

Sabbatical Leave Proposal
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Proposal date: November 2013
Proposed leave time: Spring 2016
Seniority of service: August 2004-present

Overview of Sabbatical Proposal

The Writing Center has been providing peer tutoring for many years. Since 2008 the Basic Skills committee has piloted a program that places supplemental instruction coaches (class-embedded tutors) in several sections of Basic Skills math and English classes; we have seen an associated rise in student success in these classes. Based on the need and desire to expand tutoring into other disciplines, and recent data about Moorpark College student success and equity, the Writing Center as part of the Learning Center needs to provide faculty, tutors, and supplemental instruction coaches with more specific, evidence-based information on best practices for assignments and tutoring across the disciplines. I am proposing a one-semester sabbatical for spring 2016 to research supplemental instruction coach strategies to support faculty and tutors in increasing student success and persistence. I will complete the following tasks:

1. Document the historical use of supplemental instruction coaches in Moorpark College's Basic Skills courses through interviews with faculty and supplemental instruction coaches.
2. Research supplemental instruction programs at other local community colleges and CSU's to explore ways to improve and expand our program.
3. Examine frequent writing assignments in non-English classes that students bring to the Writing Center to identify the rhetorical skills that will support writing across the disciplines, focusing on current research on threshold knowledge.
4. Create a brief handbook to present best practices and strategies for tutors, supplemental instruction coaches, and faculty to incorporate the best practices of this high-impact practice to contribute to student success at Moorpark College.

My project supports the mission of the Ventura County Community College District in its commitment to being a leader in the "development of high quality, innovative educational programs and services" and "supplemental learning services that contribute to student success." The project directly supports the Moorpark College mission statement which promises to "create learning environments that blend curriculum and services." This project will allow the Writing Center to support faculty and tutors in increasing student success. By including the current research on threshold knowledge, I will create a supplemental instruction model that strategically places tutors in discipline classes to help students with reading and writing assignments they struggle with the most.

Faculty Background

I have been involved in many campus committees focused on creating a classroom environment that supports student success. I plan to continue my involvement in student success

worked well in the Basic Skills classrooms that can be sustained by the current budget of the tutoring centers on campus. My sabbatical project will provide faculty and students with a resource that will foster student success across the disciplines.

2. Research Supplemental Instruction programs at other institutions.

I will research the ways other colleges have made their supplemental instruction programs sustainable, for example, by allowing peer tutors to earn course credits through a Career Center internship or to receive recognition on their transcripts. I will research how other community colleges and four-year institutions address issues of student success and equity, responding to high-need students in historically difficult courses. The funding for the supplemental instruction model has remained level, so we have not been able to “ramp up” the program. There are other ways to achieve the results of the supplemental instruction coach through the creation of internships or as an honors class or club activity. Irvine Valley College has created a supplemental instruction model using honor students from psychology to embed tutors in its first year psychology courses, with great success in student success and retention. This is one of several models that I will review. This sabbatical will allow me to research and identify the key components of this model used on other campuses so we can expand our use of supplemental instruction coaches in other discipline courses and create a plan for Moorpark College.

3. Examine frequent writing assignments to identify key rhetorical skills needed for writing across the disciplines.

The Writing Center has seen growing numbers of students seeking writing assistance in disciplines outside of English. This new population necessitates better training for our tutors. California’s Basic Skills Initiative will be hosting a series of workshops in the next two years on “threshold concepts”—difficult ideas in discipline courses that often create barriers to success for community college students. Students struggle with reading and writing not only in English courses, but in various disciplines that require specialized writing tasks. Mark Blaauw-Hara explains in the May 2014 *NCTE Teaching English in the Two Year College* article, “Transfer Theory, Threshold Concepts, and First-Year Composition: Connecting Writing Courses to the Rest of the College” that “transfer theory and threshold concepts hold great promise for giving us ways to increase the relevancy of general-education writing courses...which frequently suffer from a disconnect from the rest of the college writing environment” (354). During my sabbatical I plan to apply these concepts, in order to increase “the connection between general-education writing and the rest of the college” (Blaauw-Hara 354). When students from discipline courses come into the Writing Center for help on an assignment, our tutors often ask for a sample assignment and model of writing to help students on these assignments because the purpose and format can be quite different from an English composition essay. At the Writing Center we have begun to collect writing assignments from faculty across campus; we now need a handbook that presents key rhetorical strategies used in different disciplines to orient new tutors and serve as reference material. By understanding the rhetorical demands of, for example, history or biology, our tutors will be better prepared to help students succeed in those classes. This training will be important for supplemental instruction coaches to understand as well.

- Use tutor training material in College M02, Tutoring Methods: “Introduces methods for tutoring individuals and groups. Examines learning theories and instructional pedagogies, and provides opportunities for application of skills to tutoring sessions” (Moorpark College Catalog, 2014-2015)
- Prepare workshops for the ALAS Grant participants
- Present findings at International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring, November 2016
- Work with faculty from Ventura College and Oxnard College to share best practices in supplemental instruction