

Sabbatical Proposal

Revision of the Moorpark College Counseling “Online Orientation”.

Charles R. Brinkman IV

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Faculty Background

In my position as full-time Counselor over the past 15 years at Moorpark College, I have been involved in many different areas of responsibility. Currently, I am one of 11 full-time counselors who help advise and guide students toward their educational goal, through new student orientations, counseling appointments, express counseling services and more. Several years ago I was the Chair of the Moorpark College counseling department, where I was responsible for scheduling, evaluations, the Transfer Center, various majors, and other tasks. I was the articulation officer at Moorpark College for 1 year, from 2001-2002. Also, since I was hired full-time in July 1997, I have served as the EATM counselor, where I have guided over 700 students from application, admission through graduation in this program. I maintain the EATM web site, and I am usually the first Moorpark College contact that many prospective EATM students have. I plan to remain here at Moorpark College for at least another 8+ years, and I am sure I will have different opportunities and experiences in the future.

I have taken one previous sabbatical leave. That leave was for 1 semester.

For over the past five years I have answered the "MC Online Counseling" service we have set up thru the college website, where students can submit their counseling question via email, and I get back to them, often the same day or very soon after. During the past several years, I have recorded over 1500+ counseling inquiries per year through the "MC counseling" email site. These are questions from students (or potential students) requesting information about Moorpark College, the requirements for graduation, transfer, or anything else they can think of to ask via email. Through this online service and other means, I reply to inquiries from prospective, current and previous Moorpark College students, who often want to know about starting or continuing their college education.

I have extensive experience with web site creation, as I have maintained the EATM web site for the past 10 years. I have used Dreamweaver to create/update the EATM web site, and the several other off-campus/non-college web sites I maintain also. I am very proficient with the current Omniupdate web page system in place here in the District. I would say my web experience is probably better than 90+% of the people here at Moorpark College, so I am very confident about undertaking this task.

Current Status and Perceived Need

As the number of full-time counselors in the counseling department continues to shrink, we need to find ways to work smarter, not harder, while continuing to serve the numbers and variety of students that find their way to Moorpark College. While our "MC Counseling" online email service is a help, it is geared toward quick answers, without needing to do in-depth counseling. Many years ago, we attempted to devise a way to "Orient" new students online, and our first generation of an "online orientation" was created as a way that students could learn how to get the enrollment process started. We tried to incorporate everything they would need to know about enrollment, which classes to take here at Moorpark College, how and when to register, and more. We tried to develop the "online orientation" for students, so they would not need to make a trip to Moorpark College, but instead could do everything from their home computer. While we currently have that first generation online orientation in place, it has not been revised or updated in the past 7+ years, so it is most definitely now in need of change.

Technology changes fairly rapidly, so we now need to update/revise our online orientation to stay current. Our students are very computer literate, and use the computer for pretty much everything these days. While face-to-face contact is very valuable, if we can use technology to help reduce the number of students needing our services during peak times, it will benefit all students.

Recently, the counseling office has been inundated with students seeking appointments this Fall 2012 semester. In semesters past, we were scheduling for appointments a maximum of 10 days prior, and we had many openings available in that 10 day period. This Fall 2012, with the reduced number of counselors available (there were 2 retirements recently), and even more students wanting appointments, we have started scheduling appointments 14 days out – and all these appointments (2 weeks away) are usually filled by 10am in the morning. If a student calls or comes in anytime after 12 noon wanting to schedule a counseling appointment in the future, there are none available. The student is instructed to call or come by EARLY the next day, to make an appointment for 14 days away. Bottom line, we do not have enough counseling faculty available to support all the students who come to our office.

We need to find another way to assist some of the students, as we are currently unable to meet the needs of many of our students.

Proposal

My one semester sabbatical proposal/project will be to revise the Moorpark College "online orientation".

I am requesting a 1-semester sabbatical leave – during the Spring Semester 2014.

I plan to do a serious overhaul of the Moorpark College "online orientation" so that it better meets the current needs of the incoming (and even current) Moorpark College students. This should also help relieve some of the pressure from students who come to the counseling office to speak with a counselor. This orientation revision will allow us to assist some of our students, by using technology to meet their needs. Counseling has created and is responsible for the new student orientations at Moorpark College, so this project fits perfectly in my discipline. I plan to spend a good amount of time to research other colleges online orientations, and "borrow" the best ideas and designs.

Summer and early Fall are the busiest times of the year for the Moorpark College counseling office.... it also happens to be the time of year when we have the fewest counselors on contract, so we try to use part-time hours to assist with the influx of new students. As soon as the fall schedule of classes is posted online, the numbers of students coming in to the counseling office increases dramatically. The students want to know what classes they need to take for the next semester. And while we are working with these continuing students, new students also appear, wanting to know what classes they should be taking at Moorpark College. So we get hit by two large groups of students.

Even though our old "online orientation" is still active (although outdated), we have been providing more "in-person" new student orientations from early May thru mid-August, to assist the new arriving students with course planning. If we can find a way to reduce or channel some/all of these new students to an "online orientation", we can redirect more of our efforts to the continuing students who also need our services.

We need to create a current, accurate, useable and informative online orientation.

I plan to revise and expand the existing web options and create a new online orientation for current and future Moorpark College students.

My efforts during this sabbatical will be focused on several areas;

1 -- Web Development

The Internet will play a key role in this and other efforts. I am currently responsible for maintaining and updating the many pages of the EATM web site using Omniupdate.

<http://www.moorparkcollege.edu/zoo>

I have found that about 85% of the students who learn about the EATM program find out about it from the internet, and over 95+% of the applications submitted for the EATM program are downloaded from online. Students are very computer savvy these days, and we should use this to our advantage.

By expanding the web presence of Moorpark College counseling through a new online orientation, I predict it will benefit students and faculty (especially counselors) alike. Students will be guided to enroll in the correct classes, so we should have a better informed student population.

I would like to update my web design capability, and plan to take a few web refresher classes to further develop my web skills. I am quite proficient using the Omniupdate web system in place here with the college district, and have some general HTML skills. I have found some good computer/website classes through College of the Canyons - specifically their Computer Information Technology - CIT 170, 171 & 173 classes, which are "Website Development 1, Website Development 2, and Website Development Software: Dreamweaver. Santa Monica College also has a class I am interested in, their Computer Information Systems - "CIS 50, Internet, HTML, and Web Design". Any or all of these courses will help me with this project.

I plan to use/borrow information from other colleges (especially California Community Colleges) which have current online orientations. I have been reviewing college orientation sites for some time already. I will use the articulation list-serve and other list-serves to help find and review other orientation websites. I also have many contacts in place at local colleges, and have found many helpful orientation web sites. I can find people to contact at other colleges thru their college web site. It will be easy to find and review other sites... since they are all online..!

Examples;

Santa Monica College has an online orientation that new students are REQUIRED to complete, BEFORE they are allowed to register for classes - <http://www2.smc.edu/orient/>

College of the Canyons - On-line orientation is required of all new and first time to College of the Canyons non-exempt students. It provides valuable information about the services, programs, and courses available at the college. Students who successfully complete the online orientation will be given an early registration date.
<http://www.canyons.edu/offices/matric/Orientation/orientation.asp>

Santa Barbara City College. Orientation is *required* for new students who have never been to college or those who only attended while in high school. Their online orientation is available in both English and Spanish versions. <https://www.sbccc.edu/orientation/>

Cuesta College - Their online orientation is designed to be interactive. Students are advised to pay close attention to the yellow "DO NOW" boxes and complete the actions indicated.
<http://www.cuesta.edu/student/getstarted/orientation/OnlineOrientaion.html>

Cabrillo College - Students embark on a fun way to learn about Cabrillo. They get basic information and valuable tips to make the most of their time at Cabrillo. It will take about 45-60 minutes to complete. If users are interrupted, users can choose "Quit & Save" and come back another time to pick up where they left off. Users experience a combination of video, photos, text and graphics. <https://sirena.cabrillo.edu/introduction.php>

2 - Retention

Retention has always been a key topic in today's academic arena. The new Student Service Initiative in place at California Community Colleges will require colleges to invest more effort on this topic.

With declining budgets (and limiting community college enrollment by cutting classes), it is important to find ways to retain the students we do have or that seek to enroll here, and to help them be successful while they are here. A new Student-friendly Online Orientation will help.

The two main causes I have found that students are unable to complete their classes are financial and academic reasons. Often the lack of academic success can be traced to financial difficulties. If the student is working too much (to help pay for college), often their academic performance will suffer, so the two can be directly related. These are points I plan to address in depth when creating the new online orientation, in the hope that students will realize that taking too many classes during their first term may not be the best plan.

3 – Placement & Class Pre-requisites

One main goal of the online orientation will be to help ensure the students are placed (or place themselves) into the correct classes. Now that complete prerequisite enforcement is in place, students cannot register into classes they are not eligible for. BUT now counselors and other departments must clear these prerequisites for eligible students. This “prerequisite clearance” has become something that now takes a large amount of our time in the counseling office. I am hoping that with the revision of the online orientation, I will be able to put in place a better system to help students with prerequisite clearance, and prevent the long waits they now experience in the counseling office at certain times of the year, especially during registration periods.

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Who will benefit from this project?

Benefit to the Students -

All NEW students coming to Moorpark College are currently “encouraged” (but not required) to attend one of our “in-person” new student orientations. We do these orientations year-round, but our main goal is to catch all new incoming students for the fall semester... so the vast majority of our orientations occur in the summer and early fall, when fall registration is occurring.

These orientations are usually the only chance new students have to speak with a counselor before enrolling in classes (since counselors are extremely busy in the summer advising continuing students). While we are able to orient many students in person, we do not come close to catching them all. So, if we can channel ALL new students to an “online orientation” that they can do from their computer at home or anywhere else, the students will be so much better prepared to enroll in the correct fall classes, because they would actually learn and know what they should be taking for their first term at Moorpark College.

The online orientation will encompass most/all of the material we currently present to students during the in-person orientation, but an online orientation will be able to go beyond that standard information. I will also provide “hot-links” that the students can click on to learn even more information about;

- Specific programs or majors at Moorpark College

- Transfer options and opportunities

- Job placement resources

- Financial Aid & EOPS

- Access

And much more.... there is no limit...!

The student will receive the knowledge they need to register for appropriate classes, and have a vast amount of information available to them in one place, through this new online orientation. While this online orientation will be geared toward helping new students get started, my plan is that it can also be used as a resource by continuing students, to help find information they need/want. So I am hoping the new online orientation will benefit ALL students, not just new incoming students.

Benefit to the College -

Many of our services here at Moorpark College have been going online. Class registration, financial aid, fee payment, transcript requests and much more can now be done online. The portal and the new DegreeWorks software are further examples of how we expect our students to use the computer for much of their education. The UC system has launched their "Transfer Admission Planner", which allows first semester college students from anywhere, to set up a plan to transfer to the UC System. And students must go online to apply to most transfer colleges.

My goal is to have this online orientation be able to guide and place students into the correct classes here at Moorpark College. This online orientation should then make available more counseling hours for continuing student appointments – a cost saving move of services online. We can provide an orientation to literally thousands or even millions of students online, instead of in person. This online orientation will provide up to date useful information to the students, to aid in enrollment, placement and retention

Benefit to the Faculty member –

This revision of the Moorpark College online new student orientation will allow me to update my web design knowledge, while providing a useful service to students. It will also give me more time to devote to continuing students, as the new students will now have a useful tool to help them get started.

I will return from sabbatical ready to enjoy the work of implementing my new online orientation. I am sure a few adjustments will be needed, as we start using this new tool, and I can make those changes as we see what is needed. If my online orientation project can relieve/reduce the numbers of new students coming in to the counseling office during our peak periods, it will greatly reduce my future stress levels, and the stress levels of my colleagues. This project will also allow me an opportunity to update my web development skills.

Benefit to the District - The District will benefit from all areas of this sabbatical, as other colleges in the district could use this online orientation as a template or model, and create their own online orientation. The district will benefit from increased student success and retention. We will be able to serve students who do not need to physically come to our campus for orientation.

Feasibility of Implementation -

This new online orientation will be implemented before the end of my sabbatical leave, so that it is in place for Fall 2014 registration and enrollment. I have discussed this idea/proposal with other members of my department, and with members from other departments. They all agree that this is a very worthwhile project, as the online orientation is definitely in need of revision, and we need to find a way to help expedite the counseling process for new students.

Sabbatical Proposal – Summary

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Purpose:

My sabbatical will have 3 main goals;

1 – Web Development – Create a New “Online Orientation”.

Completely revise and update the Moorpark College counseling “online orientation” – which has not been updated in the 7 years since it was created.

2 – Retention.

Revise the online orientation so that hopefully it will aid in student retention and student success. The majority of student attrition occurs during the first year of college. I plan to give the students the knowledge they need to be successful in their first college experience.

3 – Placement and Prerequisites.

Revise the online orientation so that students then have the knowledge to place themselves in the correct classes, and also devise a means so we can clear more prerequisites without the students needing to physically come in to the counseling office.

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Proposed Sabbatical Timeline

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For Sabbatical - Spring 2014

October - November 2013

Discussion with all members of the counseling department and other departments – gather input as to what should be included in the Moorpark College online orientation revision. Discussion with other departments/service areas at Moorpark College - gather input as to what new students should know, so I can address it in the online orientation revision.

November - December 2013

Review online orientations in place at other colleges. Learn how online orientations currently in place at other colleges are successful. Gather input as to what is good, what is bad, what do they wish was included. There is no sense in re-creating what may already exist elsewhere. I can "borrow" the best ideas in use at other colleges. Explore methods other colleges have found to be successful/useful.

January - February 2014

Initiate contacts at other 2-year & even 4-year colleges with current online orientations by email and phone. Collect ideas, and start to create a template for the new Moorpark College online orientation.

February - March 2014

Review web creation process in use at Moorpark College. Refresh/retrain/update myself with the Omniupdate system used here. Collect necessary passwords needed to start revision of website. Begin web design - start creating/revising our current online orientation.

March - April 2014

Continue web design. Write/create new "online orientation". Share drafts with counseling office. Use feedback to revise and rewrite, aiming for a final version everyone will be comfortable using. Continue update of the Moorpark College online orientation web site.

May - June 2014

Go live. Publish new Moorpark College online orientation, for the start of new student registration for the fall 2014 semester.