Application for Sabbatical [Revised], for Academic Year 2022-23

Oxnard College

Application Deadline: October 15, 2021 at 5 pm.

_____José A Maldonado_____(sign name/type above line)

[APPLICANT NAME]

October 14, 2021

English

Liberal Studies

Name of Dean/digital signature

*Luis A Gonzalez*

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I have notified my dean of my intention to apply for a sabbatical for (choose one)


_____ Fall 2021

_____Spring 2022

__X_Fall 2022 (check contract for salary details)


On September 8, 2021 (date of notification to Dean). Email notification is of course the best way to do it.


## Application for Sabbatical, Academic Year 2022-23

*Please type and submit as an attachment*


Full name as it appears on your work records Jose A Maldonado


Number of years of continuous full time service at VCCCD: 6


Number of years of continuous full time service at OC: 6


Have you ever had a sabbatical at VCCCD?  No  (type yes or no)


How many years ago was your last sabbatical? This would be my first sabbatical.

**Application for Sabbatical Leave, Fall 2022 [Revised]**

**Looking Back: Transfer Students Grade Our Performance**

**José A Maldonado, MFA**
**Professor of English**
**Oxnard College**

## Project Description

I propose to collect narratives from successful Oxnard College transfer students to identify best practices as well as areas of growth that our campus can work on to improve transfer student rates and preparation. In essence, this study's stratified sampling of the target population (former community college students who graduated and went on to transfer to a four-year university) will help us view our performance from the perspective of an OC graduate. While involving students who failed to graduate would no doubt be fruitful, this approach would require a whole other project in itself. For instance, while students who graduated would be able to offer insight into practices that they felt worked and others that perhaps were less effective, the feedback students who did not graduate would be limited. As a result of not transferring, they would not be able to offer insight into whether Oxnard College prepared them for college, nor would they be able to compare our academic rigor to that of a four-year institution.

Collection of qualitative and quantitative data will allow us to better direct resources and efforts to help increase student success in this group and decrease the education gap in our community. My focus will be on those students who are currently enrolled in their bachelor programs, or who recently (within the past five years) completed their bachelor's degree. This will allow both Oxnard College and its feeder schools to better understand the needs of their transferring students, and findings will be generalizable to other campuses of similar demographic makeup.

Many of our students enter community college because it is seen as a critical gateway to higher education and financial stability due to their "relative affordability and accessibility" (Jabbar et al., 2019). Yet, although 80% of incoming community college students intend to transfer to a four-year institution, only 25% accomplish this within five years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Furthermore, once a student passes through the transfer portal, their formal relationship with the two-year institution is severed and whether a particular student went on to graduate is often unknown. If the ultimate goal is to help students complete their higher education, both community colleges and four-year universities must ensure that their practices lead to success for their transfer students. This study will gather data from students who traveled through the transfer portal in the hopes that we can improve and streamline these practices to ensure that they indeed are able to complete their higher education.

The premise of this study is set upon a foundation that comprises four theories. Since education involves so many factors and variables, it is prudent for one to approach the material with as many lenses and tools as possible, one of which is Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory explores how psychological needs impact an individual's motivation and personality integration. Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977) will also provide me with

deeper insight when it comes time to analyze and interpret my data. Bandura posits that whether a person performs a task successfully (in this case, transfer) is greatly influenced by their belief in their own abilities, as well as the belief that their effort actually makes a difference. Essentially, it comes down to confidence and hope: Are students confident in their capabilities, and do they have the hope and optimism that all the time and work they invest will change their circumstances?  Interviews and surveys with students who completed their studies will allow us to draw connections between their experiences and this theory.

Zimmerman's Resiliency Theory (2013), meanwhile, focuses on how factors (namely assets and resources) including self-esteem and self-efficacy impact how adolescents perform when faced with challenges. Although this idea won't apply to all of our subjects since some are well beyond adolescence, it will allow us to observe the role age plays in student resiliency. My research can lead to further inquiry into factors that impact resilience, particularly in this population, as well as how our campus can go about helping to build and develop this trait in our students.  Finally, I will also employ Social Bond Theory (Peguero, et. al., 2015) to aid in my research. Within this framework, a student's educational success is positively affected by strong social bonds with their school. Strong social bonds increase the likelihood of students completing their studies.  Building on previous research, Peguero, et. al. (2015) points out that "youths' experiences with student teacher relationships, extracurricular activity, commitment to education, and belief in school rules are each influenced by schools' cultural values" (339).  Indeed, data I collect can help us further cultivate an open and welcoming environment where students do not feel marginalized or intimidated by their surroundings, or by faculty and staff.

## Applicant Qualifications and Background

Throughout my six years at Oxnard College as a full-time professor of English, I have been heavily invested in increasing transfer numbers. It has always been my belief that a higher education is an effective way to break the poverty cycle and offer new opportunities for students. My ultimate goal is for my students to complete their baccalaureate degree so that they can go on to achieve secure, meaningful careers.  One example of these efforts involved creating presentations on four-year universities that I showed at the end of every in-person class session. I felt that exposing students to the many options they had helped make the possibility of their transfer that much more real.  Furthermore, I spearheaded a video project highlighting successful alumni so that we could inspire future students to transfer; I've also worked closely with our campus University Transfer Center, having co-conducted a Promoting Transfer Culture presentation with our UTC director, Dr. Letty Mojica.  This was in addition to a presentation I gave along with OC counselor Akadina Amrekhasadeh at this year's All Campus Day in which we had a panel with OC graduates who shared their journey with the campus.  Finally, in the hopes of inspiring future graduates while promoting OC transfer culture, I worked closely with our Associated Student Government to initiate the banners project that celebrates transferring and graduating students by displaying them throughout campus and even the community.  As part of my doctoral studies, I have also successfully completed my human subjects research certification training, which will no doubt be vital while working with Oxnard's former students.

Getting our students to a four-year university is a goal that informs a lot of what I do at Oxnard College, and this is further reflected by my proposed sabbatical project. By obtaining

data and feedback from recent transfer students, this study can lend insight into what we as an institution can do to better serve our population.

## Project Outcome and Objectives

This study's purpose is to gather data from former OC students who passed through the transfer portal and hear their insight on what we can do as a campus to improve transfer numbers, as well as ensure their success after transferring.  For instance, community colleges serve as a bridge to higher education for countless students, and many tout their transfer rates as a way to advertise their success.  With this in mind, what are practices currently employed by OC that students felt were effective and impactful? What did they feel was lacking in our service, and which practices were ultimately detrimental to their journey?  These are all questions I hope to answer through my sabbatical project.

Additionally, once a student passes through the transfer portal, they are outside of the community college's purview and subject to a host of all new challenges. Thus, what can Oxnard College do to prepare our transfer students for the next level? How do students feel about this abrupt transition, and should we reconsider this approach and instead continue outreach beyond transfer?  Participants in this study will share their firsthand experiences that will better help us answer these questions.

## Project Methodology

This study will include a mixed method approach with an emphasis on qualitative data. It will employ a cross-sectional design that will give me an illustration of students' impressions of the efficacy of both community colleges and four-year universities in meeting the needs of transfer students.  The research questions we're asking lend themselves to gathering data in narrative form. For instance, students will be asked to describe their experiences as community college students, how much guidance they felt they received throughout the transfer process, and what it was like to adapt to the four-year university environment. The details and descriptions students provide will be crucial to understanding and addressing any gaps in their preparation, and presenting this research in a qualitative manner would certainly serve my purpose.

In addition, the quantitative approach will also contribute to our understanding of student needs.  Over the course of interviewing and surveying between 25-50 students, I hope to achieve data saturation so as to place students into categories that will become clearer over time. For instance, one possible category may be Students Who Received Enough Support, and I could provide a percentage showing readers how many participants felt they were well prepared for university.  I can also provide more specific categories, for example, Students Who Needed More Financial Resources, or Students Who Needed More Interaction With Professors. These percentages can be presented either in tables or as part of the prose portion of the report.

The instrument used for this study will be informed by several sources.  Past research has had a similar interest in student success, and the questionnaires they employed would be quite useful for our campus. For instance, the "Howard Community College Follow-Up of 1984 Entrants" (Seboda, 1989) was a follow-up study of community college students four years after they first attended the Maryland-based school. It was created "to determine the students'

educational and career achievements subsequent to attending HCC and to assess the effectiveness of the college from the students' perspective" (Seboda, 1989). Of course, my purpose is not necessarily related to career achievements, but despite the survey's age, many of its questions are pertinent to my research. It asks establishing questions including "Did you attend primarily on a part-time or full-time basis?", and whether they worked and for how many hours per week. The survey also asks students to rate the community college's performance on a scale, for instance, "Quality of classroom instruction," "Faculty availability/helpfulness," and "Academic advising." Perhaps most importantly, it asks, "How well did this community college prepare you for transfer?" (Seboda, 1989). Although not every question will necessarily be included in my survey, many of these will be helpful to my research pursuit.

Another source of questions will come from the study "Comparing Persistence Factors Between Freshman and Transfer Undergraduate Students" developed by Wai Shan Ng (2018). This particular work was meant to identify factors that may lead to differences in persistence between freshman and undergraduate transfer students. Inquiries from this questionnaire will allow me to gather data about how well students adapted to the four-year environment, and provide insight into some of their behaviors. These questions will allow students to rate certain statements including: "Since coming to this university the student has developed close personal relationships with other students. . .Few of the faculty members the student has had contact with are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students. . . Most of the faculty the student has had contact with are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas" (Ng, 2018). This would help inform our campus about the environment students encounter upon leaving OC, and we could then use this to create workshops and other programs that help prepare our transferring students for what awaits them.

These resources will allow me to construct a questionnaire that includes open-ended questions regarding their educational goals and access to resources. Great care will be taken to ensure that the survey is not overwhelming in regards to items included. I will also utilize some aspects of the Social Bonds Questionnaire (Peguero, *et al*., 2016) to get a better idea of students' social connections to their campus. It is a 32-item survey with four elements, the first element is school attachment and consists of eight items (0 = disagree, 1 = agree; Cronbach's alpha = .76). The second element is school involvement comprising two count indices (Academic: five items; Cronbach's alpha = .91/Sports: eight items; Cronbach's alpha = .93). Third is school commitment and includes six items (0 = disagree, 1 = agree; Cronbach's alpha = .69). Lastly, school belief, which is five items (0 = disagree, 1 = agree, Cronbach's alpha = .75). Items removed will be those that least pertain to our participants. For instance, questions regarding sports are not necessary since they rarely play a pivotal role in community college educational goals. Fortunately, our campus department of institutional research would be able to assist in the quantitative aspect of this project by providing guidance and insight into the data I collect.

Finally, because this is a qualitative study that will include both one-on-one and panel interviews, I hope to establish an interview protocol that will allow me to collect data that will lead to a deeper understanding of the transfer student experience. The following is a sample of what I will ask participants: What would you say was the biggest difference in terms of class content between two-year and four-year colleges? What was the biggest adjustment you had to make in terms of succeeding in your classes? What are some things you wished you knew about

four-years before transferring?  What did your community college do better than your four-year and vice versa?

**Procedure**

Our campus Admissions & Records, Financial Aid, Transfer Center, and if necessary the Extended Opportunity Program & Services (EOPS) will help me identify possible participants for this study.  Based on personal interaction, I also know that many of my colleagues continue to remain in communication with former students who went on to university. I can contact these colleagues and ask them if they would help connect me with these students in an effort to recruit participants for this project.  I could incentivize their participation by offering gift cards to those who take part in this project.  Students will receive a short initial survey that will allow me to collect such variables as socioeconomic status, age, employment status, gender, and ethnicity. Students who match this study's criteria (students who went on to transfer to a four-year university) will then be asked if they would like to participate in the larger study.  Should recruitment of more recent graduates prove difficult, I will seek information from students who graduated more than five years ago.  Per my research subject research certification training, I understand that this endeavor may require an Institutional Research Board, or IRB. Participants in this study do not fall under the category of a "vulnerable group," nor would their participation place them in any form of harm.  Furthermore, all data will be collected anonymously, and personal information will not be gathered in any way.  Nonetheless, I would still approach my current doctoral institution to seek guidance on both whether this project warrants an IRB, and in the formation of a research board.

I will employ a mixed methods approach consisting of Likert scale questions, as well as an open-ended portion.  Participants will also be given the option to be part of a focus group that will allow me to gather more detailed, narrative-based data regarding their experiences in the transfer portal.  Focus groups will last anywhere from one to two hours and will include such questions as: Describe your college experience. In what ways do you feel Oxnard College prepared you for the next level? What would you have liked OC to have done differently? What support do you feel was lacking? If necessary, I am also prepared to provide surveys and interview questions in Spanish.  I believe a sample size between 25-50 students will allow me to achieve data saturation.

Being that this study will focus on Latinx students, I can apply CRT and LatCrit to their transfer journeys, identifying possible microaggressions they encountered, oppressive practices they were able to overcome, and ways they employed their own cultural wealth and knowledge to reach their goals.  These theoretical frameworks will provide a cultural context to the possible improvements both community colleges and four-year universities can work on when serving their Latinx students.

**Pilot Study**

Prior to conducting the study that will yield actual data for this report, I will conduct a pilot study with a select few transfer students who will be able to clearly elucidate both the merits and the shortcomings of the instrument and process in general. These pilot students will be selected based on their communication skills (from prior experience), availability, and

promptness in responding to initial requests. They will begin by answering the questions in the selected instrument, and then go through a trial run of the interview, after which they will provide feedback and suggestions for refinement. By doing this, I will gather vital input about this study's design, including whether the instrument takes too long, suggestions for more efficient interview questions, and even advice on how to obtain more participants, thus borrowing from the snowball sampling technique. Utilizing a pilot study will no doubt allow me to develop this study in such a way that it yields the most useful results.

## Product of Sabbatical

The end product of my research would be data that I can share throughout Oxnard College, be it in professional development workshops, department meetings, or another format. This information could then be used to address areas of growth identified in my studies. Over time, my methods could be used by the institution to conduct future research. Furthermore, I could eventually use this data to create a written report for publication or even a book. These endeavors, of course, would occur well beyond the time period allotted for my sabbatical.

## Report Dissemination

Oxnard College's student body is made up of mostly Latinx students. This group is the largest ethnic minority in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2019). As such, a wide variety of organizations, publications, and private groups would no doubt be drawn to a study of this nature. Should I eventually prepare a full report, for instance, it could appear in such publications as *The Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, or *Community College Review*. This information could also be shared with various groups that address issues of educational disparity, including the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), a group that has a large impact on college readiness, partnerships, and practices throughout the state. It would also be vital to share our findings with social justice-minded groups like the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). These groups already have so many connections and relationships with people in power who can enact change on many campuses. Data from this study would also be presented at various conferences and training sessions that cover issues related to counseling, training, and institutional best practices, for example, the annual conference held by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). Finally, findings from my research could eventually be developed into a published book so that suggestions for improvement can be shared at scale.

## Work Plan and Schedule

**August 2021 -** Identify participants; explain methods and purpose before distributing consent forms; develop and refine instruments and interview/focus group questions; initiate pilot study with select participants.

**September 2021 -** Complete pilot study, refine instrument and questions based on feedback; distribute instrument to participants and initiate focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

**October 2021 -** Continue interviews and focus groups; begin categorizing/coding results into identifiable themes to facilitate analysis. Begin data analysis.

**November 2021 -** Begin data analysis.
**December 2021 -** Begin preparing presentations to later share campus wide.

**Project Value**

       States often provide incentives to high performing community colleges, and independent organizations offer awards and recognition to those with the highest transfer rates. For instance, the Aspen Institute offers a $1 million award to high achieving community colleges, while the CCC Board of Governors honors schools for exemplary performance. As a result, community colleges dedicate a lot of resources to increasing the amount of students who graduate and go on to four-year universities. From transfer centers to application workshops to advisors, two-year colleges strive to help as many transfer-bound students as they can.

       Unfortunately, our campus has historically low transfer rates, particularly when compared to high-achieving schools throughout the state. This study can help reverse this trend by providing us with greater insight into the lives of many of the students we serve. Through their own self reporting, I will get a better grasp of just what types of challenges they face, but from their own perspective. It will also allow us to place their challenges into a hierarchy based on which is most disruptive. For instance, is lack of tutoring a greater hurdle than child care? Or should our campus place more emphasis on providing free child care and less emphasis on tutoring? Does a free bus pass program lead to increased student engagement and success, or should we seek to form stronger bonds with local food banks? Naturally, it would be ideal for campuses to provide unlimited access to all of these resources, but the reality is that funding is finite.

       This study will therefore be of particular interest to community college faculty and staff. Counselors, for instance, will have to do less guesswork when helping a student who is struggling. Administrators will get a better sense of their population and therefore a better sense of what programs to initiate and fund. On a personal level, conducting research of this nature would not only serve as preparation for future studies I may want to conduct, but it would help me improve my own approach in the classroom. My findings will better inform me and other faculty members in regards to what our students' lives are like outside of the classroom, thus allowing us to direct students to proper resources. Local organizations can also benefit from a study of this nature since they can foster collaborative efforts with local campuses as a way to improve student success. Meanwhile, the information I find can help donors make better informed decisions when choosing where to allocate funds. On the other hand, local high schools hoping to better prepare students for college can direct efforts more specifically to mitigating the effects of these obstacles before graduation, thus providing them with the tools necessary for throughput. Research can create a stronger bond between high schools and their local community college, allowing them to pass along vital information about students' needs, all of which can only lead to a better equipped - and more successful - student body.

       Finally, this study would have an impact that would extend into the community as well. Oxnard College is located in a historically underserved, marginalized community. As such, in the city of Oxnard, only 18% of residents aged 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher (US Census Bureau, 2019). This study would help continue the process of mitigating the systemic oppression that low-income students face both in and out of the classroom. By allowing

us to better understand their barriers to success, we will be able to better direct our efforts to provide the support that society often does not offer this population. The benefits of obtaining a higher education have already been well documented, hence, this study would not only contribute to more historically underrepresented students completing their programs, but it would also lead to more stable employment, higher rates of home ownership, and financial freedom. In fact, this would even help increase the lifespan of individuals we serve, as research has shown a strong correlation between educational attainment and life expectancy (Hebel, 2008).  With underserved populations, the difference between a degree and a dropout often comes down to support, and this study will help refine that support.

**APPENDIX: References**

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