

Sabbatical Request

Prof. David Birchman

English Department

Moorpark College

I. Opening Statement

I am submitting this sabbatical request in order to spend the Spring Semester 2016 teaching in France at the University of Toulouse-Paul Sabatier, the technical branch of the University of Toulouse. This experience, which will not be paid by the university, will enable me to better accomplish the following:

- Design and perfect a course in composition and critical thinking that specifically addresses the needs of our STEM students.
- Gain needed expertise as to how Moorpark's English department can more effectively meet the challenges to its composition programs as more students enter college from Common Core with its emphasis on the STEM disciplines.
- Create a link to a foreign university to enhance our Multicultural Day program.
- Gain a different perspective on issues pertaining to pedagogy and classroom management.

Post-sabbatical activity (fall 2016 forward) – 1) Review and improve my course on *Writing and Reading for Science and Technology* based on my teaching experience in France 2) Present my experience and my survey finding to my colleagues within the Ventura Community College District and at different English language and composition conferences.

III. Project Overview

My objective during my sabbatical semester is to place myself -- an American professor of English composition -- into a French scientific and technical university in order to improve English instruction for both American and French undergraduate students.

What I bring to the table for the French university is over thirty years of experience as an instructor and writer in both the academic world and the world of private industry.

Moreover, for the past thirteen years I've been a fully tenured instructor of English composition and literature. I will also bring an American pedagogical perspective to a department largely dominated by instructors trained in Europe with the idea that good ideas can come from an exchange of teaching strategies and philosophies.

The benefit of this experience for my own country will hopefully be an interesting perspective on how to modify and improve undergraduate composition courses in light of the recently introduced Common Core curriculum with its emphasis on the STEM disciplines. I want to see how English is taught to students who largely wish to be future scientists and engineers and who come from the *baccalauréat technologique*

evaluating the quality and sufficiency of evidence, understanding the relationship between correlation and causation, etc.; and 3) an evaluative essay written by each student of an existing scientific or engineering paper chosen from his or her chosen field. Although some of the modeling for these tasks would be delivered through lecture, the majority of these tasks would be accomplished through collaborative student centered activities.

Finally, I would make clear that I do not subscribe to the notion that good scientists and technicians do not have to be strong writers. A solid composition course develops a disciplined way of thinking; scientists and technicians need to think in a disciplined manner – although a little intuitive right-brained thinking helps now and again.

In the spring and fall of 2015, I will be teaching an Honors 1A course of my design called *Writing and Reading for Science and Technology*. In the Spring Semester of 2016, I hope to teach a similar course to engineering students at the University of Toulouse III-Paul Sabatier.

IV. Why France?

In the winter of this year, I began my communication with the University of Toulouse-Paul Sabatier as a means to connect my interest in France and the French language with my growing interest in teaching composition to STEM students. After submitting my curriculum vitae, examples of my course work, and letters of recommendation to the

3) A specialized course in Engineering terminology for advanced English language students (**Cours TD de composition et rédaction en anglais scientifique**).

It has been well over a decade and a half since I've worked with engineers as a technical writer. This course will be a welcome review. It will help me become more acquainted with this part of the STEM population.

4) The mentoring of new instructors (**formation des futurs enseignants**)

I will be mentoring new English instructors and creating a seminar for the exchange of ideas regarding the teaching of English composition and classroom management.

These courses and activities will be challenging. The University of Toulouse is a world ranked university. (Jean Tirole from its economics department was a recipient the Nobel Prize this year.)

My connection to France and the French language began in the fall of 1970 when I was a student in Avignon, France, through a program at the University of Washington. I attended the Cité Littéraire Universitaire (CLU) with a small group of students from the Northwest. My hosts for the six months while I was there were the Millards, a working class French family.

My connection with the French language continued from 1974-76 when I served with the U.S. Peace Corps in Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo) as a rural development specialist in a remote village. Although I communicated with most of the villagers in Tshiluba, I used French with my Zairian homologue and the local

VI. How Research Will Be Disseminated

Once my research is written, it will be disseminated through a series of conferences such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), English Council of California Two-Year Colleges (ECCTYC), and the Young Rhetoricians' Conference (YRC). The research will also be shared among my colleagues, both in our English department and in the other science and technical disciplines.

VII. Ultimate Benefit to Students at Moorpark College

It is my intention to design and teach a 1A Honors Composition for STEM students at Moorpark that will be ground breaking in its conception and performance. My semester experience at the University of Toulouse-Paul Sabatier will help me do just that. It will give me a foreign perspective on the teaching of composition to science and technical students that I would not otherwise have; it will improve my knowledge of science and technology, which will make me a sharper instructor, and it will allow me to share my views on pedagogy with instructors coming from a different academic tradition. All of this should make my STEM course a better course and me a better instructor. In addition, the survey conducted at Moorpark and in France will further help me hone the specifics of the course.

Multicultural Day. For the past several years I have served on the campus Multicultural Day committee as its program director. Although this event includes a presentation put on by our foreign students, I feel the need to have a direct Skype

Subject: Letter of Acceptance

Dear Colleague,

After reviewing your application to be a visiting professor of English in our department LVG (Modern Languages Department) as part of your sabbatical year, we are pleased to inform you that we agree to receive your educational service in the areas we discussed during our videoconference, namely:

- English specialty (Upsitech)
- Translation for other disciplines (science)
- Courses TD composition and English writing scientific (L to M)
- MEEF (teacher training)

We remain at your disposal to discuss the terms of your reception and your service teaching in our department.

We hope that our collaboration will be fruitful. Please accept, dear colleague, our best regards.

Cordially,

Executives

Ph. Murillo / I. Arthus / Cl. Peyre

Notes: Abbreviations used are those of the University Toulouse-Paul Sabatier

My English specialty is composition.

Cours TD - lectures and supervised exercises