

**Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal**  
Submitted by Kevin Bortolin for Fall 2019 & Spring 2020  
Philosophy Department  
November 2018

**Instructor's Sabbatical Leave Status**

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

**Part-time district hire date:** January 1997

**Previous Sabbaticals:** 0

**Instructor's Educational Background**

BA in Liberal Studies, San Diego State University

BA in Philosophy, San Diego State University

MA in Religious Studies, U C Santa Barbara

**Background of Sabbatical Project**

The Philosophy Department at Ventura College, like many California Community Colleges, includes courses in Philosophy and Religion. Some of these colleges have renamed the department as Philosophy & Religious Studies to make explicit the courses offered. Some years ago I built curriculum for the successful Zen Buddhism course, a course that fulfills 3 units worth of requirements in the Arts and Humanities Emphasis for the Associates Degree in General Studies, Patterns I, II, and III. It also fulfills a 3 unit requirement for the Holistic Health Studies Emphasis, 2a. Spiritual Courses section, as well as 3 units required for the AA-T in Philosophy. Finally, the Zen course fulfills 3 units required for the CSU GE, Area C: Arts and Humanities, IGETC, Area 3: Arts and Humanities, and meets the UC TCA agreement. More recently I have built curriculum for three new religious studies courses (submitted to Curricunet, approval pending, expected for Fall 2019) - PHIL V12: Introduction to Religion, PHIL V14: Confucianism and Taoism, PHIL V15: Teachings of Jesus in Comparative Perspective. All intended to be folded into, and fulfill requirements for, the same programs mentioned above.

The studies of philosophy and religion are rightly housed in the areas known as the Liberal Arts and Humanities. Liberal Arts in the sense that they are the free-making arts, the arts that set the mind free, arts necessary for free and fully human society. Humanities in the sense of fostering the cultivation of those human capacities that make for a more wise and compassionate individual life. All students deserve an education that provides the depth and breadth that reflects our humanity, not merely one that reduces the individual to a specialized function. At the Aspen Ideas Festival, 2016, Drew Gilpin Faust, president of Harvard University, and cultural critic Leon Wieseltier argued that studying the humanities is vital for the ways in which it teaches us how to be human. "The purpose of the humanities is not primarily

utilitarian,” Wieseltier said, “the purpose of the humanities is to cultivate the individual, cultivate the citizen.” Faust added, “the humanities are such an important vehicle for widening the world, for teaching empathy for people outside yourself.” In part, history teaches students about the contexts of decisions made in the past. Philosophy and religion prompts them to think about what is good, real, true, right and beautiful. Theater, literature and film make possible the vicarious identification with others. In difficult times, people inevitably turn to the humanities to try to understand adversity. “People in trouble don’t turn to regression analysis,” Wieseltier said. “Their souls require the fortification and the wisdom that only humanistic thinking can provide.”

In his 2016 article titled *The Myths and Realities of a Liberal Arts Education*, Sean Decatur points up the value liberal arts and humanities degrees have in today’s economy. He writes, “The relationship between the liberal arts and career success has been studied extensively. Reports by the Association of Colleges and Universities point to the value that employers give to hiring employees with proven writing and communication skills, the ability to learn and integrate new material, a broad understanding of the humanities, natural and social sciences, and analytical skills – which are all hallmarks of a liberal education. Moreover, **high impact pedagogical practices** – seminar style learning, community based learning, etc. – enrich students with characteristics that employers report to be highly desirable in prospective employees. Study after study demonstrates that an education in the liberal arts and sciences is excellent preparation for success in a range of careers.”

In *STEM Education is Vital – but not at the Expense of the Humanities* (2016), the author discusses that the current trend of promoting science and technology education **to the exclusion of** the humanities may seem like a good idea, but is deeply misguided. He quotes Steve Jobs (who never completed a college degree, but did study such subjects as physics, literature, poetry, calligraphy and eastern religions) who once declared, “It’s in Apple’s DNA that technology alone is not enough – **that it’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities**, that yields us the result that makes our hearts sing.” In 2013 the Association of Colleges and Universities issued the results of a survey of 318 employers with 25 or more employees showing that nearly all of them thought that the ability to **“think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems”** – the precise objectives of any liberal arts education – was more important than a job candidate’s specific major.

The Aspen Ideas Festival (2016) spawned another article titled *Why America’s Business Majors are in Desperate Need of a Liberal Arts Education*. The report states that business majors seem to be graduating with some of the technical skills they’ll need to secure jobs, but without having made the gains in writing and critical thinking skills they’ll require to succeed over the course of their careers, or to adapt as their technical skills become outdated and the nature of the opportunities they have shifts over time.

A 2014 study of the Collegiate Learning Assessment test – administered to some 13,000 undergraduates as they entered and exited university – found that business, health, and education

majors substantially underperformed students in the humanities, sciences, social sciences and engineering. The authors then adjusted their results to account for the academic abilities of students entering these majors – and found that business and education majors still showed substantially lower gains in writing, complex reasoning, and critical thinking by the time they had graduated.

Those are the weaknesses that a liberal arts education can address. “Liberal arts majors...are the students who have the active minds, who are asking the big questions,” said Erica Walker, an assistant dean at UC Berkeley’s Hass School of Business. That, she said, was a mindset that all students require. “What we need to strive to achieve for the students who aren’t asking the big questions is: challenge yourselves.”

Finding workers who ask those questions can pay off, literally, for businesses. “We have become so myopic in solving business problems that we don’t think about those problems from the perspective of other disciplines,” said Charles Iacovou, dean of the school of business at Wake Forest University. And that sort of context offers a critical competitive edge, even if not all undergraduates understand that. “More reflective education is the kind of thing they push back on,” Walker said. “But this is what businesses are telling us they need.”

**Businesses want workers who have the “ability to think, the ability to write, the ability to understand the cultural or historical context of whatever business decision they’re making,”** added Rachel Reiser, assistant dean at Boston University’s Questrom School of Business. If undergraduates want to find success, **they need to master those skills.** “We’re trying to help them understand there may be so much more to a business education,” Walker said.

And beyond the career advantages that these skills confer, there’s a broader case for offering a liberal arts education to the hundreds and thousands of students who graduate every year with business degrees. It doesn’t just increase their economic competitiveness, it also strengthens their ability to contribute to the broader society, and to leading fulfilling lives. “We as educational institutions have two jobs: to prepare them to enter the profession, but also to prepare them as human beings and as citizens,” Iacovou said.

Our District Vision Statement reads: *The VCCCD will become the leader in the development of high quality, innovative educational programs and services. Keeping in mind that students come first, we will model best practice in instructional and service delivery, student access, community involvement, and accountability.* An excerpt from our District Mission Statement adds: *VCCCD provides students, in its diverse community, with access to comprehensive quality educational opportunities that support student learning and student success.*

In the past Ventura College offered an array of collaborative Learning Communities or Team Teaching courses. Such courses are no longer on the schedule. As concrete examples of themes presented in our District’s Vision and Mission Statements, the benefit of such courses in the past was threefold: they provided a cohort or community for students to share with their fellow classmates, they enabled students to integrate subject matter from a variety of related courses

into one dynamic narrative, thereby increasing comprehension of material, and finally, they improved student retention and success. **Contributing factors to such benefits enjoyed by the students and the college by extension, were the use of other high impact pedagogical practices such as seminar style learning, discussion and inquiry-based learning, reading together, etc.**

Within the framework of the disciplines of philosophy and religion, and the areas of the liberal arts and humanities, my constant goal is to help our students awaken to a love of learning born of their natural sense of wonder. To awaken to it, nurture it, become skillful and fruitful in applying it to all aspects of their life, thereby growing in confidence. As Plato wrote: “Wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.” It’s helpful to note that the term “philosophy” was a term referring to all learning, hence **all our disciplines**. The attitude, the “feeling” that allows for meaningful learning to obtain, is that of wonder, natural to us.

*Nascantur in Admiratione*, “Let them be born in wonder.”

## **Sabbatical Project**

The purpose of this sabbatical project is fourfold: (1) to build curriculum for the philosophy and religion program, in particular, develop the following courses: PHIL V12: Introduction to Religion, PHIL V14: Confucianism and Taoism, PHIL V15: Teachings of Jesus in Comparative Perspective (these courses have been submitted, pending approval to be taught Fall 2019), (2) to research, gather and create classroom materials for these three courses: readings, videos, lesson plans – including contemplative journal writing exercises, seminar paper topics and directives, discussion formats and topics, etc., (3) participate in Agora Foundation events specializing in Seminar, Discussion and Inquiry-based Learning Methods – a focus on great works from world literature, philosophy, religion and theater – as to better understand how to implement such practices in courses taught, and (4) to establish a learning community relationship between Philosophy, English, History and Art, as well as a linking these new classes to Holistic Health Studies.

## **Components of the Sabbatical Project**

1. The first component, building curriculum for PHIL V12, V14 and V15, is nearly complete.
2. Research, reading, organizing and creating material for the classes: readings, videos, lesson plans, journal writing exercises, seminar paper directives and topics, discussion formats and topics, etc. Such research will include meeting up to twice monthly in San Diego for seminars with friend and mentor Dr. Howard Mueller, Professor Emeritus, Philosophy & Religious Studies, San Diego State University. Dr. Mueller specializes in Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Taoism, and Soren Kierkegaard. Work with the Agora Foundation is also applicable to this component.

3. These new courses will place emphasis on original texts in translation as the primary “teachers” and “lecturers.” Thus, variations in the use of Seminar, Discussion and Inquiry-based learning methods will be largely employed. Thus, to become more adept and comfortable with these high impact pedagogical practices, I will participate in many **Agora Foundation Great Books seminar events**. It’s notable that some of the texts used in Agora events are texts my courses will use.

**The seminar method**, which is central to the mission of The Agora Foundation, is very different from the educational experience of most people. Tutors, who help to guide the discussion, do not lecture about the meaning of the texts; rather they **ask probing questions** which, after **careful discussion**, help to illuminate the power of the ideas that arise in the discussion. As one of the seminar participants observed, *“the tutors guide the discussion minimally to keep it on track, but the real teachers in the room are the authors of the works themselves.”* **The reading and discussion** of the great books, organized in terms of special themes, is an approach to learning which requires an active role of each participant. The seminar setting emphasizes the **collaborative** nature of our approach. **The search to understand** what the text says and what its implications become a shared enterprise. Such **active participation** is an excellent way for one **to claim for oneself an understanding** of the great issues which continue to inform our culture. There are some subjects where the seminar approach, combined with relevant lectures, provides an ideal learning context. Many of those who have attended these seminars and mixed offerings over the past eight years have discussed the importance of the events to their lives, and how their character and thought has been transformed as a result.

4. To establish a learning community relationship between Philosophy V12 Intro to Religion, V14 Confucianism and Taoism, V15 Teachings of Jesus in Comparative Perspective, Art V02A and V02B Introduction to History of Western Art I and II, Art V08 Introduction to Asian Art, English V01C Advanced Composition & Critical Thinking, V30 and V31 Survey of World Literature I and II, History V18A & B World History I and II.  
Additionally, work with the Holistic Health Studies program to add the three new courses to its Required Additional Courses area 2b. Culture, Philosophy and Religion Courses.

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

The goals identified for this project will value both the Ventura County Community College District and Ventura College. The development of these three courses (PHIL V12, V14, V15), and professional development in the use of high impact pedagogical methods such as the seminar method, discussion and inquiry-based learning methods are concrete examples of aims found in our District’s Vision and Values Statements: *The VCCCD will become the leader in the development of high quality, innovative educational programs and services. Keeping in mind that students come first, we will model best practice in instructional and service delivery, student access, community involvement, and accountability...The VCCCD will become the leader*

*in the development of high quality, innovative educational programs and services. Keeping in mind that students come first, we will model best practice in instructional and service delivery, student access, community involvement, and accountability.* The development of these courses will overall benefit the philosophy program and supplement the college's course catalog in the following areas: the Arts and Humanities Emphasis for the Associates Degree in General Studies, Patterns I, II, and III, the AA-T in Philosophy, as well as the CSU GE, Area C: Arts and Humanities, IGETC, Area 3: Arts and Humanities, and meets the UC TCA agreement. The courses may also enhance the Holistic Health Studies program by adding them to its Required Additional Courses area 2b. Culture, Philosophy and Religion Courses.

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

The value of this project is that it will provide guidance to students in gaining a more expansive understanding of the primary religious traditions and figures of both the East and West, which includes understanding the diverse groups of human beings whose lives have been formed by the wisdom literature studied – their sense of the transcendent, their quest for meaning, their commitment to sacred values, their ideals of life, their aspirations and difficulties in the pursuit of living well. By being not only informed, but also transformed in gaining greater understanding, students may become more enlightened citizens of our world community.

The approach to the texts as the primary teachers and use of seminar, discussion and inquiry-based learning methods, will empower the students to question and think for themselves, to experience the joy that comes by arriving at understanding won through self-effort and sharing in the collaborative effort to assist one another to greater levels of meaning and understanding.

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

Completion of this project during my sabbatical leave would contribute to my teaching and benefit my students. I never grow weary of seeking to become a better student and teacher of my discipline. This opportunity can broaden my contribution to the college and the discipline of philosophy and religion. I believe this project will greatly enhance my service to Ventura College.

I thank all committee members for your time and thoughtful consideration.  
Respectfully,

Kevin Bortolin  
Associate Professor of Philosophy

## Appendix

### New Philosophy Courses

PHIL V12: Introduction to Religion

Course Description:

This course is an introductory study of religion with emphasis on the origins and functions of religion, religious experience, and religious and theological modes of expression. Course content will be drawn from Eastern and Western traditions, ancient, medieval and modern times.

PHIL V14: Confucianism and Taoism

Course Description:

An introduction to the history and cultural context of Confucianism, Taoism and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China and Japan. Focus on Confucius and Mencius, neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi), Taoist masters Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, and their influence on Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism. Emphasis will be given to original texts in translation.

PHIL V15: Teachings of Jesus in Comparative Perspective

Course Description:

This introductory course is a study of key images and interpretations of the life and teachings of Jesus, and analysis of the sources from which these are reconstructed, in biblical tradition, historical, cultural, theological, philosophical, artistic, comparative, and contemporary perspectives.

### Agora Foundation: examples of past events

**October 13, 2018**

The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus

**Sunday, September 9, 2018**

Don Quixote and Man of La Mancha, Seminar and Play Performance

**May 19, 2018**

Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

**March 24, 2018**

Aristotle on Friendship

**March 18, 2018**

Macbeth by William Shakespeare, Seminar and Play Performance

**February 24, 2018**

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte

**February 10, 2018**

The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali

**January 20, 2018**

Can Machines Think? Computing and Intelligence by Alan Turing

**October 14, 2017**

Notes from Underground by Fyodor Dostoevsky

**February 4, 2017**

The Future of an Illusion by Sigmund Freud

**January 7, 2017**

Selections from The Quran and The Life of Muhammad

**January 30, 2016**

Continuing Series on Happiness - Seneca, Of a Happy Life

**June 27, 2015**

The Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu

**May 9, 2015**

Love: Plato, Symposium; Shakespeare, Othello

**May 24, 2014**

Thus Spoke Zarathustra by Friedrich Nietzsche- Parts 1 and 2

**March 15, 2014**

Selections from The Upanishads

**December 14, 2013**

Emily Dickinson – Selections

**September 14, 2013**

Emma by Jane Austen

**March 9, 2013**

The Bhagavad Gita and Our Demand and Need from the Gita by Sri Aurobindo

**February 9, 2013**

The Iliad by Homer

**October 20, 2012**

The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoyevsky - Parts III and IV

**September 22, 2012**

The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoyevsky - Parts I and II

**March 31st, 2012**

Democracy in America(selections) by Alexis de Tocqueville

**February 16, 2008**

Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling

**Fundamental Seminars Program September 23 & 24, 2006 Human Suffering:**

Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus; The Bible, The Book of Job; Epictetus, The Handbook

**December 14 &15, 2001 Existentialism**

Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, No Exit and The Flies; Camus, The Stranger

**January 28 & 29, 2000**

Augustine, The Confessions

**December 4, 2004**

Dante, The Divine Comedy

**November 17 & 18, 2000**

Descartes, Meditations Concerning First Philosophy