

## **Sabbatical Leave Proposal for Kyle Loughman, Spring 2022**

**Name:** Dr. Kyle Loughman

**Position:** English Professor, Moorpark College

**Email:** kloughman@vcccd.edu

**Full-time hire date:** August 2015

**Previous Sabbaticals:** 0

### **A statement addressing “reasonable distribution of sabbatical leaves”:**

In reviewing the district’s sabbatical webpage, I found seven Moorpark College English faculty have been granted a sabbatical over the past twelve years. That may seem like a high percentage of English faculty being granted sabbatical leaves. However, because the Moorpark College English department is so big—it’s tied for the biggest department on campus with 18 full-time faculty members—it makes sense that there would be slightly more English faculty being granted sabbatical leaves.

### **Background and rationale:**

Since March of 2020, as schools across the country shut down due to COVID-19, faculty and students have been thrust into online instruction with varying levels of success. While we, as faculty, have had opportunities to train on Canvas and other distance learning technologies, the majority of that training has been focused on relaying content to students. That being said, another key aspect of education, the social dynamic of being in a face-to-face classroom, has been neglected. As this pandemic continues, more and more studies are being published citing young people’s increased anxiety and depression due, in part, to the social distancing policies instituted by governments, schools, and other businesses. In research conducted in August 2020, Chegg.org, a student research and advocacy organization, found that 58% of college students are either “moderately,” “very,” or “extremely” concerned about their mental health. In another report by the Student Experience in the Research University, roughly one third of undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students who were screened were found to either have depression or anxiety, or both. In California, specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau found people between the ages of 18-29—typical ages for college students—are the most anxious and depressed compared to other adult age groups. The U.S. Census Bureau, in their July 2020 surveys, found 73% of 18-29 year olds are “unable to stop or control their worry” and 71% reported feeling “down, depressed or hopeless.”

Despite this data, as of October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, these COVID-19 safety protocols do not seem to be changing significantly in the near future, so we need to understand how to best navigate them and help our students emotionally and psychologically.

### **My project:**

What I would like to study is three-fold: 1) What is the emotional and psychological impact of online instruction for college-aged students? 2) How can we, as faculty, be better equipped to address those emotional and psychological needs while teaching online? 3) Is there a correlation between students’ emotional and psychological well-being and their ability to succeed academically in an online environment?

**What will be produced:**

During my sabbatical I plan on producing the following:

1. Compile comprehensive literature review focused on online education and its emotional and psychological impacts on students, as well as how those impacts might influence students' abilities to be successful in the course.
2. Develop teaching guides and best practices, which will be developed through the literature as well as through observation of Moorpark College faculty. This collection of teaching guides and best practices will be disseminated to faculty and administrators both college and district wide.
3. Share my work during Flex week.
4. Submit my work to teaching conferences, like Online Teaching Conference, as a way to represent the college and continue disseminating this work to a broader audience.

**Note on research aspirations and the novelty of this topic:**

This is a timely sabbatical proposal, addressing a problem that did not exist in this form until March 2020 and is still taking shape. In order to be timely in our response to these changes, we—as a district and college—have to allocate time and money to explore these issues and not shy away from topics that are currently in flux. The research I am proposing is different from much of the research I have seen in others' sabbatical proposals: this topic is currently being developed and shaped; it isn't a static topic that existed decades—or even centuries—in the past. As a result of this reality, I do not have the luxury of listing book-length works that have already been published on this topic. Those books, and research on this issue, are being developed *now*. That being said, I do have the background of having read a number of books on online environments and their impacts on young people. Here is a few that help shape my perspective: Scott Warnock's *Teaching Writing Online*, Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows*, Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together*, Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*, and Danah Boyd's *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*.

**Value to instruction or service to students:**

I have been an online instructor now for roughly six years, both at Moorpark College and Bakersfield College prior to coming here, and currently teach all my courses online. Although, over these years, I have grown in my ability to relay content to my students virtually, I feel as though my ability to support students emotionally and psychologically has remained stagnant. In conducting this research into students emotional and psychological reactions to online education and how to best address student needs during online instruction, I will develop a toolbox of strategies to support the *entire* student, not just their intellectual growth.

**Value to the college:**

I have attended a number of conferences and presentations all focused on teaching online; however, because all these trainings took place either prior to COVID-19 social distancing or at the outset of this time, none of the trainings addressed the current state of students' emotional well-being. Additionally, as the entire campus went online, faculty scrambled to get up to date with Canvas and other online teaching tools; the college and faculty have not had time to research and tailor their classes towards the entire student. My hope is that in conducting this

research, compiling a literature review on the most relevant and promising research, and presenting on it, I will be able to help the college and its faculty and staff to serve our students at a high level.

**Value to the district and consistency with the mission of the district:**

Similar to how my work will influence Moorpark College, I plan on sharing my research and best practices with faculty and staff throughout the district, either through district-wide conferences (e.g. The ALAS Regional Writing Conference) or through other methods like sharing documents virtually.

The “primary mission of the district is to produce learning in lower division level academic transfer and career/vocational degree and certificate programs. Effective, efficient student support services are offered to assist in the accomplishment of the District’s primary mission based on need and available resources.” Therefore, I feel as though my project is in line with this mission. There is no doubt that students are struggling to accomplish their goals of transferring or obtaining their certificate of choice due to the move to an all-online education. Although some of the students’ struggles are related to non-academic reasons—such as family and professional obligations and medical concerns—there is a substantial role for the district to step in and better assist students struggling with these academic changes.

Additionally, the district’s “vision statement” mentions the desire to “become the leader in the development of high quality, innovative educational programs and services.” Starting now, allocating time and resources towards this *novel* and important issue is the perfect opportunity to follow through with that desire. This topic necessitates “innovative educational programs and services” because we are dealing with an unprecedented learning environment.

**Value to my professional competence and assignment:**

I have taken a number of Canvas training courses, attended presentations and conferences focused on online education, and am a member of Moorpark College’s peer online course review team, tasked with using the OEI rubric to assess peers’ Canvas courses. I am also one of my department’s “community of practice anchors,” which means I have volunteered my time to help colleagues navigate this new online teaching environment.

Furthermore, I have taught online for roughly six years, so my teaching assignment is in large part to teach online and support teachers who teach online. In being granted the opportunity to research this topic during a sabbatical, I will continue to grow as both an online instructor and as a person who can help other faculty and staff better serve our online students.

**Timeline:**

Time Frame	Project Goals
January 2022	Begin preliminary research using Moorpark College’s library databases and identify emerging texts on the subject. Because COVID-19 and this move towards all-online instruction is so new, much of this research that I will read will be developed between now, October 2020, and my proposed sabbatical, January 2022.

February 2022	Continue with “snowball” research and begin to find connections and patterns in the research. Start writing the literature review on the topic.
March 2022	While completing the literature review on online education and its social and emotional impacts, I plan to contact and observe both online and on-ground ( <i>if</i> on-ground instruction is occurring in the spring of 2022) instruction at Moorpark College.
April 2022	Write “best practice” handbook, utilizing the research and observations that have taken place between January and the end of March.
May 2022	Using the literature review, observations of Moorpark College faculty, and the resulting “best practices” handbook, create and finalize presentation for the Online Teaching Conference (for summer 2022) and Moorpark College’s Flex week (for fall 2022)

**How my outcomes are achievable and measurable within the above timeline:**

As the above timeline outlines, I plan on completing preliminary research and gathering of information in the first stages of this project. From there, my direction will continue to form and my reading will become more specific and focused and result in a comprehensive written literature review. While the literature review is being finalized, I hope to reach out to faculty and observe their online courses and on-ground courses (*if* those are being offered in the spring of 2022). My hope is to take the knowledge of the topic, developed through the literature review, and use it as a lens to observe my colleagues’ practice. Through surveys and interviews, coupled with my literature review, I hope to compile a “best practices” handbook focused on online education and addressing students’ emotional and psychological needs.

These outcomes are measurable through the documents I hope to produce: literature review, primary research notes, “best practices” handbook, and presentation.

**Why a sabbatical leave is necessary for this project:**

Throughout 2011 and 2012, I completed my doctoral dissertation on community college English departments. For that project, I compiled a literature review on community college English departments and leadership literature. Additionally, I completed field research at two community colleges, administering surveys and conducting interviews. Although this sabbatical proposal will not be as involved as my 250-page dissertation, it will include a comprehensive literature review and preliminary observations and communications with Moorpark College faculty. Therefore, I know the time it takes to complete this type of research and I know that I am capable of achieving my goals as outlined in the above timeline.

Being able to fully explore the literature on this topic and observe other faculty members’ classes is going to be a substantial task and one that would *either* be impossible to start *or* be only partially or insufficiently addressed while balancing a full teaching load and committee schedule. Just to keep up with research in the field of English and composition, which I try to do regularly, is a substantial task while teaching and performing committee work.

Additionally, I feel as though this issue warrants a full and thorough exploration, especially seeing as though we, as a district, have deemed online instruction suitable for everyone within the district. We are currently a completely online district and ensuring we are a *successful* online

district should be an institutional priority, not something that some faculty members informally dabble in as a peripheral concern.

**Letter of recommendation from online faculty member:**

31 Oct. 2020

To the Sabbatical Committee:

It's my pleasure to write in support of our esteemed colleague, Kyle Loughman. What I remember most about serving on Kyle's tenure committee is his genuine commitment to the welfare of his students. His sabbatical proposal to study the psychological impact of online education for college-aged students reflects his heart for student advocacy and his commitment to student success. The research that Kyle has proposed is urgently needed. Our students are suffering and our faculty are seeking answers. I'm confident that Kyle's sabbatical project will answer many of our questions and prepare him to assume a leadership role on campus. Kyle is a seasoned online instructor. This year he volunteered to serve as a point-person in our department to help those of us making the transition from on-ground to online instruction. Over the summer he even met with me in person to discuss my concerns, answer my questions, and provide invaluable guidance that helped make my transition to online teaching smooth and effective. I'm looking forward to the results of Kyle's extensive and timely study. I support his sabbatical proposal without reservation.

Sincerely,

Ryan Kenedy  
English Department  
Moorpark College