

Sabbatical Leave Proposal
Lauren C. Snowden
Film Studies (FTMA), Moorpark College

Proposal date: Fall 2025
Proposed leave time: Spring 2027
Seniority of service: August 2013-present
Previous Sabbaticals: 0

“Bridging Academia and Industry: A Practice-Based Exploration of the Filmmaking Process”

Overview and Background of Sabbatical Proposal

Since joining Moorpark College as an adjunct instructor in 2013, I have been privileged to teach in the Film Studies discipline and help strengthen the foundation of what is now our FTMA program. Early on, I, along with my colleagues Cande Larson and Nicole Block, recognized the need to unite Film Studies and FTVM under one umbrella—a goal that took seven years to realize. That merger has allowed us to cultivate a more cohesive, creative, and academically rigorous program.

In 2019, I was honored to become the full-time faculty lead for Film Studies. Since then, our FTMA team has worked diligently to deepen the connection between production and critical studies. During my first four years of tenure, I developed a local AA in Film Studies, now active and thriving. With a professional background in screenwriting and directing, I bring industry experience to the classroom and am continually looking for ways to bridge theory and practice for our students.

This proposed documentary project builds on that mission. Its goal is to inspire our students through what my father, a retired community college professor and 2006 California Teacher of the Year, calls *“The Revolution of Rising Expectations.”* As educators, we do more than teach content—we spark imagination and possibility.

The project will create a documentary series that connects students directly with working industry professionals, demystifying the pathways into the world of visual storytelling. By showcasing a diverse range of careers and creative voices, the series will make the “vast sea” of film industry opportunities feel more like a navigable pond.

As my colleague and transmedia expert Houston Howard often says, both a Boeing 757 and a paper airplane operate on the same laws of aerodynamics—you don’t need a massive machine to achieve flight. At Moorpark College, we teach those same foundational principles of storytelling and cinematic craft. Whether students are using a cell phone or a high-end camera, the frame is still the frame—and that’s where it all begins...

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this proposal.

Project Description

Part 1: The Documentary Film

“Bridging Academia and Industry” merges academic research and creative practice, and explores the creative and structural innovations that drive the film production process. Through professional observation, interviews, and the culmination of an original documentary film project, this project aims to align academic study with current industry practice — ensuring that our FTMA program remains relevant, forward-looking, and connected in the rapidly changing landscape of this creative industry. (This film is meant to be the pilot installment in what could potentially expanded to a whole series at a future date.)

Part 2: Speaking Engagements and Conference Attendance

In addition to producing and directing this documentary project, I am also slated to teach at the Central Coast Writers’ Conference at Cuesta College again (I taught a Film Studies for Screenwriting class on narrative form this Fall) in September, 2026. For my own professional development: In October 2026 will be the Shine Away Conference, which is put on by Hello Sunshine, Reese Witherspoon’s film production company. I plan to attend that event, which takes place at Universal Studios and features influential women in the film and literary industries, as well as many networking events for aspiring and established industry professionals. Lastly, the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) Conference will be held around April 2027 in Chicago, Illinois, and I hope to attend, as that aligns with my self-appraisal goal – to attend a conference more specifically geared toward film studies. This one will depend on financial feasibility, as I am medically restricted from traveling by plane, and train travel is quite expensive.

Justification for Project

Direct pedagogical application for critical studies courses: The content of the documentary will correlate directly with films studies curriculum by illuminating key cinematic concepts through real-world perspectives. For example, an interview with a production designer or costume designer would deepen students’ understanding of mise-en-scène the deliberate arrangement of visual elements within the frame, including setting, lighting, costume & makeup, and characters’ staging and performance. *Why is it crucial for a scene from Road to Perdition, a 1930s era film, not to have any Honda cars in it, or for the characters not to be wearing Manolo Blahnik heels? Because those items were not invented yet!* Another example might be an interview with a director who speaks about their passion for telling marginalized stories, and how through the cinematic tools they find a way to make the characters relatable. Hearing directly from professionals about the research and decision-making that goes into their work will offer students invaluable insight into how theory meets practice. These firsthand accounts will enrich classroom discussion and help students see the production process as a living extension of what they study on screen.

Relevance to our CTE/production courses: Our FTMA program hosts an Entertainment Industry Panel every spring, where we invite industry professionals – producers, composers, costume designers, directors and writers, to name a few – to answer students’ questions and give their perspective on the landscape of the industry. That event comes once a year and if you miss it, you miss it. How valuable would it be to have a resource that instructors can integrate into their course as teachable content or that students can view at their leisure in order to gain a deeper understanding about the inner workings of some of the various facets of the filmmaking process – first-hand, from individuals who are living it every day?

Objectives:

- Professional Development Objective: To engage directly with industry practitioners (above and below the line) through shadowing, industry-related workshops, writer labs, and/or virtual collaborations.
- Creative Objective: Develop an original multi-part documentary informed by the research findings.
- Pedagogical Objective: Create a product that will yield the potential for instructors to design teaching content to update our FTMA program’s film and media curriculum to reflect current industry standards and opportunities.
- Research Objective: Examine the various facets of the filmmaking process, from ideation to final product from the perspectives of a diverse group of industry professionals in different specialties.

Outcomes:

- Instructors will be able to produce various teaching modules on practical film development and production to accompany the segments of the documentary.
- Content may be used to update curriculum for film studies and production courses.

Anticipated Benefits to Students

This project will:

- Update and enhance Film Studies and CTE curriculum to reflect the realities of today’s film and TV industry.
- Strengthen pathways between academic programs and professional opportunities.
- Equip students with practical understanding of multi-platform era storytelling and production models.
- Update curriculum to reflect current industry trends and career pathways in digital storytelling.
- Provide students with hands-on understanding of how stories are conceived, developed, and marketed in the streaming era.
- Expand our Film Studies curriculum with updated, research-driven content on representation in media.
- Enhance FTMA’s connection between academic theory and professional film practice.
- Present opportunities for FTMA students to gain hands-on production experience.

Anticipated Benefits to Moorpark College and VCCCD

This project directly supports the Moorpark College Educational Masterplan, Strategic Direction #1: “Create, revise, or discontinue curriculum to meet transfer, community, and labor market needs.” This documentary would be modular (broken into bite-sized topic-based segments), so instructors can use as many of the segments as they choose, and apply practical assignments to reinforce the concepts discussed within. There is the potential for Strategic Direction #13 as well: “Strengthen relationships with our local community to increase outreach, campus visits, and philanthropic support.” One possibility is (in addition to the finishing of the documentary), in collaboration with the Moorpark College Foundation, the FTMA program could host a formal community-facing screening event for the documentary and have a reception afterward with the subjects of the film as the featured guests. The event could include a Q&A and networking portion afterward to put into practice the principles that will, no doubt, be discussed in the interviews about connecting with like-minded people.

In addition, this sabbatical project will:

- yield viability, shareability, and relevance across the District’s Film, Television and Media programs.
- reinforce Moorpark College’s leadership in contemporary arts and media education, which also strengthens the Ventura County Community College District’s standing in the community.
- strengthen ties between the college and the professional film/TV community.
- expand Moorpark College’s visibility as an institution dedicated to preparing students for contemporary creative industries.
- contribute to the college’s mission of equity, inclusion, and cultural awareness through hearing from diverse voices and media production and education.

Anticipated Benefits to Candidate

As a screenwriter and director, my experience includes a produced Hallmark film, multiple short-form projects, a television pilot, two web series, a music video, and branded commercial content. This documentary project will allow me to further refine my storytelling craft while reengaging with industry colleagues who can serve as valuable resources for our students. Maintaining professional relevance and connection is essential for educators in the evolving media landscape, and this project provides a meaningful opportunity to bridge my creative practice with my teaching.

Deliverables

- Completed documentary project
 - To be integrated as standalone or modular curricular content in all FTMA film studies and production courses
- Faculty presentation or workshop on reflecting on the process of producing the documentary, from ideation to finished product

Proposed Activities & Timeline

Spring Semester

Weeks 1–2 – Training

- Complete Canon DSLR certification (to enable independent filming and student instruction).
- Gain DIT (Digital Imaging Technician) proficiency for efficient post-production workflow.

Weeks 3–4 – Development

- Conduct industry research and networking through panels, workshops, and labs.
- Identify and secure interview subjects.
- Draft project outline, script, and interview questions.
- Refine project scope and budget.

Weeks 5–8 – Pre-production

- Finalize filming schedule, locations, and equipment.
- Assemble a small production crew (as feasible).
- Prepare interview subjects and logistics.

Week 10 – SCMS Conference

- Attend/present at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference.

Weeks 11–15 – Production

- Film interviews with industry professionals (virtual and in-person), capturing insights across development, production, and post-production.
- Film any additional b-roll and on-location footage.
- Collect any footage and photos from interview subjects to include in the final product.

Weeks 15–18 – Post-production

- Edit footage into short, instructional segments for classroom use.
- Curate music, record narration, and finalize edit.
- Generate and finalize captions.