

Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal for Spring 2026

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SKILLS (School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society) - College Edition Invigorating Transfer-level English with a Research-based Sociolinguistic Justice Curriculum

Faculty status: Full-time, tenured

Full-time Hire Date: August 2000

Part-time District Hire Date: August 2019

Previous Sabbaticals: 2 (Fall 2008, Fall 2017)

Background of Sabbatical Project

Housed at University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), *School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society* (SKILLS) is a social justice-oriented academic partnership led by faculty who teach in the university's Chicana/o Studies, Education, and Linguistics departments. SKILLS prepares and motivates California's public-school students for higher education by giving them hands-on experience in studying language, power, race, and identity. SKILLS guides students through the process of carrying out original research and community action projects on language in their own peer groups, families, and communities, placing them at the center of knowledge creation and social change.

Throughout SKILLS's decade-long history, participants have gained greater appreciation and application of linguistic diversity and community cultural wealth, leading to personal growth and academic success. In the SKILLS program, trained UCSB graduate students and undergraduate mentors guide K-12 students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds to conduct original research and actions projects while developing and implementing a culturally and linguistically sustaining curriculum rooted in linguistic justice. Frequently associated with the participatory action research of English Education scholar Dr. April Baker-Bell and feminist linguistics scholar Dr. Mary Bucholtz (one of the three faculty Program Leaders for SKILLS), linguistic justice has been defined as the realization of equitable access to social, economic, and political life through learning and application of critical language awareness (CLA), an understanding of how language is tied to power and privilege that leads to questioning common beliefs about language, making informed choices of language use, and respecting all varieties of language.

The curricular structure for SKILLS emphasizes

- Language in the peer group, which covers the basic tools of linguistic analysis and invites students to explore their own and their peers' multi-dimensional language use;
- Language in the family, which enables students to consider linguistic practices, oral histories, and experiences across generations;
- Language in the community, which guides students to investigate linguistic diversity and language politics both locally and more broadly; and
- Language in the world, which gives students a wider perspective on how their own language use as well as that of their peers, families, and communities fit into the global context of both face-to-face and mediated uses of languages around the world.

Grounded in its curricular structure, SKILLS is designed to help students

- Learn to conduct original research on language use in their peer groups, families, and communities in ways that bridge their home and school cultures
- Investigate language from social-scientific and humanistic perspectives
- Gain appreciation of their own and others' linguistic heritage and expertise
- Acquire content knowledge in the discipline of linguistics and research methods
- Develop clear oral and written communication skills in academic settings
- Engage in mentoring relationships with undergraduate and graduate students

The 20-week SKILLS program culminates in the SKILLS DAY research conference on UCSB's campus, where K-12 students present their independent research projects to the academic and public community, sharing about issues of language that are relevant and meaningful to their lives. Past participants have described the experience as transformative especially as the deeply engaged academic audience validate student agency and authority as linguistic and cultural experts in full use of their linguistic repertoires. Adopted by over eleven schools and youth community centers since 2009 in the Santa Barbara area, SKILLS has served approximately 2,800 K-12 students, 1,000 undergraduates, and 160 educators to date.

In 2023, SKILLS launched an internally funded longitudinal study, resulting in preliminary findings that suggest the program also inspires undergraduates, the majority of whom are multilingual, first-generation college students, and motivates them to pursue educational careers. Said one former SKILLS undergraduate, “When SKILLS came into my life, I was really sure of it as an extracurricular piece on my resume. Little did I know it would push me toward my endgame, a career in teaching. I really came into myself as an educator because of SKILLS.” The study’s feedback underscored the importance of structured, hands-on early teaching experiences and communal support in fostering the growth and confidence of future educators.

In September 2024, SKILLS received a five-year grant as SKILLS-LISTA (Language in Society Teaching Apprenticeship), aiming to leverage and build on the existing strengths and proven impact of the SKILLS program by integrating a critical pre-professional teaching apprenticeship component of LISTA. The term *lista* means “ready” in Spanish and reflects the project’s commitment to recruiting and preparing participants to be “ready” to work with multilingual learners and “ready” for the demands of the teaching profession.

The LISTA program will comprise three anchoring components tied to the strength of SKILLS:

1. Recruitment of traditionally underserved, multilingual candidates for service learning opportunities that offer pre-professional practicum to work with multilingual learners through the SKILLS partnership with local school;
2. Training in evidence-based instruction for K-12 multilingual learners, including culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy, effective instructional practices for English Learners, and sociolinguistic content that forms the basis of linguistic justice understandings; and
3. A robust “omnidirectional” mentoring model involving faculty, peers, graduate students, and in-service teachers to support pathways for linguistically and racially minoritized preservice teachers toward teacher credentialing and bilingual certification at key stages in their career trajectory, including mentorship on accessing resources for completing content area tests for admissions to teacher credentialing program, which can be a major hindrance in the multilingual teacher pipeline.

Within targeted networks and structures that support SKILLS-LISTA participants from recruitment through graduation and beyond, multilingual teacher candidates will

1. Examine and strengthen their multilingual identities and become equipped with the understanding and tools to critically examine the language ideologies and practices that affect them and students like them;
2. Increase their knowledge and capacity to provide evidence-based instruction for K-12 multilingual learners, strengthening their professional self-efficacy and application to TEP programs.
3. Participate in apprenticeship, professional learning, and mentoring at every stage in the process of becoming a teacher.

The overarching goal of SKILLS-LISTA is to create multiple and accessible teacher recruiting pipelines for multilingual individuals at various Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). To fulfill the program’s objectives, the SKILLS-LISTA initiative proposes a scaled-up collaboration across three types of HSI (research-focused UC, teaching-focused CSU, CA Community College) that educate the majority of CA college students to recruit and mentor multilingual/heritage speakers at multiple decision points within pipelines to teaching.

The SKILLS-LISTA project life cycle comprises five distinct phases:

- I. Phase 1 - dedicated to planning
- II. Phase 2 – piloting activities at two institutions
- III. Phase 3 – full scale implementation in three institutions
- IV. Phase 4 – finalize refinements of all components of the project
- V. Phase 5 – expansion and dissemination of the project

Purpose of Sabbatical Project

The purpose of my sabbatical project is to partner with SKILLS-LISTA by adapting the program’s social- and linguistic-justice curriculum to course learning objectives and content for English 1A (Ventura College’s transfer-level English course). Long-term objectives include conducting a pilot study on the adapted curriculum’s effectiveness in supporting students’ successful completion of English 1A and raising multilingual students’ interest in and access to a teaching career. My intention in conducting education research on the SKILLS-LISTA curriculum and omnidirectional community-based mentoring approach, all tailored to meet the needs of community college students, is to develop my dissertation, as I am a PhD student in Education with an emphasis in Writing Studies at UCSB.

In addition to the previously mentioned Dr. Mary Bucholtz (who is also my professor for a graduate linguistics course I’m currently taking), the two other SKILLS-LISTA faculty Program Leaders are Dr. Dolores Ines Casillas, professor of Chicana/o Studies and Director of the Chicano Studies Institute at UCSB, and Dr. Jin Sook Lee, Project Director/Principal Investigator of SKILLS-LISTA in charge of overseeing and managing the successful execution

of the proposed project. Dr. Lee is also the Associated Dean of Graduate Division overseeing graduate programs including UCSB's Teacher Education Program, a professor of Education, and one of my faculty advisors and committee members for my PhD dissertation.

Components of Sabbatical Project

- **Academic Study & Education Research**
 - In the first phase of the partnerships, I will meet regularly with the SKILLS-LISTA community of practice to discuss challenges and benefits of creating dialogic learning opportunities in diverse educational institutions. I will also enroll in an independent study course with Dr. Jin Sook Lee, meeting weekly to study SKILLS-LISTA curriculum and the project's conceptual frameworks:
 - **Funds of Knowledge** (González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: theorizing practice in households, communities, and classrooms*. L. Erlbaum Associates.)
 - **Language and Identity** (Brickhouse, N. W. & Potter, J. (2001). *Embodying science: A feminist perspective on learning*. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 38(3), 282–295.) (Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2004). *Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research*. *Language in Society*, 33(4), 469–515.)
 - **Sociolinguistic Justice** (Buckholtz, M., Lopez, A., Mojarro, A., Skapoulli, E., VanderStouwe, C., & Warner-Garcia, S., (2014). *Sociolinguistic justice in the schools: Student researchers as linguistic experts*. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 8(4), 144-157.)
- **Field Work & Omnidirectional Mentoring**
 - Partner with the project's Postdoctoral Fellow to co-teach SKILLS-LISTA curriculum in a high school classroom, 90 minutes each week, as well as engage in omnidirectional mentoring with undergraduate participants. During this phase, I will be collecting data in the form of observation notes and interview transcripts.
- **Writing & Curriculum Design**
 - After completing field work of approximately 20 weeks, I will be writing curriculum and designing accompanying activities for English 1A by adapting SKILLS-LISTA curriculum to suit VC's population of students post-AB705/1705 and asset-based, co-constructionist classroom activities.

Value of Sabbatical Project to VCCCD and Ventura College

SKILLS-LISTA curriculum and a sociolinguistic, research-based approach adapted to transfer-level English would benefit VCCCD and Ventura College through inclusion in a thriving culturally responsive and equity-based collaborative effort to increase student success across UC, CSU, CA Community College, K-12, and WestEd, a comprehensive educational services organization. WestEd's research team members include Dr. Sandra Leu Bonanno, whose research examines multilingual education and culturally sustaining approaches to education and dual language spaces, and WestEd's Director of Research and Evaluation in the Culturally Responsive and Equitable Systems, Jaclyn Tejwani, who will lead the independent evaluation of SKILLS-LISTA's effectiveness in various educational contexts.

Other key project contributors include Dr. Ana Sanchez-Munoz, professor of Chicana/o Studies and Department of Linguistics/TESL at CSUN, Dr. Laura Ruth-Hirrel, Assistant Professor & Graduate Advisor for Linguistics/TESL at CSUN, Dr. Victoria Harvey, Director of Teacher Education at UCSB, and me, as an English professor at Ventura College and PhD student in education research. Schools partners that will support SKILLS classroom instruction and mentoring include directors and teachers from San Marcos High School, Santa Barbara High School, and La Colina Junior High School.

In *Transforming Hispanic-Serving Institutions for Equity and Justice*, Dr. Gina Garcia (2023) revitalizes the notion of serving that is embedded in the HSI designation by reframing and renaming this component of higher education as "servingness," a call to "provide students with an antiracist, socially just, humanizing, empowering, liberatory, abolitionist educational experience," as well as enacting freedom dreaming about "HSIs as spaces of justice and liberation" and "imagining a better future for minoritized people, even if you can't see that future" (p. 2). As a crucial element of a transformed HSI, one that provides students with "an educational infrastructure that acknowledges their sociohistoric contexts, centers their identities and ways of knowing, and is validating, humanizing, and liberating" (p. 88), Garcia urges faculty to "develop their own pedagogical principles and philosophies grounded in liberatory and humanizing education" (p. 93). Liberatory education involves recognizing and caring for the socioemotional experiences of students' lives, and effective pedagogical moves entail developing meaningful relationships with students and understanding that for "students of color with multiple minoritized identities at HSIs, socioemotional experiences may include housing and food insecurities, joblessness, challenges of being in a mixed

status family, illness, caring for family members,” which likely affect student engagement and success in courses. (p. 95).

While hiring more Latina/o/e teachers to better serve students remains a top priority at Ventura College, realizing a collective freedom dream also requires on-the-ground, day-to-day efforts toward directly serving our students through engaged pedagogy with liberatory education in mind. This endeavor also means, as bell hooks writes in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (1994, p. 15) and “be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply” (1994, p. 22).

I believe integrating SKILLS-LISTA curriculum in English 1A would directly benefit VCCCD and Ventura College as faculty contributions to “servingsness” as an educational institution designated as an HSI. According to recent data from VC’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 64% of enrolled students identify as Latina/o/e while 13% of instructional faculty identify as Hispanic. On a larger scale, 2.1 million Latinx students enrolled in HSIs in 2020, and accordingly, “Latinx students want to see themselves in the faculty” (Garcia, 2023, p. 66). Though it’s been a challenge to find data on the number of Ventura College students who identify as multilingual or have skills in receptive bilingualism (able to understand but not necessarily able to speak or write in the language), my experience from teaching two to three sections of English 1A each semester suggests many of our students would benefit from scaffolded opportunities to conduct research on issues relevant to their lives and gain confidence in using their own linguistic resources, including translanguaging (the dynamic way people use languages in real life, regardless of meeting external standards of fluency).

Value of Sabbatical Project to Ventura College Students

Over the past twenty-five years of teaching five to ten sections of English 1A each year, I can verify, at least anecdotally, that many heritage language speakers grow up not recognizing their rich multilingual competencies and shy away from opportunities to develop or use their language skills due to internalized perceptions about their language abilities. Students enrolled in sections of English 1A that incorporate the adapted SKILLS-LISTA curriculum and linguistic justice approach would benefit greatly from having increased opportunities to learn about sociolinguistic justice frameworks, coupled with mindful awareness practices already integrated into the sections of English 1A that I teach. Grounded in embodied learning, community cultural wealth, and research opportunities, students would benefit greatly from the SKILLS-LISTA approach of emphasizing relevant, necessary, and meaningful research and writing that matter in their lives.

The practices of awareness, observation, reflection, dialogue, and collecting data on everyday uses of language remain important in other disciplines, as well, including required GE courses such as Ethnic Studies. Thus, my SKILLS-LISTA English 1A classes center student learning, respect for personal agency, honoring a culture of dignity and care, as students navigate an interdisciplinary pathway to academic success. The approach I take to the design of curriculum and accompanying assignments replies on a working definition of sociolinguistic justice articulated by Bucholtz, M., Casillas, D. I., & Lee, J. S. (You feel me? Language and youth affective agency in a racializing world. In M. Bucholtz, D. I. Casillas, & J. S. Lee (Eds.) *Feeling it: Language, learning, race, and affect in Latinx youth learning*. Routledge. 2018), emphasizing “societal awareness and appreciation of linguistic diversity and variation,” “the legitimation of all community languages and varieties for use across social spheres,” “acknowledgement of all language users as linguistic experts,” and “critical evaluation of how language is used to reproduce inequality and oppression.” Students in SKILLS-LISTA-infused English 1A sections would benefit from the course’s specific focus on a linguistic (and inevitably sociopolitical) form of social justice, recognition of student languaging as a crucial form of cultural sustenance, as well as a call to create culturally sustaining pedagogies, and practice accompaniment (i.e., providing resources in order to enable students to enact personally meaningful social change). SKILLS uses a nonhierarchical, multidirectional model for teaching and learning to disrupt traditional school’s unrelenting enforcement of “an ideological hierarchy of cognitive processes that devalues affect and valorizes forms of knowledge purportedly produced by an idealized ‘pure’ reason separate from embodied, emotional experience” (Bucholtz et al., 2018, p. 21).

Value of Sabbatical Project to the Instructor

After nearly thirty years of teaching college writing (twenty-five of my best teaching years as a full-time English instructor at Ventura College,) sometimes it feels like I keep getting older and students stay the same age. Yet the way I stay vital, buoyant, and passionate about teaching core skills in college composition, research, critical thinking, and literature is through the practice of liberatory education, now augmented by an omnidirectional mentoring framework. By constantly considering and creating course content that may be interesting, relevant, meaningful, of genuine use to my students, of value to students’ communities, and encouraging growth in independent learning and transferrable skills, I believe I am truly serving my students, which really matters to me. Partnering with SKILLS-LISTA would ensure I have continuing access to the established program’s dynamic infrastructure, thus

providing support for my project of invigorating transfer-level English with a research-focused sociolinguistic justice framework. I would also be able to complete my PhD in Education with an emphasis in Writing Studies while modeling intellectual, social-emotional, creative, and personally meaningful skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly competitive attention economy.

Respectfully yours,
Henny Kim-Ortel