

Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal for Spring 2011

On-Site Research Project

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Instructor's Sabbatical Leave Status: I was hired full-time in August 2004 after teaching part-time at Ventura College since August 1998. This is my first opportunity to apply for sabbatical leave.

Background for Project

The Problem: Generally speaking, our students would rather have root canal work than read, and many have never had a positive experience with a book. Most educators, however, would agree with Sir Richard Steele that "Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."

The Corollary: Most of my full and part-time colleagues would love to have time enough to read, review, and assess a variety of books in search of outstanding ones to include in their classes. However, many of us find (especially during the school year) that, as Daniel Pennac writes, "Life is a perpetual plot to keep us from reading."

The Status Quo: The vast majority of faculty members at Ventura College require their students to read textbooks unsupplemented by full-length works of fiction and non-fiction. In English composition classes, for example, instructors require full-length books in addition to essay compilations in 0/25 English 2 classes and 5/29 English 1A classes.

With each of our composition classes capping at 27, a potential 1458 students per semester could be exposed to stimulating literature in this area alone. Including the possibility of inspiring English 1B (23 sections) instructors to try new texts as well as the teachers of other reading-based classes on campus greatly increases the potential audience for my proposed project.

The Rationale: Why should we require our students to read full-length books?

- To expand their vocabularies
- To inspire them to think critically
- To enhance their ability to write and to spell
- To spark their curiosity
- To broaden their horizons

Purpose and Value of Sabbatical Project:

My purpose during this proposed semester-long project is to develop an annotated bibliography of excellent fiction and non-fiction books. It would be useful not only as a resource for my colleagues who teach English 2 and 1A, but also for a variety of other classes and for potential One Book-One Campus selection.

Research Method:

I plan to review at least 40 books, gathering titles by:

- Surveying VC faculty members' favorite books, books they've taught successfully, and books they've considered teaching
- Looking at syllabi developed at other college and university campuses to discover books already being taught
- Examining publishing companies' brochures on first year experience/One Book recommended titles
- Perusing the Los Angeles Times' and New York Times' bestseller lists for the past few years
- Researching One Book selections on college campuses across the country

In order for a book to appear on the annotated bibliography, it must:

- Have a track record of appealing to a broad range of readers as measured by appearances on bestseller lists and/or multi-starred reviews by large numbers of readers
- Be well written
- Have the potential to expose students to new experiences, new points of view, and new worlds
- Be capable of generating worthwhile discussions leading to thoughtful writing responses
- Be available in paperback

I will format the annotated bibliography in MLA style and include a brief description of each book as well as the class(es) for which it might be most useful.

Method of Dissemination:

My goal is to disseminate this bibliography as widely as possible by:

- Scheduling a Language Arts department meeting to review and discuss it with the possibility of changing curriculum for English 1A to include a full-length book
- Offering a campus-wide flex day activity focused on incorporating full-length books into classes
- Emailing it through the VCCCD portal to all faculty, administration, and staff at our college and at Oxnard and Moorpark colleges with a cover memo well in advance of text adoption deadlines
- Making myself available to instructors should they have any questions about the books or want to discuss suggestions for instructional strategies
- Chairing a multi-disciplinary committee to develop One Book-One Campus activities based on the bibliography