



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE'S FRED ROGERS CENTER ANNOUNCES COLLABORATION WITH HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

LATROBE, PA – The Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College and the Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative at Harvard College's Graduate School of Education have announced a three-year collaboration focused on extending and deepening their work together in the service of ensuring that all children have high-quality early-learning experiences.

The lead initiative of the collaboration will be to continue to promote adult-child relationships throughout early learning environments. This effort relies in part on the development of Simple Interactions, an educational approach based on the understanding that the active ingredient in a child's growth is the developmental relationship between the child and another human being. The main building blocks of these relationships are the day-to-day interactions between children and the adults who teach and care for them.

Simple Interactions was developed by researchers and practitioners across several institutions and countries over the past decade. Its initial creator is Dr. Junlei Li, currently the Saul Zaentz Senior Lecturer in Early Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and formerly Rita McGinley Professor of Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College and co-director of the Fred Rogers Center.

Li and Dr. Dana Winters, director of Simple Interactions at the Fred Rogers Center and assistant professor of child and family studies at Saint Vincent College, will spearhead this new collaboration. The pair has shared a close working relationship that began at the Fred Rogers Center and now extends across projects from Pittsburgh to Boston and around the country. Winters feels that this collaboration is a natural continuation of this partnership.

“We had been working well together for four years,” said Winters, “and when Junlei was transitioning to Harvard, we had developed plans to continue to work together, engaging our students in both institutions and the larger professional communities. Simple Interactions has always been a collaboration, and we wanted to make sure it remained so.”

The objectives of the collaboration include:

- Facilitation of regular meetings between the leadership teams of the Zaentz Initiative and the Fred Rogers Center.
- Presentation of joint events by the Zaentz Initiative and Fred Rogers Center that spotlight the area of supporting adult helpers and promoting social-emotional development.
- Application for jointly-funded projects to integrate the existing professional development and system change approaches of the Zaentz Initiative and Fred Rogers Center.
- Offering reciprocal opportunities for Harvard graduate and doctoral students to engage in learning experiences at the Fred Rogers Center, and for Saint Vincent College students and early childhood professionals to participate in learning experiences at the Zaentz Institute.
- The creation and use of tools, videos and other materials related to Simple Interactions.
- The use of selected archival materials from the Fred Rogers Archive in educational and professional development programming at the Zaentz Initiative.

“This is a great collaboration because it will bring together the strengths of Harvard and the strengths of the Fred Rogers Center here at Saint Vincent,” Winters said. “Harvard’s professional and academic reach is global, and the legacy of Fred Rogers in early childhood in the United States is profound. When you bring those things together, the reach of Harvard, the reach of the Fred Rogers Center, the depth of work in early childhood education, and the legacy of a trusted pioneer like Fred, it can be something very special all the way around.”

Winters and Li regularly travel across the country and abroad to teach and support the use of Simple Interactions, and have worked with education leaders in Pennsylvania, Arizona and Georgia on developing statewide early childhood education systems based on relationships and adult-child interactions.

“I’d love to see our work continue to grow in more states,” said Winters. “Educators and children’s helpers are going to be able to have access to resources of two phenomenal places that are deeply immersed in helping provide the best care possible for children.”

In addition to implementing Simple Interactions in educational systems across the United States, this collaboration will also allow Winters and Li to continue to travel abroad to promote and teach the approach. Winters noted the significant impact that a summer 2018 trip to China had on a group of seven Saint Vincent College students, and hopes to include Harvard graduate students in these travels in the near future.

“The lives of the seven students we took last year were enriched immensely,” she said. “They were able to go into orphanage settings and community hospitals to be a part of our work and see it happening first hand. Three of the students completely changed their career paths.”

Recently, Winters had the opportunity to deliver a guest lecture to Li’s graduate course at Harvard. She was accompanied by three Saint Vincent College students who were able to sit in on classes while sharing some of their Rogers Center experiences with the Harvard graduate students. The new, formal collaboration will allow such trips to continue, and Winters is eager to maximize such opportunities to share talent and resources. She also plans to create a companion course at Saint Vincent to mirror Li’s graduate course at Harvard.

“I think the opportunity to do joint work with teams from Harvard is special,” Winters said. “Harvard’s education graduate students are coming to Harvard because they have a definite vision of how they are going to change the world. Most of them have been in the field for a bit, and they’re coming back because they have big ideas. This, combined with our Saint Vincent students’ knowledge and experience of already doing work with Simple Interactions, allows us to open a lot of doors.”

As exciting and valuable as it is for Winters’ Saint Vincent students to have an opportunity to visit and study at Harvard, Li feels that the Harvard students will equally benefit from their access to the Fred Rogers Center and its vast collection of resources.

“Fred Rogers’ legacy is deep and rich, and cuts across many disciplines of professional practice in child and human development,” said Li. “His work provided concrete examples and opened professional pathways for many to follow. I cannot think of a better pioneer and role model for students, whether at Harvard or Saint Vincent, who aspire to bring their own gifts to making the world a better place for children.”

While a big goal of the new formal collaboration between the Rogers Center and Zaentz Institute is to promote positive human relationships around all young children, Winters stressed that in keeping with the spirit of her center’s namesake, the main purpose is to help the education and development of the Saint Vincent and Harvard students who will take part.

“We want students to see a benefit of this,” she said. “It’s a great way to say, ‘hey, we have this great collaboration with Harvard,’ but if it never reaches the student level, what’s the point? Why are we here? I’m hesitant to do anything that doesn’t support our students in some way. That’s why Fred Rogers put the center here at Saint Vincent College – he wanted to work with students.

“He did not get the chance in his lifetime,” she continued, “but we’re going to continue his unfinished mission. We are very cognizant of the impact this partnership can have on the broad early education landscape, and we are trying to be intentional about how to provide opportunities for students so their education and aspirations can be enriched, also.”

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***Photo 1: The Fred Rogers Center at Saint Vincent College***

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