

David Carlander

Detailed Statement of Proposed Sabbatical

As of this writing, the English department at our college does not offer a course exclusively focused on graphic novels and comic books; given the popularity of this kind of literature in mainstream society, and in particular its popularity with our students, this seems like a missed opportunity.

I am currently in the process of writing a course outline proposal to submit to the Curriculum Committee next semester for approval; this course is tentatively titled Comics and Graphic Novels. If approved, we could begin offering the course to students in Fall 2024. I'm applying for a sabbatical for Spring 2024 so as to develop curriculum, lesson plans, and create material for this course.

There's scholarship to go through, books to be read, such as *Will Eisner's Comics and Sequential Art*, *Comics: A Global History, 1968 to the Present*, and *All of the Marvels*, for starters. Then there's the comics themselves to read through, which will help propel curriculum and lesson plans on a day-to-day basis. There are the countless documentaries and visual presentations dedicated to comics as a medium of artistic expression. To work through these takes time.

I also want to look to some of our neighboring institutions and learn from them how they are offering comics courses to students; in particular, I want to communicate with and visit UC Riverside and Cal State Long Beach to discuss—and hopefully observe actual class sessions—where comics and graphic novels are being taught at the upper division, thus informing how perhaps we at VC might offer something similar at the lower division. Again, this takes some time.

My hope is that, along with the many months I'll be planning this project, having a sabbatical will allow me to concentrate my efforts in those last months leading up to the semester when the course could actually be offered. This would be a time to solidify decisions about the course, ensure it's on solid ground, and get it ready to roll out for students in the Fall 2024 semester.

It's my belief that having the time and opportunity to create curriculum around this new course will be a great benefit to me as an instructor and allow me to improve my teaching. It's a chance to broaden my knowledge base in a particular subject matter, but it's also an opportunity for me to come at my teaching from a new angle, I think. While most of my teaching is done in the area of Composition, this course is going to encourage me to package and present material to students in ways that are going to feel new, dynamic, and that will likely push creativity, ingenuity, and imagination in creating assignments and ways of looking at course content. I can take what I learn from this experience and apply it, where appropriate, to the way I teach Composition. In a sense, I'm being placed back in the role of student as I develop this curriculum, and that's always a humbling position for an instructor to take...and often an informative one as well that can lead to some innovation.

With respect to the college, and the larger district, I humbly submit that this is an opportunity to do something fresh and to offer a new experience to students. Ventura College has never offered a course exclusively dedicated to the medium of comics/graphic novels, and no such course exists at this time at either one of our sister colleges. And given the climate, it's a good time to offer a class like this that will likely appeal to students. If successful and engaging, it's a class Ventura can regularly offer to students, and should either Moorpark or Oxnard develop their own interest in offering a similar course, then VC has done the work to create the blueprint, so to speak.

Most importantly, having the time to develop curriculum for a comics/graphic novels-based course is going to be a benefit to students. The entire purpose of my sabbatical is to create materials and lessons that will appeal to students, that will challenge them, that will encourage them to develop multiple literacies as well as their analytical and critical thinking skills. It's about creating a robust, meaningful experience that will perhaps challenge their preconceived notions about the nature of academic, scholarly study. Comic book culture is very much on our students' radars, it's part of their daily lives and personal interests, and any time we as instructors can tap into what our students are passionate about, take creative advantage of those interests, and present material in ways that allow students to rely on prior knowledge while building new literacy skills, it's a winning recipe for success. My hope is that with a dedicated semester away to work on this project, that's precisely what I'll be able to offer.

Many thanks for your time and consideration, and please take care!

David Carlander