

## **Sabbatical Proposal**

### **Statement of Purpose**

It all begins with the imagination. That's the premise I use to reach students and to get them interested in any kind of writing, particularly poetry – no matter who they are, where they are, where they come from or how old they are. The goal of this semester-long sabbatical project for Spring 2012 will be to write a textbook with the working title: *Wherever I Go, Poetry Will Follow*. The book will highlight my experiences over three and half decades of teaching poetry. It will include creative nonfiction (memoir), original poems and poetry-writing exercises that can be applied to any genre and used in any writing classroom, including our ESL, developmental writing, composition, literature, and creative writing classes at Oxnard College.

The book will offer a wealth of information collected over the years of conducting writing workshops that will assist our students in reaching their creative potentials, allowing them to overcome writing difficulties and express themselves in innovative ways. The book will also provide our professors with a new approach to teaching writing that is generated through workshop techniques using creative prompts. Once the book is completed, I will offer workshops to assist our Letters faculty in using these techniques in their writing classrooms.

### **Rationale**

#### **Professional Development:**

I will benefit from this sabbatical by having time to write a textbook that thoroughly documents three and a half decades of teaching poetry writing at places where other poets have not ventured to go, including: every grade level in public school, preschool, juvenile halls, a maximum security men's prison, a school for homeless children, a school for abused children and teens, home-schooled children, a school for suicidal and severely emotionally disturbed teens, a senior center, libraries, a training center for developmentally disabled adults, art galleries, a women's center, a university and community colleges, specifically Oxnard College.

The majority of my time will be spent writing memoirs that will discuss my vast and varied experiences. I will also write new and revise older poems that capture my experiences or create portraits of students. The writing exercises, many of which I have already successfully used in creative writing, composition and critical thinking classes at Oxnard College, will need to be refined and rewritten into a usable format for other writing instructors. They will include model poems by both professional and student writers. This sabbatical will also provide time to seek a publisher who can bring this project to fruition.

#### **Value to Students:**

When the book is adopted by professors and used in the classroom, even as a supplemental text, students at every level of writing – from ESL to composition to literature – will benefit by coming to writing from a creative, workshop approach that

promotes self-expression and critical thinking. On their own, students will enjoy reading this user-friendly text. The memoir portion will read like stories, and the poems will be mostly narrative and easy for them to relate to – especially the exercise model poems written by their peers. The exercises will enable them to write about their own life experiences in original poems, essays, stories, memoirs, or plays based on the prompts provided in the text. They will also take pride in owning a book that a professor at their college has written and will be more inspired to write.

#### Value to Department:

My department will benefit from this sabbatical, because I will offer workshops for Letters faculty providing instruction on how to best use the exercises in the book. I will encourage other Letters faculty to adopt this textbook for their writing classes, even as a supplemental text, since they will find the exercises to be valuable – not just for creative writing – but for any kind of writing, including remedial, composition, descriptive and narrative writing and critical thinking.

In addition to being able to use the exercises as writing prompts, they will also find the process of teaching that I will outline in the book to be useful, because it will describe ways to not only inspire eager students, but also to reach uninterested students, students who haven't had good writing experiences or who have difficulty getting started and organizing their ideas coherently. This book will be a valuable teaching tool, because it will stress how to challenge students with vastly different experiences and get them excited about writing.

#### Value to the College and/or District:

I am confident that eventually I will find a publisher for this book who will distribute it widely among writers and college professors who teach writing. The college will benefit by having one of their professors publish a textbook that can be sold in our bookstore, in other college bookstores, and in the community. Any time a professor publishes a book, the district benefits from the prestige that comes with it. The district will enjoy the exposure of having an Oxnard College professor, a published author, visible in the community. Frequently, there are articles in the newspaper about the publication, and I will definitely solicit reviews. I'm certain that the South Coast Writing Project will run a feature about it in their newsletter, as will the California Poets in the Schools program.

#### Value to the Community:

It is noteworthy that publications by our professors, particularly those that can be used as textbooks in our classrooms, add greatly to our status as an educational institution and our image in the community. As an active poet in Ventura, I will distribute this publication throughout the county and will make sure that it is carried in local bookstores and libraries. I will also have a link posted on the California Poets in the Schools website for other poets and writing teachers throughout the state to purchase and use in the classroom. I will give readings and sell the book at galleries, libraries and other venues where poets and writers gather for such events. Since my target audience has a broad scope beyond the college level, elementary school teachers, as well as middle school and high school English teachers, will want to buy the book, read the poems and memoirs, and try the writing exercises with their students.

## **Implementation**

### **Procedure:**

I will spend the bulk of my time writing memoir about my teaching experiences. I will research other texts that have been used to teach writing, particularly creative writing, notably published by Norton, Teachers and Writers Collaborative and Shambhala Press, to see how they present exercises and will read memoirs on experiences teachers, particularly poets, have had teaching writing.

For writing guidance, I will attend an Antioch University's MFA residency, open to alumni, and will focus on participating in creative nonfiction (memoir) lectures and workshops. I will consult with other poets, specifically those who have taught through California Poets in the Schools, as well as other college writing professors, to get their feedback and ideas, and I will present the writing I do to my monthly writing group for critiquing. I have identified a few other poets and creative nonfiction writers who will serve as editors, as well. I have already created an outline for the book and have written the first chapter.

I will begin each chapter with an original poem or a series of poems about my teaching experiences, some of which portray particular students. Then I will follow with a memoir about that experience. I will end each chapter with one or more writing exercises, most appropriate to that particular population. The writing exercises will include sample poems by both students and adult professional poets that can be used as models. I will spend some time reviewing poetry books to find appropriate poems for each exercise.

There will be several chapters to the book, but I envision three sections: an introduction; chapters on teaching poetry at various locations, including: community colleges (particularly Oxnard College), in the community (for specific populations), and at schools (public and private) grades K – 12 (including gifted, special education, second-language learners and at-risk populations); and a conclusion acknowledging all the sponsors who've awarded me grants and a sabbatical, the administrators who've provided funding, my teachers and my mentors. (See attached proposal outline.)

Since I plan to use poems by professional writers, I will research how to gain permission to republished them. I will also solicit model poems from my creative writing students. In addition to writing the book, I will also take time to query editors about publishing it. I will consult with a few poets I know who have written similar texts to see how they pursued publishers. I will research perspective publishers and prepare a synopsis and a query letter to send to them. If I run into difficulties, I will secure an agent 's assistance. I will also pursue a copyright for the manuscript.

### **Projected Results:**

The result of my project I will be a completed manuscript. If I'm lucky, by the end of the sabbatical my book will have generated some interest from publishers, maybe even a contract. I have learned from past publishing experiences to be patient; however, I am confident that this unique and exciting book will get published. I will have done my research and will staunchly and systematically pursue every avenue I can find until someone picks up my book.

Meanwhile, I can share some of the content in the manuscript with other faculty who will want to employ some of the writing exercises in their classrooms. Several English/ESL professors have expressed an interest in adopting this book to use in their English 68, 96, 101 and 102 and ESL classes. At least one professor is fully committed to doing so and has asked me to give him writing exercises that he can use in English 96 and 101 classes next semester. Naturally, I plan to use this book as a major text in English 103, Creative Writing.

Although the book will focus on teaching poetry in a variety of settings, I have proven through my own experiences, that any of the exercises can be applied to all writing situations by simply adapting the presentation and changing the model poems. I have used exercises in my college creative writing classes that I developed in K-6 classrooms. I have developed my college critiquing criteria from classes I taught at high schools. One thing I learned during my fellowship at the South Coast Writing Project (SCWriP) is that writing is writing. To this day, I use a writing exercise every semester in my English 101 class that I learned at a SCWriP seminar from a first grade teacher, as do two other SCWriP fellows in my department.

### Reporting Methods

I plan to write an abstract of the book to send to publishers, along with a chapter or two. Since this abstract will provide a detailed summary of my book, I can duplicate it for my sabbatical report. In that report I will also describe the process I used to write the book and seek a publisher. I will include one or more chapters, particularly those that apply to teaching writing at a community college. I will submit this report to our president and the Board. I will also distribute some of the writing exercises that I develop to those Letters faculty members who wish to use them until the book is published and available for purchase.

### Timeline

During the first and second month of my sabbatical, I will write the chapter on teaching writing at Oxnard College, which follows the introduction. I will expand the writing exercises with suggestions on how to implement them in all writing classes across the sequence. I will search through poetry books for poems that are suitable models for the exercises. I will also begin reading through my archives and collecting data – student poems and letters, newspaper articles, lesson plans, and my own reflections. I will organize my findings into raw material that I can use to inspire my memoirs and will assess what writing I need to do and what lesson plans need to be further developed.

I will also peruse books by other authors that offer writing-about-teaching memoirs and books that provide teaching-of-writing exercises and will attend workshops and lectures on creative nonfiction (memoir) at one of Antioch University's residencies. Once this is finished, I will send these two chapters, along with a synopsis and a query letter, to a few publishers that I have identified (Norton, Teachers and Writers Collaborative and Shambhala Press).

During the third and fourth month, I will write more extensive memoir. This will be the bulk of the work. I will also write poems for chapters that don't have them and revise any poems that need revision. During the fourth month, I will compile the material into chapters. I will consult with other writers about how to organize and market the book.

Finally, during the fifth month, I will do extensive editing of the book. If I haven't heard back from the three selected publishers, I will write to other publishers to see where there's an interest in my book and will look into getting an agent, if necessary. I will pursue permission rights to publish poems that I will be using as models for writing exercises, as well as a copyright for the manuscript itself.

### **Past Contributions**

#### Department/Discipline:

Over the years of my fulltime employment, I have represented the Letters Department on a variety of committees, including Academic Senate, Professional Development, Curriculum, and Sabbatical. I was also previously the faculty advisor for the creative writing club and am currently the faculty advisor for the poetry club. I wrote the curriculum for the Literature by Women course and the Advanced Creative Writing course and have significantly revised the Creative Writing course. In essence, I have created a creative writing program on our campus. I have also participated in writing SLOs, reviewing course outlines and overall planning for our department needs. Additionally, I was Department Chair for one semester, while our regular Chair was on leave, and have served as the Chair of the Sabbatical Committee.

#### College/District:

The most noteworthy achievement that I have done is single-handedly creating the Literature, Arts & Lecture Series on our campus. It is unique in our district in that the other campuses do not have such a thorough and dynamic series providing weekly events for twelve weeks each semester. I began the then called "Scholars' Lecture Series" around 1994 on our campus by inviting our own professors to present lectures in LA 6. Then I started bringing local published poets to our campus to do readings. My goal was to bridge the gap between the campus and the community. Over the years, I kept developing the program and increasing its visibility. Today, we have internationally-known presenters from all over the country coming to our campus, and our president refers to the series as the "Signature Program" of Oxnard College.

#### The Community:

The Ventura community has enjoyed our Literature, Arts & Lecture Series over the years. What I created is education outside of the classroom. In addition to that, I have had a high profile in our community, giving numerous poetry readings in venues throughout the county and on all three campuses. I have received five artist fellowships from the City of Ventura just to write poetry. My poetry book, *The Common Fire*, is sold in local, as well as national, bookstores, including our own bookstore.

In addition to these accomplishments, I have brought my classes to local theatrical productions and poetry readings and have arranged for my creative writing students to give poetry readings at local arts galleries. I have also conducted poetry-writing workshops at public schools throughout Ventura County, at juvenile hall and at a school for suicidal and severely emotionally disturbed teens. Several of the students I taught poetry to years ago at Fred Williams School in Oxnard and Sunkist School in Port

Hueneme are now showing up in my English classes at our college with fond memories of being excited about writing poetry back in fourth or fifth grade.

### **Scholarly Achievements**

I have a Masters degree in English and Creative Writing and Master of Fine Arts in poetry writing. I also have a track record for starting up programs, both in the community and at our college. For example, I co-founded The Feminist Poetry and Graphics Center in San Diego back in the 70's and co-edited a literary magazine as one of our projects. I began the California Poets in the Schools in both San Diego and Ventura counties.

As for my qualifications for writing this book, I have taught poetry writing in hundreds of classrooms and at dozens of community organizations. At one time, I was hired as the full-time poet-in-residence by Chula Vista City Schools. I have also attended several state and national writing conferences, and have taught creative writing every semester at Oxnard College for the past 11 years. In 1995, after teaching here for only three years, I was presented with the Mark Dever Award for outstanding achievements by a full-time faculty member and subsequently delivered the graduation address. I am also a South Coast Writing Project fellow.

My poetry book, *The Common Fire*, was published by Red Hen Press in 2004. I have read my poetry in venues all over the country, and my poems have been widely published in nationally literary magazines and anthologies. My awards include nine California Arts Council Artist-in-Residence grants, two National Endowment for the Arts regional grants, five artist fellowships from the City of Ventura, first place in the 1994 John David Johnson Memorial Poetry Award and a nomination for a Pushcart Prize. I'm a writer. It will be great to have a sabbatical that will give me time to write.

### **Length of Service & Past Sabbaticals Awarded**

I have been employed fulltime at Oxnard College for 18 years to date as an English Professor and have had one previous semester-long sabbatical in Spring, 2005. I qualify for a sabbatical in Spring 2012, because I will have not taken one for seven years.