

## Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal

Creating an Awareness and Knowledge Acquisition of *Santería* in the United States

Submitted by Ben Somoza

Department of Modern Languages

November 1, 2019

### Instructor's Sabbatical Leave Status

**Full-time hire date:** August 2011

**Part-time district hire date.** 2005

**Previous Sabbaticals:** 0

### Background

As a child growing up in Cuba, I was fascinated by *Santería*, also known as *Regla de Ocha*, or *Lucumí*, its history in the Caribbean, and its trajectory to the United States. *Santería* originated in Cuba as a combination of the West Africa's Yoruba religion and Catholicism. Cuba's prevailing religion is Christianity, primarily Roman Catholic, although in some instances it has been profoundly modified and influenced through syncretism.

The creation of this new religion in Western culture developed as a necessity for the African slaves to hide their worshipping deities from the Catholic priests whose goal was to convert them to Catholicism. These slaves were now faced with a new challenge; how to pray to their African gods and still survive. The answer was to create African deities that reflected the same qualities as those of Catholic saints.

### Purpose of Sabbatical Project

The purpose of my proposed sabbatical is to develop an educational bridge to students seeking cultural knowledge while reflecting on the cultural impact and practices within the Latino and Anglo-Saxon communities in the United States. I intend to link this project to courses offered by the Sociology, History, and Political Science departments thus creating a sense of respect, tolerance and acceptance.

The outcome of this sabbatical is comprised of research and its conclusions in the four areas noted below:

- Socio-economic impact
- Political implications
- Religious ramifications
- Urban growth in America

### **Value of Sabbatical Project to VCCCD and Ventura College**

The District and Ventura College will benefit by having a more knowledgeable student population. The depth and breadth of the students' experience of *Santería* will fundamentally contribute to a new sense of community, enhanced student success and retention because of an amplified level of critical thinking.

### **Value of Sabbatical Project to Ventura College Students:**

The objective of this project will be to educate and expand our students' minds, and shatter images previously established through a lack of comprehension of social, political, religious, or historical information.

### **Value of Sabbatical Project to the Instructor**

*Santería* is an intriguing, stimulating and often-misunderstood topic. As an educator, it allows my students and I to expand the exploration of this subject beyond the average boundaries of the typical curriculum. This will enhance the overall educational experience for the college community and the student population at large.

I appreciate your consideration.

Respectfully,

Ben Somoza