

Society for the Future of Higher Education

April 2026

News and Views

Dear SFHE Members and Friends,

Hello, and happy spring! I'm already looking forward to reconnecting with you this summer. Until we gather again, I'd love to share a few updates about the Society. The Board of Directors met in Cincinnati, Ohio in mid February, where we reflected on the Society's steady growth, discussed the Mary Jo Smalls Fellows program, and continued planning for our 2026 conference. Strengthening and expanding our membership remains a central focus, and we'd be grateful for your partnership in that effort. Would you consider inviting a colleague or friend to join us this year?

We'll return to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on the campus of La Roche University from July 16–19. This year's conference theme is "The Faculty Advocate." I encourage you to submit a proposal and to nudge a peer or rising scholar to do the same. You can submit here: [Call for Proposals](#).

We're also delighted to introduce a new element to the conference experience: a talent showcase! We'll close our time together with a special event, "Scholars on Stage: Books, Beats, and Beyond." Whether you'd like to share a brief book talk (2–3 minutes), read a poem, sing a song, show off your knitting, or highlight any other talent, I invite you to email me if you'd like to participate. Truly, all talents are welcome. Stay tuned for our keynote speaker announcement, which is nearly finalized. Keep an eye on your inbox for the official news.

As many of you enter a particularly busy season, I hope you'll remember to be gentle with yourselves. I'm wishing you a productive and meaningful spring in these interesting times. Stay strong until we meet again.

As always, I welcome your comments and questions. You can reach me at vfelix@sfhe.org

See you in Pittsburgh!

Warmly,

Dr. Vivienne Felix



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The Faculty Advocate
2026 Summer Conference
July 16-19, 2026
La Roche University, Pittsburgh, PA
REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!
www.sfhe.org

2026 Conference



Plenary Speaker
Dr. David Kirkland
Friday, July

Dr. Kirkland is a former secondary English teacher and high school administrator, who served on the faculty of New York University for over 15 years as a professor of urban education. While at NYU, Dr. Kirkland also served as the inaugural Vice Dean for Equity, Belonging, and Community Action, and seven years as the executive director of the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. A leading national scholar and advocate for educational justice, Dr. Kirkland's transdisciplinary scholarship explores a variety of equity related topics, including: culturally responsive-sustaining education, restorative practice, school climate and discipline; school integration and choice; social-emotional learning; vulnerable learners; and the science of school transformation. With over 100 groundbreaking publications to his credit, Dr. Kirkland has analyzed the cultures, languages, and texts of vulnerable youth, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to answer complex questions at the center of equity and justice-related education.

Morning Groups

Historical Fiction

Nancy Cunningham - nancy.cunningham@gmail.com

This year in the Historical Fiction Group we will be reading two old books and one new one.

Day 1: *Middlemarch* by George Eliot was published in 1871

Day 2: *Swann's Way* by Marcel Proust is the first volume of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (also translated as *In Search of Lost Time*) was published in 1913 in French. The Lydia Davis translation was published in 2002

Day 3: *Flashlight* by Susan Choi was published in 2025

We'd love to have you join for all three days, or you are welcome to just come for the days we discuss a book you've read.

Researching & Teaching with AI

Christina Romero - civanova@iu.edu

Have you ever considered using AI for lesson planning? As a research tool? This morning group will foster a space for you to learn about Gemini and Magic School – two helpful AI platforms. We will also practice using these platforms to do first round coding and analysis in research and lesson planning. Participants will walk away with more knowledge about purposefully using AI.

Each day of our morning group, please bring research data (for those doing research), K-12 academic chosen standards/lesson plan ideas (for those teaching in K-12), as well as your laptop.

2026 Conference

Pop Culture

Eric Ecklund - eecklund@francis.edu

This year the Pop Culture Morning Group will pay homage to our host city of Pittsburgh. Our primary focus will be on how the award-winning show “The Pitt” presents and deals with a variety of important social issues in its first two seasons. Group members are asked to come prepared to talk about the issues they found most compelling and are encouraged to direct the group to how other pop culture sources (including the obvious spiritual predecessor “ER”) dealt with similar situations. For our field trip this year, we will be visiting the Heinz History Center <https://www.heinzhistorycenter.org/>, which is currently hosting the following exhibits:

My America: An Illustrated Experience
Pittsburgh's Hidden History
Mister Roger's Neighborhood
From Slavery to Freedom

Friday, 7/17

The group will discuss how various social issues were depicted in the first two seasons of “The Pitt” (HBO)

Saturday, 7/18

Visit to the Heinz History Center

Sunday, 7/19

The group will meet to discuss the visit to the Heinz History Center and potential plans for next year's group

Writing Retreat

Dorothy Hurlburt - dhurlburt1@gmail.com

Do you wish for a good block of time to develop or even complete a writing project? This seminar is for those who want to write and to create in an encouraging environment. Come with a specific project in mind, or in progress, whether it is a scholarly article, a set of poems, a memoir, novel, mixed-media artifact, or something else. During these sessions we will begin by sharing and exchanging ideas about our projects, then we will get down to writing. We will tailor the meeting according to the needs of participants with spontaneous opportunities for discussion, collaboration, or feedback. At the end of the morning the group will reconvene to talk about how it's going. We would be happy to hear from people ahead of time about projects you are working on or how you would like to use the time.

Mary Jo Small Fellows

Welcome our 2026 Mary Jo Small Fellows



Jeffrey Cobbold

Jeffrey Cobbold is an artistic researcher, multimedia artist, and New Jerseyan. Jeffrey holds degrees from Berklee College of Music's Valencia, Spain campus, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts. He is currently a Doctor of Musical Arts student & special faculty lecturer at California Institute of the Arts within the Performer-Composer program.



Jennifer McNeany

Dr. Jennifer McNeany currently serves as Assistant Professor of Educational and School Psychology at Indiana University Kokomo. Previously, she has served in roles as a PK-12 district administrator for special education and mental health services, PK-12 school psychologist, adult literacy administrator, and classroom teacher. Her interests center on assessment literacy, instructional planning, and reflective teaching. She is also interested in research on relational teaching and its influence on student outcomes to strengthen both scholarly understanding and classroom practice. In her free time, Dr. McNeany enjoys spending time with her husband and five children reading, playing board games, and traveling.



Monica Rey

Dr. Mónica Rey is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Gammon Theological Seminary and Adjunct Professor of Gender Studies at Babson College. A feminist biblical scholar, Rey holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Boston University. Her research focuses on the intersections of gender, genocide, and the Hebrew Bible, including its afterlives in contemporary discourse and practice. Rey is co-chair of the Feminist Studies in Religion LAB.



Grace Vargas

Grace Vargas (She/Her/Ella) is Assistant Professor of Religion at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, TX. She teaches courses on Latine and Latin American religion and spirituality. She received her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University. Dr. Vargas also has a BA from Rutgers University and a MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary. She defended her dissertation in 2020 which was titled, "Lo Que Predicábamos No [Era] Americanismo": Protestantism and Cross-Cultural Religious Encounter in the Shadow of Empire, a Twentieth Century

2026 Conference

Cuban Case Position. Dr. Vargas's research in the history of religions investigates the intersections of cross-cultural religious encounter and identity formation, with particular attention to the entanglements of religion, empire, and politics.

Inspired by Rubem Alves, Dr. Vargas sees the task of history as one of recovery and sacramental dissemination. Her work centers on the history of Christianity in Latin America, particularly the Protestant Church. Employing critical and postcolonial methodologies, she examines previously unheard voices from history, allowing new histories to emerge. These new histories witness the significant and unique ways in which the Latin American Church and its progeny, the Latine Church in the United States, have historically contributed to the story of the global Christian movement.



Denise Dawkins Weir

A North Carolina native and seasoned higher education leader, Denise Dawkins Weir is dedicated to fostering inclusive academic environments. As a double HBCU alumna with over 16 years of post-secondary experience, she specializes in creating "safe spaces" for underrepresented populations. Her extensive background spans student conduct, freshman advisement, workforce development, and adjunct instruction.

Currently, Denise serves as the Internship Coordinator for the Public Health Informatics and Technology Program at Dominican University New York, while also supporting the Division of Business, Innovation, and Leadership. She is a Doctoral Candidate at Manhattanville University, where her research focuses on the intersection of autism and culture, specifically exploring the lived experiences of Autistic Black male students.

Mary Jo Small Scholars

We're excited to welcome back some of our Mary Jo Small Fellows from 2025. The Mary Jo Small Scholar's program provides our MJS Fellows a second opportunity to attend the conference. In the second year of the fellowship, MJS Scholars serve as volunteers at the conference and are invited to present their work. Fellows returning this year include:

Akua Cosby

Kristin Harmon

Yonca Cubuk Uzundag

Tyesia Williams

Dues/Annual Fund

We rely on member dues and annual fund contributions to continue our good work. You can renew your membership, join SFHE, or contribute to the Annual Fund at <https://sfhe.networkforgood.com/projects/90341-membership-renewal>

Board of Directors

Its time to elect new Board members! Thanks to Melanie Howard for her serving as President for two terms as well as serving as Secretary and a Board member before that. We also want to thank Amy Berger for her service as Secretary and Kiera Warren for serving as a Board member. The Society could not function without the valuable contributions of our members.

Candidates for the Board

Rebekah Adderley

Dr. Rebekah Adderley is a Professor of Speech and Communication Studies at the Tarrant County College Connect (virtual) Campus. Dr. Adderley began teaching K-12 in the fall of 2005 and began teaching at Tarrant College in the fall of 2008. Dr. Adderley has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Studies from the University of North TX, a graduate certification in secondary education from the University of North TX, a Master of Arts degree in Communication from the University of TX at Arlington, a graduate certification in Multicultural Women’s Gender Studies from Texas Woman’s University and a Doctor of Education degree in Learning and Organizational Change with Baylor University.

Dr. Adderley joined the SFHE in 2022 and has served on the board of directors and as VP. Dr. Adderley is passionate about student engagement, equity in higher education, social justice education, and promoting best practices within the e-learning space.

Eric Bain-Selbo

Eric Bain-Selbo is Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Southeast Missouri State University. Across four institutions, he has spent approximately 25 years in administrative leadership positions. His research spans across the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies, focusing primarily on social ethics, political philosophy, comparative religion, cultural criticism, and issues in higher education. He has been a frequent presenter at conferences such as the American Academy of Religion, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the American Democracy Project (American Association of State Colleges and Universities). He has authored numerous articles, book chapters, and six books. His most recent book is entitled The End(s) of Religion: A History of How the Study of Religion Makes Religion Irrelevant (Bloomsbury, 2022). He is co-editor of the International Journal of Sport and Religion and the Editor-in-Chief of the Encyclopedia of Religion and Popular Culture (Springer, 2027).

Eric has been a member of the Society for approximately a quarter of a century. During that time, he has served on the Board and from 2011 to 2021 was the Executive Director. For many years, he partnered with Allen Dunn to offer the Theorizing Culture Morning Seminar at the annual meeting. He also has served on the Editorial Board of Soundings since 2009 and was co-editor from 2016 to 2021.

Sarah Moore

I first attended the conference in 2015 when it took place at Western Kentucky University. I was introduced to the society by my friend Dorothy Hurlburt, who had a paper accepted in 2012. From the start, I was drawn to the sense of community as much as I was to the academic papers and panels.

At that time, I was teaching composition at Hawkeye College in Iowa, though after the pandemic I left academia and started a small editing business with Dorothy. Before I moved to Iowa I taught in Indianapolis, then returned to my native Scotland to pursue a master’s and then PhD in English literature, specifically transatlantic connections and synchronicities between Scotland and North America in the nineteenth century.

Even though I am no longer in academia I have continued to attend the annual meetings, and to appreciate the spirit of intellectual inquiry that the society offers as well as, of course, the friendship of the other attendees. Now, if I am accepted to serve on the SFHE board, I look forward to

In Memory

Thomas Berger July 1941 - October 2024

Thomas R. Berger, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at Colby College, died October 22, 2024 in Oberlin, Ohio at the age of 83. He is survived by spouse Jeanne, children Amy and Scott, and numerous friends, caregivers, and many alumni from both Colby College and the University of Minnesota whom he taught.

Tom was born on 3 July, 1941, in Seattle, Washington and shortly thereafter moved to Sunnyvale, California where he completed high school. Tom earned his B.S. degree in Mathematics and Physics from Trinity College in Connecticut and went on to complete his Ph.D. in Mathematics from California Institute of Technology. In 1967, he started his career in group theory and representation theory at the University of Minnesota. His interest in education also led him to teach in the University of Minnesota program for gifted and talented high school students. From 1988-1991 he worked at the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C. overseeing the awarding of grants for the improvement of mathematics education nationwide. Tom resumed teaching as the Carter Professor of Mathematics at Colby College in Maine, where he remained a passionate practitioner of transformative education until his retirement in 2006.

[Read Tom’s full obituary here.](#)

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