

**Environmental and Outdoor Student Organization Development Project:
Supporting Personal, Academic and Career Opportunities**

Submitted by Daniel Walsh-Counseling Department

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Instructor's Sabbatical Leave Status

Full-time hire: January 2011

Previous Sabbaticals: 0

Background of Sabbatical Project

The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave it neither power nor time.

Mary Oliver

After some years of latency I have decided to give life to an idea that I believe will bear the fruits of discovery, success and service for our students. The tipping point came this past spring when representatives from the Ventura Chapter of Surfrider Foundation proposed to Ventura Colleges Facilities Oversight Advisory Group the introduction of Ocean Friendly Gardens on the Ventura College campus. They expressed the need for a committed group, preferably students, to assist with maintaining the gardens once established. Despite an internal pause I could no longer keep my idea dormant and knew this was the moment to give it the “power” and “time” it deserves.

Academic counselors can be considered “generalists,” that is, we see *all* students with their varying interests and academic goals. That said, many counselors have areas of specialty based on personal, academic or professional experiences. During my time at Ventura College students with academic and career interests in the environment and outdoors continue to find their way to my office, some by referral while others coincidentally. Coincidentally because the environment and outdoors are also interests of mine stemming from my own personal, academic and professional pursuits.

I have discovered that though students express an interest in careers related to the environment or outdoors they seldom have the insight necessary to determine professional pathways and academic goals related to these interests. Additionally, they lack the experiences, e.g. internships or volunteering, that not only assists with academic and career decision making, but also makes them competitive transfer candidates and future employees. Furthermore, though these interests

are commonly born from personal outdoor endeavors, students are limited in their outdoor experiences due to a variety of barriers. Lastly, it is evident from my personal experience, as well as existing research, that there is a significant absence of diversity among those who are employed in careers related to the environment and outdoors, as well as in outdoor recreation.

If granted sabbatical, I intend to address these matters through a myriad of components. As a lifelong outdoor enthusiast I share the enthusiasm and passion these students have for the environment and being outdoors. Along with earning a Master of Science degree in Environmental Studies I have volunteered and worked for the National Park Service; California Fish and Wildlife (formerly California Fish and Game); conservation, environmental and outdoor education non-profit organizations; as a private outdoor guide; and taught wilderness travel and environmental conservation courses at Santa Rosa Junior College. These experiences, coupled with my academic counseling expertise makes for a broad familiarity with personal, academic and professional opportunities related to the environment and outdoors. With this I sought to create a platform more far reaching than my counseling office in an effort to expose interested students to the vast personal, academic and professional opportunities related to the environment and outdoors and support access to such opportunities. In addition to these goals the hope is that this organization will serve as a vehicle for diversifying the workforce of the environmental and outdoor fields, as well as the population of outdoor recreationists. Thus, I recently initiated the Environmental and Outdoor Student Organization (EOSO) at Ventura College.

The following mission statement was crafted by current EOSO members:

The purpose of the Environmental and Outdoor Student Organization (EOSO) is to bring together students who are interested or curious about environmental awareness, advocacy, stewardship and education, as well as those students who have an appreciation for the environment. It is also the purpose of EOSO to bring together students interested or curious about outdoor activities and the enjoyment of being outdoors. In the pursuit of such interests and curiosities, EOSO hopes to expose students to various personal, academic and career pathways related to the environment and outdoors.

With fall 2018 as our launching point we have a small but committed group of students. Of our approximately 20 active members there is a diversity in gender, age and ethnicity. During the 2018 Student Life Day event we had over 150 students sign-up to be contacted for future EOSO meetings and events, clearly indicating a general interest in our group.

As a newly formed organization we are still wandering through the forest of logistics and details of running a student organization, figuring out how to operate efficiently and effectively and learning about available resources. As a faculty advisor there is a delicate balance of letting students determine the direction of the organization while still keeping them focused on the overall purpose of the organization. Furthermore, it is evident that despite our student's passions, additional responsibilities to work, school, their personal lives and families limit the time they can commit to the overall success of such an organization. Nevertheless, to date students have participated in and scheduled local day hikes; visits to an aquarium and natural history museum; a guest speaker panel (see attached); conservation and adventure films; and a backpacking and camping gear demonstration.

While this is a fine beginning there is much more work to be done in effort to institute a long lasting organization that provides an array of personal, academic and professional opportunities for these students, while promoting diversity in the environmental and outdoor workforce and recreation. During the remaining 2018-19 academic year we will continue to work through the particulars of operating a student organization while attempting to expand our membership and exploring new activities for our members.

It is my hope to capitalize on the current momentum of our newly formed organization by using a fall 2019 sabbatical to work with students to swiftly develop and strengthen the full potential of this organization. I am confident that this project will create a lasting structure of support for students while providing additional benefits to Ventura College, the district and the community.

Purpose and Components of Sabbatical Project

Young people, when informed and empowered, when they realize that what they do truly makes a difference, can indeed change the world.

Jane Goodall

As previously noted, the purpose of this project is to develop the Environmental and Outdoor Student Organization at Ventura College in a way that promotes the exploration and refinement of students' academic and career goals related to the environment and outdoors while also encouraging their personal interests in the environment and outdoors. An additional intent of this project is to promote diversity in the workforce of the environmental and outdoor fields, as well as in outdoor recreation. To this end, if granted sabbatical the following are the components that I plan to explore and develop in support of this project.

Group Counseling: Create and implement a Group Counseling Session (GCS) for students interested in majors related to the environment and outdoors. Explore schools with related majors and outdoor recreation programs. Cover major preparation, general education and other major program requirements. This GCS can be hosted in the Transfer Center and held during the first EOSO meeting of each semester. This type of counseling aligns with the direction our college is heading with the integration of Guided Pathways.

Resource Network: Work with EOSO members to establish a network of professionals from organizations, agencies and companies related to environmental and outdoor careers that can support volunteers, internships, speaker panels, guest speakers, event tabling, Career Fairs, and other opportunities for our students and instructors. Once a contact is established record and maintain a catalog of these resources for future events. The following are a few examples of potential organizations, agencies and companies to collaborate with: Channel Islands National Park, Surfrider Foundation-Ventura Chapter, Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, Los Padres Forest Association, Los Padres Forest Watch, Patagonia, Student Conservation Association, Naturalist At Large, Nature Bridge, Bike Ventura, Ojai Raptor Center, Recreational Equipment Incorporated, etc.

Volunteerism: Reach out to organizations and agencies to establish relationships with a contact person(s) that can assist with EOSO students volunteering. Create and maintain a list of contacts and volunteer opportunities related to the environment and outdoors.

Internships: Reach out to organizations, agencies and companies to establish relationships with a contact person(s) that can assist with placing EOSO students in internships. Create and maintain a list of contacts and internship opportunities related to the environment and outdoors. Collaborate with the Ventura College Career Center to assist with internship placement specifically for students interested in careers related to the environment and outdoors.

Speaker Panel/Guest Speakers: Reach out to organizations, agencies and companies and establish relationships with a contact person(s) that can assist EOSO with recruiting speakers for panels and individual guest speakers (for classrooms and EOSO events) that will provide further insight to the academic and career pathways available in the environment and outdoor field. Assist EOSO members with recruiting future speakers for panels and individual guest speakers. Create and maintain a list of contacts for speakers related to the environment and outdoors.

Career Fair/Event Tabling: Reach out to organizations, agencies and companies and establish relationships with a contact person(s) who can represent their organization while attending career fairs and table at environmental/outdoor related events, exposing other students to career opportunities. Create and maintain a list of contacts for representatives at these organizations, agencies and companies that can attend career fairs and tabling at events. Collaborate with the Ventura College Career Center to assist with recruiting organizations, agencies and companies that hire for careers related to the environment and outdoors.

High School Partnerships: Develop a “pipeline” from local high school environmental science courses and clubs to EOSO by collaborating with former high school students and current high school staff and faculty. This would include inviting students from these high schools to EOSO events. Explore the opportunity to develop a mentorship program between students from local high schools environmental programs and EOSO members, working with EOSO members to determine how this would function. Additionally, introduce these students early on to the Ventura College courses related to their field(s) of interest.

University Partnerships: Continue the pipeline to local transfer institutions including California State University Channel Islands Environmental Science degree program and University of California, Santa Barbara Environmental Studies program, among other programs, by collaborating with department chairs in these respective programs.

Explore the possibilities of engaging Ventura College students in environmental projects at CSUCI’s and UCSB’s programs. Additionally, explore the opportunity to develop a student mentorship program for Ventura College students with students from these respective institutions through collaboration with EOSO members and CSUCI and UCSB staff, faculty and students.

Conferences and Events: Collaborate with EOSO members to determine interest in conferences and events. Produce a conference and events list relevant to EOSO member's interests possibly including the California Higher Education Sustainable Conference; events by UCSB's Global Environmental Justice Project; workshops by the California Student Sustainability Coalition; Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education conferences; and many more. Additionally, research scholarship options to attend such events.

Career Postings: Expose students to the undiscovered career resources for finding job listings related to the environment and outdoors. Collaborate with the Ventura College Career Center to assist with developing more robust resources for careers related to the environment and outdoors.

Scholarships: Research the potential for scholarship opportunities for students interested in fields' related to the environment and outdoors. Collaborate with the Ventura College Foundation to explore the potential for establishing a scholarship via the Environmental and Outdoor Student Organization. Work with EOSO members to develop criteria for potential scholarships.

Grants: Research grant opportunities to support the purpose of the Environmental and Outdoor Student Organization. Collaborate with EOSO members to prioritize grant funded events and activities. Such events may include but not limited to, conferences, workshops, trainings, etc.

Donations: Solicit donations from outdoor/equipment companies to assist EOSO members in affording the proper gear to engage in outdoor experiences. Work with members to develop criteria to be eligible for such gear. Establish partnerships with outdoor/equipment companies for similar donations that can be used for fund raising efforts, e.g. auctions, raffles, etc.

Service Learning: Explore potential service learning opportunities with courses related to environmental majors, namely ESRM V01: Introduction to Environmental Issues, ESRM V03/POLS V12: Environmental and Natural Resource Management and ESRM V14: Conservation of Natural Resources.

Annual EOSO Events and Activities: Work with EOSO members to identify staple events that EOSO will sponsor annually and develop a framework to establish these events. Examples may include maintaining Ventura College's Ocean Friendly Gardens; participation in week-long Earth Day events; Environmental Speakers Series, etc.

Alternative Spring Break: Survey the interest with EOSO members and explore prospects for service projects, environmental and outdoor leadership opportunities, etc. during spring break.

Outdoor Recreation: Expose students to new outdoor locations for recreating and new outdoor recreation activities by developing a Shared Experience Series where EOSO members share their own unique outdoor experiences with one another. Expand on this series by inviting other outdoor adventures to present to EOSO members and Ventura College. Additionally, collaborate with outdoor adventure programs that can support new outdoor experiences, particularly where gear is an issue, e.g. rafting, climbing, etc. Also, explore the potential for self-supported overnight trips and activities. Work with Associated Students of Ventura College and appropriate

administration to understand and implement suitable criteria for engaging in such outdoor experiences and activities.

Diversity: It has long been noted that the conservation movement, and for that matter outdoor recreation is, “predominately suburban, middle class, heterosexual, and white” (Nee 2018). This includes the environmental conservation workforce, volunteers and internships, across public and private sectors. This sabbatical project aims to confront this very matter by opening greater access to untapped opportunities for our diverse student population interested in pursuing degrees and careers in these respective fields, in addition to personal outdoor experiences.

In a dated, yet comprehensive and still relevant publication by the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies Publication Series titled *Diversity and the Future of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, several suggestions to diversifying participation in the environmental movement are made in the article *Diversifying the American Environmental Movement* (Bonta & Jordan 2007) that are very much aligned with my proposed sabbatical project. Three principal examples from this article include:

- “Partnerships and Collaborations”
- “Engage Young People”
- “Connect the Generations”

In the components formerly listed I have pointed to a variety of ways of supporting the above suggestions. Other opportunities to address the issue of diversity may include highlighting it during the Diversity Festival through films, guest speakers, workshops, etc.; creating a STEM speakers forum that addresses the issue of diversity in the sciences; collaborate with Ventura Colleges MESA program to engage those interested students in EOSO opportunities; research scholarships that promote diversity in the environmental and outdoor fields; inspire EOSO members to integrate this topic in to other courses through writing and presentation assignments; and encourage Ventura College EOSO alumni to serve as resources and role models for future generations of Ventura College students.

Further submissions from this article recommend establishing an “educational pipeline” and integrating “a sustainable approach.” Each of these suggestions are integral to my proposed project. The latter is a cornerstone to the overall success of this project. That is, it is unfathomable to develop such a robust organization that hosts lasting effects if there isn’t substantial time allocated for this project.

Alumni Network: Effective immediately, establish an EOSO Alumni Network, maintaining current contact information and tracking all former members’ academic and professional pursuits. Such a network can participate in future speaker panels, serve as career contacts and potentially make monetary contributions for scholarships, events and activities.

Social Media Network: Collaborate with the EOSO Social Media Coordinator to build on our existing social media resources, keeping them current and strengthening our contacts via social media. This will include alumni contacts.

Faculty Advisor Resource Manual: All the aforementioned resources, contacts, networks, etc. will be duly recorded in a resource manual and kept current by the Lead Faculty Advisor. In an effort to institute a sustainable structure for EOSO the manual will be passed on to future EOSO faculty advisors.

Value of Sabbatical Project

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.

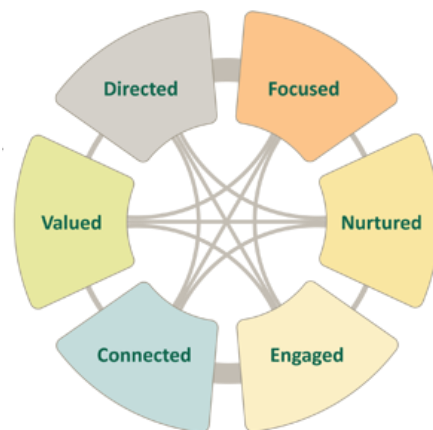
John Muir

Value to Ventura College and Ventura County Community College District

I believe one of the greatest values to Ventura College (VC) is effectively putting in to practice the college’s mission statement. On so many levels this project has the potential to “transform students’ lives,” personally, academically and professionally. Fundamental to this project is in fact to “develop human [student] potential,” again, on personal, academic and professional levels. This project will also “create” a plethora of opportunities for students to become “an informed citizenry.” All of this while supporting “degree completion,” “transfer” and “work preparation.”

Additionally, this project will support our college’s vision, as it serves as a “source of inspiration and guidance” for personal interests, as well as academic and career goals. This project will also endorse our guiding principles, namely “embrac[ing] the strength of diversity”; “design[ing] student-centered solutions”; “spark[ing] self-confidence and a sense of discovery”; and “pursu[ing]e our vision and goals with passion.”

Furthermore, the Six Success Factors (see attached) derived from the RP Groups *Student Support (Re)defined* study that the college has upheld as fundamental to student success, are prolific throughout the components of this project, as are other elements of this study.



There are other values to the college that this project has the potential to uphold such as higher completion rates for degrees and transfer and greater persistence, which all make for an

improved Student Success Scorecard (SSS). As we know the SSS is one of several initiatives that fall within the California Community College Student Success Initiative. This project both directly and indirectly touches on a handful of other initiative areas within this strategic plan, including increasing “college and career readiness” and “strengthen[ing] support for entering students.”

There is an expectation that as students become familiar with EOSO during their first semester, we will be able to promote VC courses that relate to their interest, assisting with major exploration and course completion for major preparation and general education. This serves students and the college as it keeps them on path toward completion.

The development of community partnerships brings interest to both VC and VCCCD from the respective agencies, organizations and companies EOSO collaborates with. There is the possibility that such partnerships kindle monetary contributions for the college or district. Furthermore, partnerships may also serve as a connection for the college’s instructional faculty seeking additional resources to support their respective disciplines. As well, academic counselors can learn about academic and career pathways through such collaboration.

Both the college and district can benefit from the physical contributions EOSO provides to the college campus, as well as the greater community. On campus contributions such as planting native plants, maintaining Ocean Friendly Gardens, implementing conservation efforts, etc. improve the facilities at a lower cost, while “beautifying” the campus. This can inspire other students to contribute to the campus or simply enjoy the splendor of such contributions. Both may build a greater sense of place for students, which can contribute to increased student success.

Value to Ventura County Community

Off campus contributions have similar effects as noted above though reaching beyond the college and district population. Agencies, organizations and companies will be exposed to a source of reliable volunteers, interns and ultimately future employees. Diversifying the work places of these agencies, organizations and companies brings an array of ideas and solutions to the table achieving the goals and objectives of these respective employers. It also provides for these entities the opportunity to give back to their community by supporting Ventura College and EOSO’s goals, whether that be through donations, volunteering at our events, etc. Additionally, citizens in the community benefit when we contribute to local conservation projects, be it water quality monitoring; invasive plant species removal, beach clean-ups, etc. Such contributions develop a stronger sense of place for all, deepening a connection to the community and encouraging further contributions by others. The restoration and preservation of our natural spaces inspires our community to engage in experiences outside, interacting with other community members and living active lifestyles. Such enhancements to our natural spaces encourages tourism that fuels the local economy. All of these benefits impart a holistic value to our community.

Value to Students

Several of the values to the college and district are also true for those of students, including persistence, degree completion and transfer success. As well, each of the Six Success Factors are of great value to the success of our students and are integrated through the various opportunities. Additionally, there is the connection and guidance from Ventura College faculty early on, particularly if coming through the high school “pipeline,” that will better prepare students to choose a major and select the appropriate courses for this major. There is also the emerging sense of place I previously alluded to that has the potential to develop a connection to the college campus in a way that motivates students to want to be on campus, which promotes student success.

Through access to new opportunities and experiences, particularly when related to their major, students become stronger candidates when applying to transfer institutions and ultimately jobs. As an example, consider the Personal Insight Questions on the University of California (UC) Admissions Application and how valuable their EOSO experiences will be when answering some of these question. The one required question asks: *Please describe how you have prepared for your intended major, including your readiness to succeed in your upper-division courses once you enroll at the university.* Now consider a student who is able to craft an essay based in practical experiences relevant to their major, those which they garnered from the opportunities noted above.

This project creates opportunities for EOSO members that will undoubtedly assist with building their resume for colleges *and* careers. I often ask students when they graduate from college-*What will distinguish you from all the other graduates?* The opportunities this project hopes to create for our students are what will distinguish them.

The shared experiences that will come from the various opportunities will not only create lasting friendships, but also have the potential to develop a lasting career network. Through the EOSO Alumni Network I foresee a network that students can refer to when seeking insight to careers, needing references or searching for jobs.

Establishing a scholarship fund would be an incredibly valuable resource for our students. Obviously there is the monetary value, however, students can also note this achievement to strengthen college admissions and job applications.

As with other courses being taught at Ventura College, EOSO’s opportunities will continue to foster environmental literacy in our students. The North American Association for Environmental Education defines an environmental literate person as: *Someone who, both individually and together with others, makes informed decisions concerning the environment; is willing to act on these decisions to improve the well-being of other individuals, societies and the global environment; and participates in civic life.* Why is this important? Generally speaking, it comes back to the UC admissions question, which ultimately asks-*Are you prepared for your major, your studies and eventually a career related to the environment or outdoors?* Society will continue to have differing views regarding environmental issues. However, until we have an environmentally literate society it will be difficult to address these differences. Students seeking

studies and careers in the environmental sector will need to be proficient in environmental literacy to be successful on their academic and career paths, while also addressing today's and tomorrow's environmental issues.

Lastly, by exposing students to outdoor recreation they are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles, likely promoting physical fitness, as well as reducing stress.

Value to Instructor

There is a fundamental value from this project in that it makes me a better academic counselor. With the extensive collaboration, networking and research required to meet the project goals I inevitably learn more about the available careers paths and volunteer and internship opportunities for our students. Though I have a fair grasp on the majors at various colleges and universities related to environmental and outdoor degrees there are many emphasis that are beneath the surface of majors and this project will allow for me to unveil these major emphasis. Additionally, establishing contacts at universities allows for a more streamlined path for updates of these respective major programs requirements.

There is also a value in collaborating with my colleagues at Ventura College. Such collaboration not only allows for sharing new ideas, but it can generate inspiration and motivation to become a better instructor or counselor as it may be. In-house collaboration also creates a cohesiveness amongst the campus community that can support a sense of familiarity and "connectedness" that encourages further campus participation.

After being in the field of academic counseling for nearly twelve years, most of them at VC, I feel it is time for a renewed sense of contributing. I have served on a variety of department and campus committees; attended workshops and conferences; collaborated with colleagues on the portal redesign; and developed our previous online orientation. And though these contributions were and are all meaningful, they seldom provided the opportunity to work directly with our students. Direct service has always been what drives me and this project will allow for me to do this on a greater scale, in addition to the one-on-one counseling I joyfully provide in my office.

Furthermore, since my time away from working in the environmental and outdoor fields I have wanted to find a way to revive this passion and this project is a great way to do just that. This rejuvenated sense of contributing, particularly in an area I'm so passionate about, while serving students, is of great value as it keeps me refreshed, creative and inspired, which to me are characteristics of a healthy and happy employee.

Conclusion

Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread.

Edward Abbey

This sabbatical opportunity is timely with the recent launch of Ventura Colleges Environmental and Outdoor Student Organization. Clearly there is enormous potential in this project, but only if time permits can this potential be developed in to opportunity. Opportunities first and foremost for our students, but also for the Ventura College Community, the district and the greater Ventura County community.

Certainly I have given considerable thought to this project and am passionate about the environment and outdoors. I continue to be inspired by wild places and those that not only frolic in them, but aim to protect them. Mountain air breathes in me a refreshed spirit as does the hollow of a barreling wave. I've had opportunities to protect our environments resources and have been afforded the experiences of grand outdoor adventures-climbing big mountains, rafting pristine rivers, trekking through lands that swell with wildlife and surfing warm water further south. All of this has shaped who I am as a person, how I interact with the world on a daily basis. I firmly believe that all who are interested should have the opportunity to experience the fulfillment of being outdoors and protecting such places.

There is a notion that taking time to be stewards of our environment and enjoying the outdoors is a luxury. I would agree, but only because the opportunity to access these experiences have not been made readily available. We have passionate students who care deeply about our planet and want new experiences related to the environment and outdoors, personally, academically and professionally. Ventura College and EOSO can be the catalyst for these experiences.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Daniel Walsh

Daniel J. Walsh

Academic Counselor

Ventura College

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Ventura College Mission

At Ventura College, we transform students' lives, develop human potential, create an informed citizenry, and serve as the educational and cultural heart of our community. Placing students at the center of their learning experience, we serve a highly diverse student body by providing innovative instruction and student support, focusing on associate degree and certificate completion, transfer, workforce preparation, and basic skills. We are committed to the sustainable continuous improvement of our college and its services.

Ventura College Vision

Ventura College will be a beacon of learning—a source of inspiration and guidance—for our students and community.

Ventura College Guiding Principles

At Ventura College we believe that students come first and all else follows. We strive to create a campus environment that fosters collaboration, communication, and mutual respect. We are committed to these Guiding Principles in all that we do:

- Embrace the strength of diversity
- Listen with intensity and compassion
- Communicate with integrity and patience
- Design student-centered solutions
- Spark self-confidence and a sense of discovery
- Pursue our vision and goals with passion