

February 2015 Featured Professional Development Fellow Judith Wightman

Hello and welcome to KCELT's sixth installment of our monthly podcast series featuring our Professional Development Fellows or PDFs. I am your host Jeremy Slagoski and with me today is Judith Wightman, who teaches psychology. Welcome, Judith.

Thank you! Happy to be here.

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

I taught psychology at Kirkwood part-time from 2000 to 2004. It was a part-time job I had in addition to various full-time jobs. And then a full-time position opened in 2006, and then I thought maybe I would love to do this full-time. I've been full-time ever since, and it's going great!

My degree is in industrial organizational psychology, which is psychology applied to the workplace. I had heard about the Professional Development Fellowship job, and it sounded like an opportunity to use some of those techniques that I learned in IO psychology related to organizational development and team-building and training and employee development, and so far I've found that to be the case. I'm getting to do some stuff that is exciting to me and is really different from what I was doing before.

As part of the Professional Development Fellowship, Judith facilitates and co-facilitates reading circles on books on topics related to teaching and learning. Can you tell us about some of the books you have covered and what inspires you to design and facilitate these reading circles?

Sure, one thing I love about reading circles is that it's a way to get faculty involved in topics that either may be new to them or familiar to them but give them more in-depth information about the topic. So far, I've helped facilitate sessions using books on introversion, learning and memory, and stereotyping. One thing I like about all three of those topics is that they're very consistent with my background in psychology, and they're interesting to the general public too. Another good thing about reading circles is that you're generally reading a book that was written for the popular press instead of a purely academic book. So the books tend to be interesting and well written, and people enjoy discussing them. It just gives us a new perspective on topics that relate to teaching and learning.

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

I think my favorite thing about my colleagues is that they have great ideas that I never would have thought of and I wouldn't have seen in any other realm. An example of that would be, and this was actually brought up during the reading circle on introversion, one of my colleagues had the idea to ask students to email someone, not in the class, and tell them something they had learned about in the course at the end of the semester. It came up in the introversion series because it's something that a quieter student could still do well at. You know, "I have time to think about what I want to say and I can email anyone of my choosing. Then that person asks me a question, then I have a chance to think about my

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answer before I respond.” So my colleague had this idea and I thought it was great, and I never thought of that before. I’ve been doing it for two or three semesters now. It’s a great assignment and students enjoy it. I really enjoy seeing what they talk about, and what stuck with them from the semester. So that’s one example, but I think that’s my favorite thing about KCELT in general. Regardless of the specific topic we’re learning about in a KCELT session or series, people bring up ideas about teaching that are new to me and that really work well in other classes. I appreciate when other people share those ideas.

What excites you about teaching our Kirkwood students?

I love psychology as you know, and most people do too. Once they learn some specific information, they find it pretty interesting. So personally what excites me about teaching is that I’m still very interested in the content even though I’ve been teaching for many years. There are always new things to learn, and it’s just very fascinating. I enjoy seeing students—I don’t know how to say it—seeing that fascination wash over them. An example of that in class, the other day we were talking about placebo effects. I called up a website for the drug Botox being used to help people with migraine headaches. Right there on the homepage of this drug company, they had data that said that Botox took away 9 headache days per month in people with migraines, and the placebo took away 7 headache days per month in people with migraines. I can tell that most of them thought that was pretty interesting, so it lends a discussion of, “What is a placebo effect? When do we see it? What does a placebo look like in a study of Botox? How do we know when a drug works? What makes a drug get approved by the FDA?” It just leads to all kinds of critical thinking questions. Students have heard of Botox and they heard of migraine headaches, but they never thought about it in this new way. So I like the content and sharing the content with the students is my favorite thing.

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

My advice is to apply. I haven’t regretted it at all. And I’m looking forward; I’m about halfway done with my term. I am looking forward to the things I can work on in the next few semesters. One thing I would say to someone who is considering a Fellowship would be that he or she is already doing things that would lend themselves well to sharing with other instructors at Kirkwood. It’s just a matter of formalizing those ideas and preparing presentations to share with colleagues, so a person wouldn’t necessarily have to do a lot beyond what they are already doing. It’s just packaging that information in a way to make it most useful for other faculty.

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

That was Judith Wightman, instructor of psychology here at Kirkwood Community College.

This has been a KCELT production of the Professional Development Fellows Interview series. Judith Wightman was interviewed on Monday, February 9th, 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 most recently Facebook. If you are a faculty member, please feel free to stop by our offices

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in Cedar Hall. We'd love to see you and talk about teaching and learning. KCELT:
Engage...Discover...Connect.