

Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal for Fall 2021
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Faculty Status: Full-time, tenured
Hire Date: August 2014
Previous Leaves: 0

Background and Statement of Purpose:

I have long valued health and wellness as an integral part of my life. As a certified yoga instructor, I understand that simple practices focused on well-being can have a significant impact on our mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health. However, in my twenty years in the field of education, I've seen that it can be incredibly challenging to prioritize health and wellness with so many demands on our time, energy, and resources. Many employees are juggling full-time work (sometimes more than one job), families and interpersonal relationships, financial stress (e.g. student loans, mortgage, etc.), community involvement, and more. As a working parent, I have gained an immense amount of empathy for colleagues and students who juggle work, school, and family obligations. The truth is, it isn't easy. We do our best for all the people relying on us, and sometimes, that comes at the sacrifice of taking care of ourselves. I've seen this play out with colleagues as they experience "educator burnout," often resulting in professionals leaving the field of education because it becomes too much to handle. Mental, physical and emotional well-being are essential if we are to be our best selves for our students, colleagues, community, families and ourselves.

Several years ago, I responded to a medical emergency on our campus involving a colleague who passed away only a few doors down from my office. It was the first time in my life I encountered mortality in such a close way, and to this day it is a difficult memory to re-live. One minute I was saying good morning and exchanging friendly pleasantries with this valued colleague, and a couple of hours later, he was gone. I couldn't sleep for weeks, and I discovered a new-found understanding for what it means to, "ponder one's mortality." I honor the memory of my colleague by reminding myself that life is short and that the best we can do is to live every day to the fullest.

Last winter, there was another medical emergency in the building in which I work, and once again, I happened to be among the first to arrive on the scene. It took an incredibly long time for communication to reach first-responders, the ambulance drove to the wrong part of campus, and by the time they arrived, I could tell I was in a state of adrenaline shock. It was evident that the trauma of the past experience of my former colleague passing had been triggered by this event. Once again, I stepped back from my day-to-day routine to realize that everyone experiences stress, trauma, and a host of other challenges, making it difficult to simply show up and be 100 percent available for students and colleagues alike.

It goes without saying we are living through a period of unusual and stressful circumstances. A global pandemic, social unrest, economic challenges and climate change (amongst other issues), coupled with ensuing changes in the work and home environments,

have created unprecedented stress for many people across the globe. While I've been pondering this sabbatical proposal for more than a year, I believe it's even more important than ever to prioritize the health and well-being of our campus and district community so that we can continue to be a beacon of learning and opportunity for our students.

"Healing is a matter of time, but it is also sometimes a matter of opportunity."
-- Hippocrates

Rationale:

Ventura County Community College District (VCCCD) Sabbatical Policy (8.6.A) states the following: "These professional growth opportunities will focus primarily on the growth of the individual in order to maintain a dynamic faculty, one equipped with the mental and emotional tools to provide exceptional service to the students and the District in an era of constant change." This proposal is centered around providing "mental and emotional tools" that faculty need in order to best support our students.

Faculty aim to be proactive in meeting the health and wellness needs of students with resources such as the Student Health Center, mental health referrals, Behavioral Intervention Care Team (BICT) reports, and more. What is lacking, however, is the priority for faculty to proactively share and implement health and wellness strategies on a recurring basis. In particular, there seems to be an opportunity through New Faculty Orientation to address this matter, specifying self-care as a critical component to our own success as faculty and ultimately the success of our students. Additional benefits of a focus on the health and wellness of faculty (and administrators and classified professionals) could be improved morale, enhanced overall health, and moreover, could serve as a model of health and wellness for students.

While the primary focus of this proposal is on faculty, I believe there could be opportunities for faculty to share their own health and wellness best practices with students. For example, in our Guided Pathways efforts we seek to help students clarify their career and academic goals, enter a program of study, persist in their goals and ultimately achieved degree/certificate completion and/or transfer. I posit that we need to add an element of "guided pathways to health and wellness" in order to provide the wrap-around, holistic services our students need to feel supported on their path into and through Ventura College.

"The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, or not to anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly." --Buddha

Projected Timeline & Implementation Plan:

1. My first goal (July – September 2021) is to complete two to three online courses through Coursera, including but not limited to:
 - a. Yale University's "The Science of Well-Being"
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being>

- b. Yale University's "Health Behavior Change: From Evidence to Action"
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/health-behavior-change>
 - c. The University of Sydney's "Positive Psychiatry and Mental Health"
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/positive-psychiatry>
2. My second objective is to conduct research (July – October 2021) concerning:
- a. Faculty health and wellness
 - b. Faculty orientation programs
 - c. Post-secondary institution wellness initiatives
3. My final goal is to use my research and develop recommendations (October – December 2021) for short-term and long-term strategies that can potentially be used in various settings:
- a. My primary focus will be on enhancing VC's New Faculty Orientation with a health and wellness component, including partnering with colleagues from:
 - i. Student Health Center
 - ii. Health and Kinesiology Departments
 - iii. Human Resources
 - b. My secondary focus will be to identify ways to incorporate health and wellness strategies for faculty, classified professionals and administrators in various meeting and campus-wide training events.
 - c. My tertiary focus will be on ways in which improved faculty health and wellness can lead to positive modeling for our students. For example:
 - i. Counseling faculty practicing wellness tools may be able to model these strategies during student appointments and incorporate recommendations into Student Education Plans. Counselor can add notes to students' education plans and could help students create a plan for wellness strategies that could enhance academic success.
 - ii. Instructional faculty could incorporate health and wellness strategies as mini-lessons in both classroom settings and online applications such as the development of Canvas lessons that can be easily infused into cross-discipline applications.

"The doctor of the future will give no medicines, but will interest his [or her] patients in the care of the human frame, in diet, and in the causes and prevention of disease."

--Thomas Edison

Value of Project for Students:

The focus of this proposal is on faculty well-being, but I believe a by-product of that work can be the benefit to students when their faculty are practitioners of health and wellness. As college faculty, administrators and classified professionals, we must model appropriate well-being strategies and lifestyles focused on health so that our students can see what is possible. Many students choose to take health courses on our campus, but in general, they only take one

course and perhaps one kinesiology or dance activity course if it's needed for a graduation requirement. It would benefit our students to know about the value of taking these types of courses, and/or practicing the principles learned in these courses throughout their time in college and as they continue into careers after college. Students will benefit from learning how to incorporate health and wellness strategies into their life beyond Ventura College.

As a result of the recommendations of the RP Group's "[Six Success Factors](#)", Ventura College adopted the same factors as our "Beacons of Success" a number of years ago. These factors include supporting students to feel directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected and valued. Much of our work on Guided Pathways, Student Equity and Achievement (SEA), and previously Student Success and Support Program (3SP), has centered on the *directed* and *focused* elements. While we aim to connect students to our campus, to help them feel engaged, nurtured and valued, we often focus our services on core academic planning, teaching and learning, without incorporating all of the success factors. An increased focus on the health and wellness of students can serve to truly *nurture* each holistic individual we serve on our campus, to show that we *value* who they are beyond the limits of instruction and course performance, to *engage* them on a fundamental level of self-awareness, and to *connect* them to themselves and their peers in a dynamic way. I am hopeful that my research and collaboration with colleagues will lead me to identify strategies to foster these success factors that faculty can incorporate easily into their courses and interactions with students.

"What is called genius is the abundance of life and health." --Henry David Thoreau

Value of Project to the District:

It stands to reason that a focus on improved health and wellness of employees can lead to more productive, happier employees, employee retention, and a positive impact on students' well-being. Development of a New Faculty Orientation component built on a foundation of health and wellness principles can serve as a model for all three campuses in the district and in support of all new faculty hires. Moreover, my hope is that there will be general recommendations developed from my research which could be utilized for supporting current faculty as well. The tenure process often provides support for faculty members' development within their discipline, but to my knowledge, and based on my own experience, there is no emphasis on how to approach acclimating to a new job/campus and balancing a multitude of responsibilities with a focus on well-being. I firmly believe we can do better to support our faculty (and students) in a holistic way.

"Your health is what you make of it. Everything you do and think either adds to the vitality, energy and spirit you possess or takes away from it." --Ann Wigmore

Value of Project to College & Department:

In many of my experiences attending department, division, and various committee meetings, I've witnessed a climate that often belays a feeling of hurriedness, intensity, stress, fatigue, and an absence of checking-in on the well-being of one another. It is my sincere hope

that an increased focus on the health and wellness of faculty, classified professionals and administrators can serve to help us center ourselves before meetings, improve productivity, and increase a sense of collegiality. It doesn't take long to institute a moment of mindfulness at the start of a meeting, to check in with students and colleagues regarding goals and intentions, and to provide opportunities for kinesthetic activity to engage on a deeper level.

I was grateful to see the efforts started Fall 2020 to provide wellness strategies via Canvas to VC faculty, classified professionals and administrators. I applaud my colleagues in Health and Kinesiology for their tremendous efforts, but in all honesty, the daily schedule of counseling faculty does not permit active/live participation in these sessions, and I've found it near impossible to go back and watch recorded sessions after the fact due to workload and life duties beyond work. I am hopeful to find a way to connect these great efforts of my colleagues into avenues for increased accessibility and utilization.

As a counselor, I often remind myself that I "should" check in with colleagues before jumping into the agenda of a meeting, and yet, it's easy to overlook this key step when time is limited, and agendas are lengthy. Furthermore, as the member of several Tenure Review Committees (TRC) over the past several years, I see the need to support new colleagues beyond the evaluation process. I'm a current co-chair on a TRC and asked my colleague who is going through the tenure process about their experiences regarding holistic support as a new employee. They shared that, while they have received wonderful information via the New Faculty Orientation regarding their professional development and support for the requirements of tenure review, they did not experience any guidance on how to adjust to the challenges of a new faculty role. Moreover, they expressed that going through tenure can be a stressful process in and of itself, and that it would be helpful to have a deeper level of support as an individual. I am hopeful that I may be able to develop recommendations in this area as well.

"Three things in life – your health, your mission, and the people you love. That's it."

--Naval Ravikant

Value of Project for Personal Professional Development:

On a personal level, I find myself evaluating my own professional goals and vision for the future. With 20 years of experience in the field of education, I am confident I want to continue to work in this field for years to come. I also realize, however, that I need to identify strategies that help me reprioritize my personal health and practice effective wellness techniques. It has taken me decades to learn that I can't say "yes" to every committee, request, or even opportunity. It has been much harder for me to learn to say "no" and create healthy boundaries between work and home (for example, learning that I don't need to check and/or respond to emails at all hours of the night). My personal goal is to create a wellness plan that will not only motivate me to continue in the field of higher education for many years to come but will allow me to feel confident that I can disconnect in a healthy way when I am not working.

"Before healing others, heal yourself." --Gambian saying

Dissemination Plan:

My goal is to share my project outcomes with appropriate parties (eg. Professional Development Committee, Counseling Department and Campus Leadership) at the beginning of the spring semester 2022, and to fully implement a new health and wellness component to the New Faculty Orientation plan for the 2022-23 academic year.

“The root of all health is in the brain. The trunk of it is in emotion. The branches and leaves are the body. The flower of health blooms when all parts work together.” --Kurdish Saying

Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal Addendum for Fall 2021
Lauren A. Wintermeyer Ramirez, M.A., Ed.D., Counseling Faculty
Submitted December 10, 2020

Value of Project for Students:

I have gained insight into the student experience as a general counselor at Ventura College and feel that I have a unique perspective on the challenges our students face because of the work I have done with first year students. Specifically, I have been on the workgroup for our First Semester Course Planning, which is our group counseling experience for new-to-college students, for the past several years. This year we developed a Canvas shell for which I recorded videos and created content to help our new students navigate their path to success at VC. I have also taught COUN V02 Career Exploration and Life Planning for many years including two sections this fall. Finally, I had the opportunity to help fill in for our First Year Experience Counselor this fall while she has been on leave. All of these experiences have afforded me a window into the challenges our students, particularly those new to college, face when trying to adapt to life as a college student.

Through my experiences, I have realized that our students often struggle due to challenges that are far beyond those presented in the classroom and/or through class content. Many students I've met with who find themselves on probation/dismissal report that familial, financial, mental, physical and/or emotional health challenges are among the primary reasons they have struggled with school. Rarely do students tell me that the courses/curriculum was the problem. To that end, my hope is that my sabbatical research will assist me in developing strategies to better support our students as they get onboard our "pirate ship" and to support them throughout their academic journey at VC. While I have not yet done the research to develop these strategies, I hope the benefit to students will include some of the following possible interventions:

- As a general counselor, I hope my research will enhance my ability to meet students social and emotional needs in addition to their career and academic planning.
- An enhanced First Year Experience component that integrates health and wellness strategies into the requirements of the FYE program. This could be done in partnership with Counseling, the Student Health Center, Health and Kinesiology faculty, Pirates Cove and FYE Staff.
- An additional component of our new student group counseling experience could include information about health and wellness as a key component in planning for the first semester courses and beyond.
- In my work with Guided Pathways, I can see the potential for students to have a plan for their health and wellness be an integral component of their program map and plan for success.
- Working with my divisional colleagues on strategies to address students' academic standing and develop proactive strategies, I am hopeful my research would allow me to

contribute suggestions of how to better support our students getting back into good standing.

Value of Project to the District:

Researching health and wellness and sharing my findings with colleagues at my campus and throughout the district could potentially serve to enhance the following:

- A new component of the Faculty Orientation Program at VC could be a model adopted by Oxnard and Moorpark Colleges.
- Any strategies developed to address students' academic standing issues, to enhance the First Year Experience program and new student group counseling, and/or to develop strategies in conjunction with Guided Pathways could be tools/resources shared across the district (for example, the development of Canvas shell Modules, lesson plans, etc. could be easily shared).
- If I am able to develop strategies to improve the health and wellness of faculty, staff and students, that improve the working environment and experience, improve student success, and lead to positive outcomes for any/all populations included, I think there is an inherent benefit to the district as, I believe, employee and student health and well-being should be a key goal of VCCCD.

Value of Project to College:

Similar to benefits to the Students and District, I believe that my research could benefit Ventura College in numerous ways:

- Improved New Faculty Orientation experience through the development of a health and wellness component. As stated in my original proposal, I would partner with faculty across disciplines such as Counseling, Mental Health, Health, and Kinesiology to develop resources, strategies, and hopefully an integrated plan in which new faculty would participate as a way to support them holistically throughout their tenure journey.
- Existing faculty, staff, and administrators could participate in strategies developed through flex activities, all campus retreats, regular meetings, special events, etc.
- Campus events for students, such as "de-stress fest" types of experiences, can bring together departments across campus to strategize ways to support students during peak times of intensity such as finals preparation – this could include recommended health and wellness strategies that faculty could incorporate into their class lectures/labs/activities (eg. everything from a simple mindfulness exercise, to checking in with students through a "whip-around" activity, to inviting a guest into the class to facilitate a simple mental health break and/or kinesthetic experience, etc. – I have a lot of brainstorms, but I would continue to research these types of ideas through my sabbatical).
- If I am able to partner with colleagues to develop mental, emotional and physical wellness strategies for new and existing students, to enhance their success and VC and beyond, I believe that is of tremendous value to our campus and district.