

Sabbatical Leave Proposal
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Proposal date: October 2013
Proposed leave time: Spring 2015
Previous sabbatical leaves: Spring 2006
Seniority of Service: August 1996-present
Planned continued service: Retirement in 2023

Overview of sabbatical project:

I am proposing a semester-long sabbatical to

1. research and catalogue level-appropriate cultural and literary reading materials for beginning and intermediate Spanish classes and to develop activities to teach reading these texts to our students in the language programs.
2. take courses at the Tec de Monterrey in Querétaro or at the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara in Mexico during the spring semester 2015 to revitalize my language skills, update my cultural knowledge, and compile original texts suitable for our students.

Background:

According to our World Language department SLOs¹ we expect that, after completing our Language M01-M04 courses, our students "demonstrate comprehension of reading level-appropriate, authentic texts". Not only is reading in a foreign language per se essential because it is one of the four language skills (besides speaking, writing, listening), but is also necessary in order to examine original texts and be able to interpret firsthand the human and environmental experience in the country of that language. This importance of understanding cultures other than our own is reflected in another one of our student SLOs: "Discuss historical, political, social and creative aspects of [language specific] cultures and civilizations". Ideally these discussions happen in the classroom based on relevant literature in the target language because culture--history, politics, literature, daily life--can best be comprehended by reading authentic texts.

The problem is that reading in a foreign language is a challenging assignment. Students have to learn how to read, decipher, grasp the information and interpret the meaning of documents written in a foreign language. To achieve this aim, students must be taught this skill in an appealing, interactive, and stimulating manner. Yet teaching students how to read in a different language in elementary and intermediate language courses at the community college level is a challenge to the instructors, as students tend to have little experience reading cultural

¹ In the World Languages department we have common Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes for all languages (for the Asian languages the Course Objectives are lightly modified to embrace their distinctiveness, but the SLOs remain the same).

documents even in their own language and are thus poorly prepared to take on the task of reading in a foreign language. This reality is exacerbated by the fact that our textbooks typically lack adequate authentic cultural and literary materials and even more so, strategized activities that assist students in their approach to reading these texts.

In addition, most community college foreign language instructors have little training and experience in the teaching of reading literary texts, as reading has taken on a rather small role, secondary to teaching grammatical concepts. Consequently, if instructors happen to include reading--as I have observed many times during class evaluations-- they tend to paraphrase the texts to the students, translate the text for them, ask the more advanced students to translate, or skip the reading task altogether. None of these methodologies assists students in the acquisition of reading, comprehension, and interpretation of original texts written in a foreign language. Not surprisingly, our assessments of student learning outcomes and class tests have shown that our students continue to fall short in cultural knowledge.² Furthermore, in our departmental discussions and conversations, faculty have voiced their frustration with the teaching of cultural concepts and have expressed their interest in guidance.

To improve our results, I would like to offer our faculty improved and compatible reading materials, and provide them with the opportunity to become trained in how to approach the teaching of reading foreign literary texts with our students. This task can only be successful if the topic is tackled systematically.

My second objective during this sabbatical is to spend 5-6 weeks in Querétaro and Guadalajara in Mexico to immerse myself in the language, the local cultural environment, read news and trending magazines in order to update my knowledge of current events and to identify authentic literary materials for our Spanish courses. I plan to enroll in a Culture/Literary Studies course at Tec de Monterrey, Querétaro or the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, which will enable me to have high level discussions in Spanish that will further expand my cultural knowledge and strengthen my language skills. A culture or literature course, which uses literature to discuss cultural aspects of Mexican society, will be invaluable in my quest to find authentic reading texts for our students.

Faculty background:

My personal interest in reading dates back to when I was a child, and continues today as evidenced by my doctoral thesis and PhD in Spanish literature. Since my beginnings as a

² Thus far we have not succeeded in developing an adequate SLO assessment tool for culture because culture is such a broad concept. The SLO assessments we have used have not been inclusive enough, hence we are currently in the process of exploring a more adequate tool. Despite these challenges, however, the results of the completed assessments indicate that our students' knowledge of culture after completing our courses is below our expectations. Our own individual class assessments have confirmed those preliminary results.

language instructor I have been eager to share my enthusiasm for reading literary texts with our students.

I have been actively engaged in studies of language acquisition and proficiency since the beginning of my career as a Spanish instructor at the college level. My interest in a proficiency-oriented language teaching approach eventually led me to become certified as a language proficiency tester and trainer for the American Council of Foreign Languages Teacher Association (ACTFL). Testing for the different proficiency levels of language has given me insight not only into language assessment, but also into teaching for proficiency. As a result I have promoted the implementation of course materials and methodology in our language programs that support language proficiency as an outcome. While we have definitely made progress in our language department in proficiency-oriented approaches in speaking, writing, and listening, reading proficiency tends to be neglected.

We can make the foreign language cultural texts more accessible to our students, but we have to assist our faculty in this process. We can only share our passion for reading if we enable our students to examine, understand, and appreciate foreign literature. A sabbatical leave will allow me to do the required research, compilation and categorization of materials to be able to teach our faculty how to approach reading in a new language in an accessible, interactive, and inspiring manner.

Proposal:

Since reading and cultural knowledge are such important components of language, I propose over the course of a one semester sabbatical the following activities:

1. Develop criteria for the selection of authentic cultural and literary texts³ recommended for the teaching of reading at the beginning and intermediate foreign language classes, particularly in Spanish. The analysis will focus on the type, content, length, and relevancy of appropriate texts.
2. Identify, compile and categorize a selection of appropriate cultural literary texts in Spanish, that can be used in a classroom to teach beginning and intermediate students how to approach, read, and understand original Spanish texts.
3. Prepare a presentation on the criteria for selecting authentic foreign language cultural and literary texts for beginning foreign language classes.
 - Timeline for points 1-3: Week 1-6.⁴

³ Literary texts that would be effective for our courses may consist of relevant, brief graphic announcements, simple poems, and very brief narratives for the beginning levels and slightly more complex poems, short descriptions and lengthier narratives for the higher levels, all of the above produced by native speakers and intended for a native speaker audience.

⁴ For a summarized timeline, see Appendix A.

4. Investigate methodologies about teaching reading cultural texts in elementary and intermediate foreign language classes, particularly in Spanish. My project will encompass
 - literary research.
 - consultations with faculty from the World Languages Department, from the English department, from the college district, from other community colleges, from our main transfer institutions (i.e. CSUCI, CSUN, CLU, USC), and from experts on reading assessment and methodology (colleagues with whom I have collaborated in ACTFL language methodology and assessment projects).
5. Develop materials and interactive activities that guide instructors through the process of teaching how to read authentic Spanish texts and the students through the process of reading. With the growing importance of the online component in our instructional setting, I will develop materials that can be used for the traditional classroom, as well as for web-enhanced, hybrid, and online classes.
6. Prepare a presentation and workshop on the methodology of teaching reading authentic foreign language cultural and literary texts.
 - Timeline for points 4-6: Week 7-12.
7. Study and research in Querétaro or Guadalajara in México to
 - revitalize my language skills and update my knowledge of current cultural trends and events.
 - compile and categorize relevant, appropriate authentic texts (especially from local magazines, newspapers, and publications that are difficult to acquire online).
 - Enroll in a course on Mexican culture, either at the Tec de Monterrey, Querétaro or at the Universidad de Guadalajara. I intend to take a course that combines culture and literature and includes relevant, original materials. I expect these studies to inspire my research on topics of interest and appropriate foreign language texts for our students. Some pertinent culture courses offered at the Tec de Monterrey are⁵:
 - *Literatura contemporánea y sociedad*
 - *Literatura latinoamericana*
 - *Literatura Mexicana*
 - *Sociedad, desarrollo y ciudadanía en México*
 - *Escenario regional de América Latina y el Caribe*
 - *Historia de México contemporáneo.*

⁵ Website for the Spanish program at the Tec de Monterrey, Querétaro: <http://studyinmexico.campusqueretaro.net/campus-quer%C3%A9taro>. Detailed course information is not on the web, but I have been in contact with Veronica Martinez, the director of International Studies, who sent me the above list of relevant courses that they offer regularly.

An alternative would be the International program at the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara⁶. Some course options at the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara are:

- *Understanding the Social Issues of Mexico through Literature*
- *Social, Economical and Political Structures of Mexico*
- *Mexican Contemporary Art*
- *Introduction to Latin American Literature*
- *Advanced Conversation*

➤ Timeline for point 7: Week 13-17

8. Completion of Presentations and Workshop

- Complete compilation of authentic foreign language texts for beginning and intermediate Spanish students.
- Complete presentation on criteria for selecting authentic foreign language texts.
- Complete presentation and workshop on the teaching of reading foreign language texts.

➤ Timeline for point 8: Week 18

Dissemination and implementation of sabbatical project:

I plan to distribute the compilation of Spanish language texts to faculty in the Spanish programs at Moorpark College, our district and to our interested colleagues in the neighboring universities. I will showcase the presentations on the teaching of reading foreign language texts to the World Language faculty at Moorpark College during department meetings and offer ensuing workshops on teaching students how to read and understand foreign language texts. I will organize a Flex Workshop, to which I will invite our colleagues from our sister colleges-- Ventura and Oxnard--, CLU and CSUCI. For the workshops on campus I plan to reach out to our specialists in reading from the English department, as some of the foreign language reading strategies and general reading methodologies are overarching. I will also present this workshop on the teaching of reading foreign language texts at the meetings of the Community College Council of Foreign Language Teachers [CCCFLT] and the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language [ACTFL], which I regularly attend and where I often present.

➤ Timeline for holding presentations and workshops: Fall 2015

Benefit to Faculty member

I am a teacher because I want to share the thrill of understanding foreign cultures in their authentic context. Reading in a foreign language is an integral part of this experience as it enables understanding the human experience as it is expressed in literature. It would be a great joy for me to see that our students are taught in a participatory, interactive, and stimulating way how to read foreign texts and thus develop an appreciation for foreign fiction

⁶ Website for the Spanish program at the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, International Programs Office: <http://internationalprograms.uag.mx/study-options/>

and non-fiction. Having level-appropriate texts and exploring methodologies on reading instruction will certainly improve my teaching.

We can only be good teachers of the cultures and languages of other countries if we maintain ourselves up-to-date on the events of the respective country. The best way of achieving this goal is immersion in that culture. I will greatly benefit from the opportunity to spend time in Mexico to refresh my language skills and experience its culture in person.

Benefit to Students

In a typical semester at Moorpark College, we teach about 25-30 language classes in Arabic⁷, Chinese*, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin*, and Spanish at the beginning and intermediate levels to about 600-700 students. Our student learning outcomes state that after course completion all language students will "demonstrate comprehension of reading level-appropriate, authentic texts" and be able to "discuss historical, political, social and creative aspects of the [respective] cultures and civilizations". The World Languages department, as stated in our Course Outline on Record has agreed to assign a significant portion of the course content to the teaching of cultures. One route to teaching students about the cultures of the different countries is by reading appropriate texts that impart cultural knowledge and understanding.

If we provide our faculty with the tools on how to approach teaching reading cultural and literary foreign language materials in an interactive and fun environment, then, in turn our students will be able to decipher and grasp these texts. Being able to read and understand foreign language texts will broaden their horizons as they will then be able to comprehend and become familiar with various cultural concepts. Students, who master the skill of reading in a foreign language, can transpose this experience into reading in their own language as well, since some of the foreign language reading strategies and native language reading strategies overlap.

Students will also benefit from my enriched language skills and updated cultural experiences attained during my stay in Mexico. Our classes are more exciting and informative when we include current facts and ideas.

Benefit to College and District

The college and district will benefit from instructors who successfully apply strategies for the teaching of reading in a foreign language and from the expected results--an improvement in the World Languages students' learning outcomes in reading foreign languages and knowledge of culture. If our World Language students are able to " discuss historical, political, social and

⁷ Languages marked with an * are currently not offered due to budget cuts, but will hopefully be reactivated in the future.

creative aspects of [language specific] cultures and civilizations"⁸ and "demonstrate comprehension of reading elementary, authentic texts"⁹. after completing our courses, then they will as well have fulfilled two aspects of the Moorpark College mission statement: "Skills in critical thinking, [...], reading [. . .]" and "[p]reparation for the challenges and responsibilities of life and change in a free society and the global community." I am certain that graduating students who are able to read about the global world and understand international concepts in the original language, would be a major accomplishment for our World Languages department, our college and the district.

Feasibility of Implementation

I will present the outcomes of the proposed sabbatical leave to our colleagues in the fall semester of 2015. We can begin integrating the cultural texts and applying the reading methodology within that semester. Members of our faculty and Dean Inajane Nicklas have been supportive of this proposal, expressing their interest in the project and in guidance for the teaching of reading authentic literary texts in the World Languages program. I have had consultations with faculty at CLU and have colleagues at our sister colleges, CSUCI, and ACTFL whom I plan to consult for my research and with whom I will share my results.

No additional funding is required and our current facilities are sufficient.

⁸ World Languages SLO #2

⁹ World Languages SLO #4

Appendix A:

➤ Timeline for Sabbatical project:

- Week 1-6 and week 13-17:
 - Research, identification, and compilation of authentic, foreign language texts for beginning and intermediate Spanish students.
 - Prepare presentation on the criteria for selecting authentic foreign language cultural and literary texts.
- Week 7-12:
 - Research methodology of reading foreign language texts.
 - Prepare presentation and workshop on the methodology of the teaching of reading foreign language texts.
- Week 13-17:
 - Take a course at the Tec de Monterrey in Querétaro or Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara in Mexico.
 - Identify authentic cultural and literary reading texts for beginning and intermediate Spanish levels.
- Week 18:
 - Complete compilation of authentic foreign language texts for beginning and intermediate Spanish students.
 - Complete presentation on criteria for selecting authentic foreign language texts.
 - Complete presentation and workshop on the teaching of reading foreign language texts.

Post-sabbatical work/Implementation of project:

- Fall 2015:
 - Conduct and organize workshops to present the presentations and workshops (Department meetings, Flex, conferences).