Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal for Spring 2027

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Faculty Status: Full-Time
Full Time Hire Date: August 10, 2016
Part Time Hire Date: Fall 2014
Previous Sabbaticals: 0

Background of the Sabbatical Project

I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Early Childhood Education Leadership and have made substantial progress in both my coursework and dissertation research. My dissertation investigates early childhood educators' understanding of executive function (EF) skills and how they support children's development of these skills within classroom environments. Since July 2025, I have been working on an accelerated timeline to align my data collection with a national conference in November 2025, during which I will conduct the quantitative phase of my study. Having completed Chapters 1 through 3, successfully defended my proposal, and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I am now preparing for the data collection stage. Following the quantitative phase, I will transition to qualitative data collection by conducting interviews with early childhood educators from December 2025 through August 2026. I anticipate defending my dissertation and completing my degree in Spring 2027.

The findings emerging from my research indicate notable gaps within our teacher preparation program, particularly in depth and integration of content related to executive function development. These gaps are most evident in two capstone courses of our Ventura College Child Development program—CD V04: Observation and Assessment / CD V04L Observation and Assessment Lab and CD V66: Practicum—which are critical to shaping preservice teachers' understanding of child development and applied practice. The following excerpt from my dissertation provides additional context for these findings.

> Researchers are calling for neuroscience to be a part of pre-service teacher education as well as professional development, focusing on teachers' knowledge of children (Ansari et al., 2017; MacNabb et al., 2006; Dubinsky et al., 2013). Teachers increasingly seek to understand how the brain develops and processes information, and how this knowledge can be applied to effectively support children's learning and development in the classroom (Chang et al., 2021; Dublinsky et al., 2022; Pickering & Howard-Jones, 2007). Although there is a call for more content around brain development and processes, this has started to be included in pre-service teacher development yet not fully actuated by institutions of higher education (Deans for Impact, 2015; Dublinsky et al., 2022; Friedman et al., 2019; Luzzato and Rusu, 2019). Textbook publishers are acting on this desire, yet they have been known to publish neuromyths (Howard-Jones, 2014). Some researchers are downplaying educators' ability to learn neuroscience because it may be too difficult to understand completely which demoralizes the field of early education and

> does not value an educators' desires and abilities to understand all aspects of a child's development (Dublinsky et al., 2022). When teachers are provided the tools and knowledge to create student-centered pedagogy that embraces neurosciences, "they improved the learning environments of their classrooms through increased emphasis on higher-order thinking, building deeper knowledge, engaging in more substantive conversations, and making more connections to real world problems" (Brick et al., 2021; Dubinsky et al., 2022, p. 271; Roehrig et al, 2012). Rather than replacing pedagogical training or classic theories of cognitive development (ex. Piaget and Vygotsky), modern neuroscience theories such as neoconstructivism should complement them and by integrating these perspectives they can strengthen educators' understanding of brain-based learning and promote more effective, developmentally informed classroom practices. (Dubinsky et al., 2022). One way in which teacher preparation programs and professional development can support more connection to neuroscience is by looking at current theory and frameworks designed for neuroscience education.

In 2024, the State of California released updated Early Learning Foundations,– the state's early childhood standards – followed by the Infant-Toddler Learning and Development Foundations in fall 2025. Both updated sets of standards include new and explicit expectations related to executive function skills, emphasizing the importance of educators' understanding and intentional implementation of EF-supportive practices in the classroom. Yet, there has been little to no training for our field in relation to the new standards.

Our department has been leaders in the state in utilizing the standards in our practices with both our students and the children they are working with. This moment presents an ideal opportunity to integrate the emerging knowledge from my dissertation into the daily learning experiences of students within our teacher preparation program. While the final findings of my study are still forthcoming, existing research already highlights practical, evidence-based strategies for embedding brain based and executive function focused applied skills necessary to implement these practices effectively in early childhood settings.

Purpose of the Sabbatical Project

The purpose of this sabbatical project is twofold. First, this sabbatical would provide the opportunity to complete my coursework and defend my dissertation cumulating with my graduation. This process is not just about completion of a degree; it is a process that has and is helping me to develop more advanced critical thinking skills as well as research and analysis skills. I have been and will continue to grow in my expertise in my mastery of early childhood leadership that will directly translate to my leadership skills in my program and our partnerships in the community.

The other part of my sabbatical, which I believe will take most of the time, is the integration of brain based, and executive function strategies into existing coursework in CD V04 Observation and Assessment as well as CD V66 Practicum classes. This will not be a complete rewrite for the two courses, however, it will be looking for opportunities to build in research that I have learned will make the learning more valuable for our students, both as a preservice teacher and how it integrates into their work with children in their classrooms.

Our Child Development Department has been aligned with the Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP) for several years, maintaining consistency with the majority of community

colleges across California. As a result, our coursework is already closely aligned with statewide expectations. With the implementation of Common Course Numbering, we anticipate minimal changes to our existing content since our curriculum has long adhered to these shared standards. In keeping with the principles of academic freedom, faculty collaboratively agree upon the official Course Outlines of Record, while individual instructors retain autonomy in how they deliver instruction—ideally in ways that are responsive to the needs of their students. Given this context, the guiding question becomes: *Where should I begin in updating and enhancing my coursework?*

Clement and Lovat (2012) caution that "simplistic generalizations about neuroscience's application to education have been dubbed as neuromyths, and regarded as being at best irrelevant to or at worst counterproductive in bringing about good educational practice" (p. 534). With this in mind, the first step in my process will be to identify and address neuromyths currently embedded within course content, ensuring that information presented to students accurately reflects current brain research. Following this, I will evaluate existing lectures and learning activities to locate opportunities where students can engage with and apply executive function (EF) and brain-based strategies within the course framework.

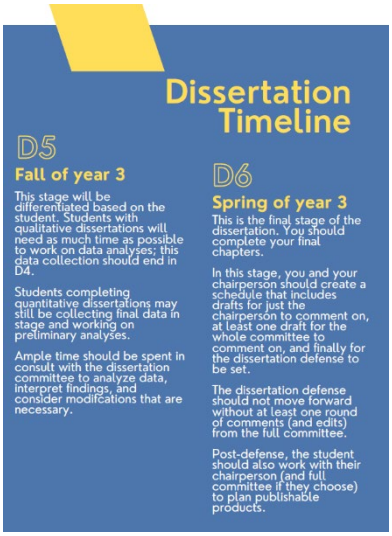
As Dublinsky et al. (2022) note, when preservice teachers understand the neuroscience underlying targeted supports for children and use this knowledge to inform both planned and spontaneous pedagogical decisions, they are more likely to demonstrate stronger self-efficacy, motivation, and professional responsibility for student outcomes, while cultivating child-centered and developmentally responsive practices. Through this process, my goal is to bridge the gap between emerging neuroscience and classroom practice by ensuring that our coursework reflects current, evidence-based understanding of brain development and executive function. In doing so, we can better prepare preservice educators to apply this knowledge in ways that meaningfully enhance children's learning and development.

I have served as Co-Chair of the Child Development, Education, and SLPA Department at Ventura College for the past seven years, alongside my colleague Deanna Hall. Both Deanna and I are submitting sabbatical proposals this cycle, and we have engaged in extensive and strategic planning to ensure continuity of leadership and departmental stability should both proposals be approved.

To maintain consistent leadership, we have agreed to take our sabbaticals in alternate semesters, ensuring that one co-chair remains in position throughout the academic year. In addition, key departmental responsibilities—such as scheduling, curriculum updates, and program planning—will be completed collaboratively in advance to minimize workload impact during the active sabbatical periods. We have also developed a shared decision-making plan to address any programmatic needs or unforeseen issues that may arise.

Our Dean is fully aware of our coordinated approach and has endorsed both applications, acknowledging that strategic plans are in place to support smooth operations and continuity for the 2026–2027 academic year.

Components of the Sabbatical Project



Part.7.- .Dissertation.Timeline

By Spring 2027, I will be entering Stage D6 of my college's Dissertation Timeline, which includes completing final edits, defending my dissertation, and preparing publishable manuscripts. Because I am ahead of schedule with my data collection and analysis, I anticipate that my remaining workload during this phase will be minimal. I am confident that I will be ready to defend my dissertation early in the D6 stage.

Part 2 – Incorporation.into.Course.Content.

The second component of my project will involve a systematic review of my current coursework to identify opportunities for integrating executive function and brain-based learning content. The goal is to embed strategies that support preservice teachers in understanding the development of executive function skills in young children, as well as recognizing and fostering these skills through intentional classroom practices. As noted previously, there has been no formal training provided to the field on the newly released California Early Learning Foundations (2024) and Infant-Toddler Learning and Development Foundations (2025), nor on the application of brain-based teaching strategies in early childhood education. By intentionally embedding this content, I aim to bridge a significant gap in our teacher preparation program and better equip future educators with the knowledge and tools needed to support young children's executive function development.

To begin, I will conduct a review of the Course Outlines of Record for CD V04 Observation and Assessment, CD V04L Observation and Assessment Lab, and CD V66 Practicum. Although these courses are scheduled for revision as part of the Common Course Numbering initiative in 2025–2026, our existing curriculum is already aligned with the state-level Course Outlines of Records. Therefore, the proposed updates are expected to closely reflect the content and practices currently being implemented within our program. I will be reviewing the courses for the following items:

1. I will identify the neuromyths currently embedded within the coursework to determine where misconceptions about brain development and learning may exist. This process will allow me to revise and update course content to reflect accurate, evidence-based neuroscience that supports students in developing a clear and authentic understanding of how the brain learns and grows.
2. I will analyze the Course Outlines of Record to identify where the California Early Learning Foundations are currently applied within coursework for adult learners. Through this review, I aim to pinpoint opportunities to embed more intentional, brain-

based learning experiences that align with the newly released Foundations and strengthen students' ability to connect theory to practice.

3. I will review current research to develop a targeted list of practical, executive function–based strategies that can be integrated into course content and assignments aligned with the California Early Learning Foundations. These strategies will be designed for students to apply directly in their fieldwork experiences—while observing, assessing, and engaging with young children—to strengthen both their understanding and implementation of brain-based practices.
4. Once this information has been compiled, I will begin redesigning assignments, lessons, the CD V66 Practicum Handbook, and related course materials to intentionally integrate brain-based learning opportunities. These revisions will be aimed at helping students develop a deeper, more meaningful understanding of executive function skills and how to apply them effectively within early childhood settings.

Value of the Sabbatical Project to VCCCD and Ventura College

This sabbatical project directly advances Ventura College's mission of providing high-quality, evidence-based education that prepares students for meaningful careers and lifelong learning. By aligning our Child Development program with current neuroscience and executive function research, the project will strengthen the academic rigor and relevance of our curriculum while ensuring that it remains responsive to emerging state standards, including the California Early Learning Foundations and Infant-Toddler Learning and Development Foundations.

Integrating brain-based and executive function strategies into our teacher preparation courses will enhance the effectiveness of instruction across the department, creating ripple effects that benefit our college, community partners, and the broader district. This work will:

- Advance curricular innovation by embedding current research into course design, ensuring our offerings remain competitive and compliant with statewide initiatives such as the Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP) and Common Course Numbering.
- Elevate instructional quality by developing model lessons, assignments, and resources that can be shared across departments, disciplines, and sister colleges interested in neuroscience-informed pedagogy.
- Support equity and access by equipping preservice teachers—many of whom represent diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds—with the cognitive and pedagogical tools to better serve children from a wide range of communities.
- Strengthen community partnerships with local early learning programs, school districts, and community agencies who rely on Ventura College graduates to enter the workforce with a deep understanding of developmentally appropriate, brain-based practices.
- Enhance Ventura College's reputation as a leader in early childhood education, reinforcing our role within VCCCD as a hub of excellence and innovation in teacher preparation.

Additionally, the project supports the Ventura County Community College District's (VCCCD) goals of advancing equity, innovation, and workforce readiness. By equipping future early childhood educators with up-to-date, research-driven knowledge, this work contributes to the development of a highly skilled early childhood workforce that benefits the entire region.

The resulting curriculum materials, EF strategy guides, and redesigned practicum handbook can serve as models for cross-campus collaboration and professional development across the district and beyond.

Ultimately, this project builds institutional capacity by translating research into practice, ensuring that Ventura College continues to produce educators who are not only reflective practitioners but also informed by the latest developments in brain science and pedagogy.

Value of the Sabbatical Project to the Instructor

For myself, this sabbatical represents a vital opportunity for professional growth, scholarly contribution, and instructional innovation. Completing the doctoral dissertation and integrating its findings into the college's curriculum will:

- Deepen my scholarly expertise in early childhood neuroscience, executive function, and brain-based learning—knowledge that can inform future curriculum development, professional development, and college initiatives.
- Expand my leadership capacity within the Child Development, Education, and SLPA Department by modeling research-based instructional redesign that aligns with both state standards and institutional goals.
- Enhance instructional practice by developing and piloting innovative, evidence-based learning activities that improve student engagement, critical thinking, and applied understanding of executive function skills.
- Contribute to professional dissemination through the creation of publishable materials, conference presentations, and faculty development workshops, positioning Ventura College as an institution that values and shares practitioner research.
- Promote long-term sustainability by embedding current neuroscience-informed pedagogy into course materials, ensuring that the benefits of this work extend beyond the sabbatical term and continue to influence future students and faculty.

In essence, this sabbatical supports not only personal academic achievement but also programmatic excellence and institutional advancement. It serves as a bridge between cutting-edge research and real-world classroom practice—fulfilling the college's commitment to continuous improvement, innovation, and student success.

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