

Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal for Fall 2023 (or Spring 2024)
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**Everyone Deserves a Second Chance:
Meeting the Needs of Students Who Do Not Pass English 1A on Their First Attempt**

Faculty Status: Full-time, tenured
Hire Date: August 2009
Previous Leaves: 1

Overview of the Sabbatical Project

Too many students are falling through the cracks after not passing English 1A on their first attempt despite the overall success of this open-access transfer-level English class, which is required for all degrees and transfer. While English faculty members are working collaboratively to increase overall success rates in English 1A, the **college needs to adopt an intentional and integrated approach to encourage and support students to re-enroll in a second attempt and complete this milestone class**. Out of first-time VC students in fall 2019 who did not pass English 1A, only 1 in 5 students (19%) passed the course by fall 2020, and 30% stopped out of college altogether, according to a [recent PPIC report](#). Holistic support services for this population can potentially **increase retention and student success**, particularly among BIPOC students who are less likely to pass English 1A on a first attempt, according to PPIC.

In this project, I will:

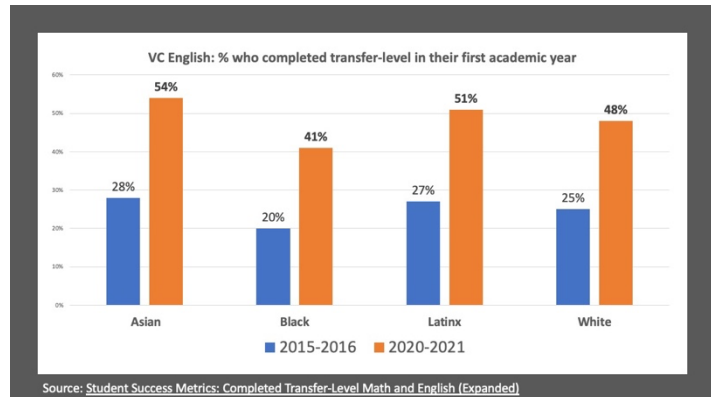
- (1) Investigate the campus support and outreach systems at other CCC colleges with higher re-enrollment and success rates for repeating students in transfer-level English.
- (2) Develop and present a plan for robust whole-campus support at VC for students who need a second chance to pass transfer-level English and who are often struggling with more than just academic content.
- (3) Design and share English 1A Canvas modules paired with equitable teaching strategies designed specifically for the success of repeating students.

Background of the Sabbatical Project:

Completing transfer-level English and Math during the first year is a crucial milestone for students on the way to degrees and transfer. According to an October 2022 RP Group study, "[African American Transfer Tipping Point](#)," black students who complete both English and Math in their first year are 310% more likely to transfer. Reaching this milestone for non-African American/Black students has even more impact, increasing their odds of transfer by 360%. As a college, district, and state, we have made **substantial progress on better serving students as they work toward this milestone** through the equitable placement reforms implemented in the wake of the 2018 California Assembly Bill 705 (AB705). The new open-door policy to transfer-

level classes corrected a well-intentioned and decades-long approach in the California Community College system that placed about 70% of our students into long sequences of required remedial courses. This approach disproportionately impacted BIPOC students who were at least twice as likely to be placed below transfer, a decision that tracked too many students out of the possibility of a college degree.

Since we opened the doors to English V01A English Composition at Ventura College in fall 2019, completion rates in the first year have almost doubled for students in each ethnic group. For example, the completion rate for Latinx students jumped from 27% in fall 2015 to 51% in fall 2020. The rate for black students increased from 20% to 41% during this period. According to the RP Group, **completing just transfer-level English (and not Math) in their first year increases a black student's odds of transferring by 70%.** In short, there is much to celebrate in the more equitable outcomes of open-door transfer-level English and Math, although equity gaps between ethnic groups remain. Still, new challenges have emerged in a post-AB705 world where almost all students begin in English 1A.



One of the thornier challenges is how to better meet the needs of students who do not succeed in transfer-level English on their first attempt. We need to find a way to avoid having these students fall through the cracks, as too many are right now. Across the state, only 16% of first-time English students who did not pass the class in fall 2019 reached this critical milestone by fall 2020, according to PPIC's August 2022 report, "[Community College English in California's New Era of Student Access](#)." The report also indicates that Latino and African American students are less likely to eventually complete college composition after an unsuccessful first attempt. At Ventura College, of the more than 500 first-time VC students who did not complete English 1A in fall 2019, **only 2 in 5 students (41%) re-enrolled in the class by the following fall. And only 1 in 5 students (19%) passed English 1A by fall 2020.** The available data from PPIC is no doubt impacted by the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, even if the numbers are slightly less dramatic for the fall 2020 and 2021 cohorts, it is clear that a significant number of students each year will need additional support and resources to retake transfer-level English.

Purpose of the Sabbatical Project:

This sabbatical project aims to better meet the needs of students who do not succeed in transfer-level English on their first attempt. The college needs to have a **systematic approach to encourage these students to re-enroll and try again.** Currently, individual English instructors may or may not reach out to students who withdraw or do not pass their classes to encourage

them to re-enroll. English instructors regularly discuss in our department meetings how important it is to let students know that sometimes challenging tasks take more than one attempt. However, it is quite possible that encouraging messages from an instructor who just registered a below-passing grade may not reach students as effectively as we'd like. Plus, ensuring that all students receive consistent and positive messages is difficult.

Instead, the college needs to provide students with **targeted communication and intentional support from the whole campus**, not just from English instructors who choose to take the time to offer this support. This new approach might include providing students with information about Basic Needs services, incentives to re-enroll, targeted tutoring or peer mentoring opportunities, options to enroll in sections with extra help from instructors outside of class, or various other approaches. It is crucial to meet students where they are and provide them with the resources they need to succeed on their second attempt.

In short, this project seeks to move from the decentralized and scattershot approach relying only on outreach from English instructors to an **integrated, whole-campus effort involving basic needs, tutoring, and academic counseling** as well as any other relevant student and academic services to “maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within a one year,” one of the key directives of AB705/AB1705.

Components of the Sabbatical Project:

Research Support Options for Repeating Students at other CCCs: In addition to reading relevant higher education research, I will **investigate successful programs at peer colleges and, when possible, interview key stakeholders** involved in efforts on those campuses. The following colleges have above-average re-enrollment rates for students who did not pass transfer-level English on their first attempt: Hartnell, West Valley, Ohlone, LA Pierce, Glendale, Cerritos, Gavilan, and Cypress. When students re-enrolled, several colleges also had much higher success rates than the systemwide average: Ohlone, Coastline, San Mateo, San Diego Miramar, Irvine Valley, Orange Coast, and Marin. I will learn more about other programs across the system specifically designed for this type of support, such as Glendale College's [English 3rd Attempt Program](#) and SBCC's [Reaffirming and Inspiring Students in English](#) (RISE), among others.

Develop and Present a Plan for Robust Support Services at VC: After extensive research, I will **develop a whole-campus plan to provide vital support services at VC for students who need a second chance to pass transfer-level English and often struggle with more than just academic content**. This plan may include communicating more effectively with impacted students, addressing their basic needs, providing targeted tutoring or peer mentorship, arranging extra help from instructors outside of class, and connecting students with academic counseling services, among other services. While I will focus on students repeating English 1A, many elements of this plan will likely apply to students who need to repeat transfer-level Math as well. When I return from the sabbatical, I will present my findings and the integrated plan at

appropriate venues on campus, such as the SEA committee, Guided Pathways, and the Academic Senate.

Course Redesign: Over the past three years, I have participated in extensive training on anti-racist and equitable teaching strategies such as the USC Equity Institute, CORA, Reading Apprenticeship, and a workshop series with Diego Navarro entitled “Inquiry into Constructs that Instill a Culture of Dignity: Creating Conditions of Belonging & Psychological Safety for Students of Color.” During this project, I will apply these approaches by **redesigning and revamping how I teach English 1A to promote success for repeating students**. For instance, I will select content/readings and design assignments that are culturally relevant and that focus on overcoming hardships and beating the odds. I will also develop shareable English 1A Canvas modules designed with equitable teaching strategies and specifically for the success of repeating students.

Timeline of Sabbatical Project:

Weeks 1-3: Research programs and interview key stakeholders in at least three CCCs with above-average re-enrollment rates for students’ second attempts at English 1A. Begin the selection process for culturally relevant readings and writing prompts for English 1A with attention to an approach for students who are repeating the course.

Weeks 4-6: Research programs and interview key stakeholders in at least three CCCs with above-average success rates among students repeating English 1A. Review higher education research on course repetition and how to encourage students to stay engaged after not passing a class. Finalize the selection of materials for a so-called Second Chance English 1A.

Weeks 7-12: Share initial findings in 1:1 and small group meetings with colleagues at Ventura College to begin developing a whole-campus intentional plan. Finalize the prompts for the major writing assignments in English 1A and design step-by-step scaffolding for reading and writing tasks with an equity-minded grading schema.

Weeks 13-18: Draft and revise the whole-campus plan for essential support services at VC for students who need a second chance to pass transfer-level English. Develop Canvas modules that are shareable for my redesigned English 1A class.

Value of Sabbatical Project to Ventura College and District:

This sabbatical project contributes directly to at least [two of the district’s Strategic Goals](#): “increase equitable access and success for all students” and “support the closing of academic achievement and support services equity gaps.”

The district’s [Strategic Plan](#) for meeting these goals seeks to increase the percentage of students completing transfer-level English and Math with a student-centered approach:

- 2.2. Increase the percentage of degree, certificate, or transfer seeking students completing college level English and math within their first year from 25% to 45% by 2027.
(Baseline Year 2019-20)
- B. Student-centered implementation of AB705 and support to students for success and timely completion of all college level courses.

It is more likely that the district will achieve these targets by explicitly addressing the needs of students who do not pass transfer-level English and Math classes on their first attempt. Also, because BIPOC students are more likely to be repeating a transfer-level course, **we need to provide targeted support for repeating students to meet the goal of closing equity gaps.**

The strategic goals and objectives at Ventura College align closely with the district's planning documents, particularly Goal 1: Objective 2:

Goal 1: Increase the success of our students while closing equity gaps.

Objective 2: Increase transfer-level English and Math completion rates to be within the top five in the state.

The college's [2020-2023 Strategic Plan](#) identifies the following strategy: "Implement, evaluate, and refine AB 705 policies and procedures." The plan identifies this action step to implement this strategy: "Develop courses, pedagogical strategies, or other support to address identified gaps."

This proposal to provide intentional and robust support for students who need to repeat transfer-level English fills a gap in the college's approach to AB705, which has, up to this point, focused on equitable placement, access, and success on a first attempt. By increasing the number of students who re-enroll and complete this milestone class on a second attempt, we have the potential **to significantly close equity gaps while improving the overall completion rates in transfer-level English.** With more students completing English and Math, the college is also likely to benefit from increased retention and completion of degrees and certificates, which is essential in this period of shrinking enrollment.

Beyond more equitable student success, a higher completion rate of English and Math in the first year increases the allocation we receive from the state because this metric is explicitly funded in Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF). The SCFF provides an added incentive to the district and the college to build and maintains better support services for students as they seek to achieve this milestone.

Value of Sabbatical Project to Ventura College Students

The most tangible value of this project for students is the increased potential for success in a milestone class, English 1A, thereby significantly increasing their chances of completing a degree or transferring. A student who passes both transfer-level English and Math in their first

year is **310% more likely to achieve the academic goal of transferring** to a four-year institution, according to PPIC.

One of this project's less tangible but essential outcomes is creating a stronger sense of connectedness and belonging for students who are likely feeling vulnerable and experiencing self-doubt after not passing one of their first college classes. Imagine for a minute that students encounter intentional and caring outreach and support from the college community after not passing English 1A. These students are **more likely to experience Ventura College as an institution that cares** about their academic and personal success.

This project also has the **potential to impact a large number of Ventura College students**. From Fall 2018-Spring 2022, more than 11,500 students have enrolled in English 1A with an average overall success rate of 60.1% for this same period. So approximately 4,500 students have needed to retake English 1A over the last four academic years. However, the recent PPIC study suggests that only about 20% of these students go on to complete the transfer-level English requirement within two additional semesters, and about 30% are at risk of stopping out of college altogether. Increasing the percentage of students who re-enroll and succeed on a second attempt could have a significant impact not only on these students' lives but also on the retention and completion rates for the college as a whole.

Value of Sabbatical Project to Me as an Instructor:

Providing better support for students who need a second chance is a passion project for me. Since the beginning of my career as an English instructor at Atlantic Union College (AUC), a predominantly African American college in Massachusetts, I have had a deep commitment to working with and supporting students who are beating the odds in educational systems that were not designed for them. At AUC, I created and taught a two-semester version of College Composition for students who needed more time and support. As a graduate student at UC Santa Barbara, I taught in the Academic Communities of Excellence (ACE) Writing program for EOP students. And my commitment to teaching students who often need second chances led me to pursue teaching in the California Community College system and eventually at Ventura College.

As an English instructor and department chair, transitioning to an open-door policy in English 1A has required us to rethink everything we do. And the results for most students are much better. Even students with high school GPAs below 1.9 are meeting or exceeding in one semester the success rates that used to take four semesters for students starting two levels below transfer. One of our new mantras has become "Repetition is the new remediation." Students who attempt and retake English 1A have a better success rate than those who used to be placed into a two-course composition sequence. However, this approach only works if students actually do re-enroll and take another crack at English 1A. This project will fill in one of the most critical missing pieces in our implementation of AB705.

This sabbatical project will also give me the time and space to process and apply much of the often theoretical anti-racist and equity-centered training I have engaged in over the last 3-4 years. Having blocks of time to focus my attention on a single project rather than multitasking will allow me to apply my professional learning in my English 1A sections as well as in a plan to support students who often need it the most. And the rewards of seeing students receive whole-campus support to regroup and retake English 1A successfully will be priceless.

I am flexible on the timing of this sabbatical project, and though there is some urgency to tackle this project, either Fall 2023 or Spring 2024 is possible for me, depending on the balance of proposals the committee receives.

Thank you for your time and energy in reading my proposal for a sabbatical project and considering how this project holds value for our district, college, and students.

Respectfully yours,
Eric Martinsen