

REPORT ON SABBATICAL FALL 2024
SYDNEY SIMS
2/1/2025

Purposes and Outcomes

In the last several years, and especially since Covid, students are arriving at Moorpark with more, and more profound, mental health issues. Experiences of trauma create difficulties in managing school, work, and life in general. Spectrum disorders and learning disabilities can create intellectual, emotional, and social problems that hinder students' progress toward their goals. Even without extraordinary trauma, unacknowledged patterns of thought and behavior can impede students' academic success and emotional well-being. Zen-centered training and practice offers tools to recognize these patterns and facilitate positive change and growth.

Mindfulness practices have been proven to enhance student success. The college already teaches mindfulness both directly, through the Student Health Center, and indirectly, in the Growth Mindset training received by tutors in The Learning Center. This sabbatical continues in the same direction, equipping me to respond more flexibly and compassionately to students' academic, psychological, and emotional needs. It has improved my teaching skills by allowing me to focus more purposefully on students' needs and to bring greater clarity and awareness to the classroom. This training and practice support both my teaching and my service to students and colleagues.

One often-unacknowledged source of anxiety is the fear of death. Many students have experienced the death of relatives and friends. I completed training as a hospice volunteer with Livingston Memorial in Ventura (<https://www.lmvna.org/>) to recognize and confront this anxiety in myself and others, and have begun making visits to hospice and palliative care patients. (I originally intended to pursue Clinical Pastoral Education and seek opportunities to serve as chaplain-in-training at a local hospital or university. However, CPE training requires a year of residency, and I decided to limit myself to hospice volunteering for the time being.)

I completed a four-day intensive training in Compassionate Bereavement Care with Dr. Joanne Cacciatore, a professor at Northern Arizona State University and researcher/author in the field of traumatic grief. Philosophy and course details are at <https://www.missfoundation.org/compassionate-bereavement-care-certification/>.

During the same period I continued my Zen studies with Paul Genki Kahn, Roshi, co-founder of The Zen Garland Order and the Ancient Oaks Temple in Savannah, Georgia (<https://zengarland.org/>). In June 2024 I ordained as a novice priest. I served as Head Trainee for a three-month intensive study period in fall 2024, culminating in becoming a Dharma Holder in the Soto Zen tradition.

One-on-One Training

- Paul Genki Kahn, Roshi: weekly one-hour Zoom meetings on Zen study, practice, and teaching, plus three in-person visits to his temple in Savannah
June 2024: priest ordination
October 2024: head trainee (Shuso) for intensive three-month Zen training period (Ango)
- Maddy Hazzard: weekly one-on-one meetings to review hospice training manual and related resources at Livingston Memorial

Reading

I read the following books on Zen philosophy, history, and practice; contemplative/mindfulness-based care; and pastoral work, along with other related readings:

- Hee-Jim Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist*
- Hee-Jim Kim, *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on his View of Zen*
- Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*
- Livingston Memorial Training Manual 2024, plus related articles on hospice work
- Cheryl A Giles, *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work*
- Dr. Joanne Cacciatore, *Bearing the Unbearable*
- Julie McFadden, RN, *Nothing to Fear: Demystifying Death to Live More Fully*
- JoAnne Chitwood, RN, *My Gift: Myself, A Guide to Excellence in End-of-Life Care*
- Livingston Memorial Training Manual

Service and Professional Development

Having returned to campus, I intend to offer professional development activities to colleagues on supporting students with mental health concerns and habitual patterns through a Zen- and hospice-informed awareness and openness. I will be able to convey the basics of Zen Focusing, a therapeutic practice of somatic awareness, for both teaching and personal growth. If invited, I will offer an introduction to Zen meditation to Moorpark students through the Student Health Center.