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The Teaching and Learning Center is pleased to present the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*. The series is dedicated to helping faculty to stay connected with one another while working remotely. Every week, a faculty member will have the opportunity to answer ten questions about themselves and about navigating the changes brought about by COVID-19. This week, we are pleased to feature Dr. Ryan Wurst, Professor of Digital Art.



Dr. Ryan Wurst
Professor of Digital Art

Where are you from?

I am from Denver, Colorado.

Which college or university did you attend?

I received a Bachelor's of Music from the University of Colorado at Boulder, a Master's of Fine Art at the University of Minnesota, and a PhD at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

When did you begin teaching at FSW?

I started teaching at FSW in the Fall of 2019.

What made you become interested in your academic discipline?

Both of my parents are music teachers, so I don't remember a time when music wasn't an essential aspect

of my life. I always joke that I didn't really have a chance. I started migrating to the visual arts after composing music on the computer. In my undergrad, I had a really important mentor, Michael

Theodore,

who really broke down any barriers between all art disciplines. That freedom allowed me to try anything

that was even related to art. I do believe that it is the people in my life that have guided me far more than

any other factor.

What is your favorite food?

Dang! This is too difficult. I love Chinese food so much, but my favorite local restaurant is Nice Guys Pizza.

If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be and what would you ask them?

This is going to be a little bit of a strange answer, but I would want to have dinner with Napoleon. I absolutely love history and for the longest time I wanted to be a history teacher. In middle school I wrote

a huge research paper on Napoleon. I would have dinner with him just to tell my younger self. I think I would forget the questions about his wars or anything like that. I would probably ask him more about his

relationship with Josephine. It would probably come out as crazy as any of the reality shows on TV right

now. Maybe I would just spend the whole dinner trying to convince Napoleon to go on a reality show.

What new things have you learned or done as a result of COVID-19 & working remotely?

I think, in a weird way, I have started really loving any interaction with strangers. There are so few opportunities to see strangers when everything is taking place in my home. I have found myself waving to everyone that I see. If I am walking my dog, I will stop and chat with them at a distance. I think this is

going to cause me to be late for many meetings in the future.

COVID-19 has increased online learning, and as a result, the need for promoting inclusivity in virtual learning environments. What ideas can you share with your colleagues about how to ensure inclusivity in the virtual classroom?

I have really noticed that students are desperate for connection. My Zoom classes have had some of the best conversations I've had in a classroom setting. The students want to talk to each other and to do that

in a space where they have the ability to be wrong. I try to emphasize in my art classes that we are not in

search of an answer, but we are in search of a good conversation. There are far less opportunities for the

offhand conversation with a student in the hall or for the students to joke around. Every interaction that we have right now is scheduled. I really work hard to create moments where students can talk and joke around with each other. I have also found myself letting the class go into tangent land far more. It has also been very helpful for me too because it makes my teaching feel a little more natural and closer to what I am like teaching in person.

What are you doing (exercise, cooking, reading, etc.) to take care of your mental and physical health during social isolation?

I think the thing that kept me going more than anything else is my dog Andy and journaling. I adopted Andy in June this year and I feel like that is the moment in the pandemic where I felt okay. Having him changed everything for me.

What advice do you have for your colleagues on how to navigate social isolation and changes from COVID-19?

I don't know if this is advice, but I do think it is important to notice small moments of joy. It's really easy

for me to get too set on all of the happenings in a day, but I do try to stop and let moments sink in as much as possible. I try to let the joyful ones sink a little bit more than I would pre-COVID.

If you would like to be featured in the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*, please contact Kelly Westfield, Coordinator of Marketing & Technology for the Teaching and Learning Center: kwestfield@fsw.edu



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