please feel free to stop by our offices in Cedar Hall. We'd love to see you and talk about teaching and learning. KCELT: Engage...Discover...Connect.