

VENTURA COLLEGE

SET YOUR COURSE

Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal

On-Site Research Project for Spring 2016

Submitted by Jenna Garcia

English Department

October 2014

Instructor's Sabbatical Leave Status

Full-time hire date: August 2006 Part-time hire date: August 2005

Previous Sabbaticals: 0

Background of Sabbatical Project

In 2013, 70% of our incoming students placed into developmental English classes (English 2 or lower), and these numbers have remained consistent over at least the past five years ("09-14"). Students who place into these basic skills classes face the challenge of raising their English skills to the college level while simultaneously enrolling in other courses across the curriculum that require them to demonstrate those very skills.

Katie Hern, an English instructor at Chabot College who researches ways to improve the success of students who place into developmental classes, argues that "developmental classes should provide students the chance to practice, and receive guidance in, the kinds of complex intellectual challenges they will actually see in a good college course." In other words, Basic Skills classes should not be easier classes with simpler tasks. Instead, they should present students with rigorous coursework supported by more scaffolding and assistance than they would get in a traditional transfer-level course. This would assist students because in order "to be prepared for college-level academic literacy, students need concentrated practice in these skills and habits of mind" (Hern). With these skills and habits, students would then be better equipped for the other classes they are enrolled in concurrently and the classes they will take in the future.

One way to raise the rigor in English 2 is by assigning a book-length nonfiction text in addition to the traditional reader or articles that are often used. Many of our instructors have had great success using *Tattoos on the Heart* by Gregory Boyle. It would be useful, however, to have a variety of texts that instructors could easily access to use in class.

Purpose of Sabbatical Project

The purpose of this sabbatical project is threefold: (1) identify and evaluate appropriate book-length nonfiction texts for English 2, (2) establish a library of review copies available to English 2 instructors and

add copies of the books to the Ventura College library, and (3) research scaffolding strategies to support reading and analysis of these and other books.

Components of Sabbatical Project

- Identify and evaluate books

The books must meet several criteria in order to be appropriate for this project. First, they must be an appropriate length (approximately 200 pages). Second, they must be available in paperback. Finally, they need to address a wide range of possible topics, some current, some timeless. I plan to begin my search by speaking with colleagues across the campus about the types of books/genres they often use in class. If the goal is to prepare students for the type of work they will encounter in other classes, these texts should be directly relevant to other general education classes.

- Establish a library for instructors and add to the Ventura College library

Reviewing appropriate books can be a time consuming process that may impede many instructors from adopting new texts in their classes. I will work with publishers to get exam copies of the texts and find a centralized location to store them so that any faculty member from English (and perhaps other disciplines) could access them. I will also work with the VC library staff to order copies of these texts for our regular library holdings.

- Research strategies for scaffolding book-length works

Many of our students do not have experience reading book-length nonfiction works and need assistance for accessing them. I plan to research strategies related to Reading Apprenticeship and Talking to the Text as ways to guide students through these texts. In addition to having these strategies available for myself, I would prepare handouts and/or workshops that could be used for Flex activities or Writing across the Curriculum work (perhaps connected with the Velocidad Title V grant or the Reading and Writing Center).

Value of Sabbatical Project to VCCCD and Ventura College

Currently, our campus is very concerned with student success (identified primarily as degrees and certificates). The goals I have identified would help students achieve success by raising the level of their engagement with the courses they take. It would also be related to equity issues as I would be seeking texts from a wide range of voices. The larger campus community could also benefit from having more strategies for setting up scaffolding for book-length works in courses across the curriculum.

Value of Sabbatical Project to Ventura College Students

Approximately 70% of our students will need to take English 2 as part of their college education. This project would benefit not only students in my classes, but potentially the students in other English 2 classes. Students who gain practice with reading academic book-length texts will be better prepared to read the required texts (monographs, primary sources, etc.) in their other classes at Ventura College. They will also be better prepared for the coursework they will encounter if they transfer. They will be able to apply the strategies to any text they read and will likely be less intimidated by the texts they encounter in other classes.

Value of Sabbatical Project to the Instructor

Completion of this project would help me raise the level of rigor in my classes and add to my teaching tools. I have begun experimenting with various ways of having students respond to texts, but have not had the time to fully research new strategies. This project would primarily benefit my English 2 classes, but the overall pedagogical practices would be relevant to all of my classes.

Thank you to the committee for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jenna Garcia
Professor of English