

# My SABBATICAL LEAVE PROPOSAL

Ray Zhang  
Economics  
October 27, 2024

Length of Service as a full-time faculty: 20 years

## Apply for Sabbatical Leave – One Academic Year (F2025-S2026)

Previous One Sabbatical Leave (2016)

Moorpark College Mission Statement:

*Moorpark College's student-first philosophy embraces equity, social justice, anti-racism, and intersectionality. We empower learners from local, national, and global backgrounds to achieve their certificate, associate and baccalaureate degree, and transfer and career education goals. Through the integration of innovative instruction and holistic student support, our programs are designed to foster equitable student outcomes.*

### I. Academic background in brief

#### Teaching Experiences:

- Full-time at MC (2005-present, tenured in 2008) and Long-term Sub @LACCD (2002-03)
- Part-time teaching experience at Chaffey College, Cerrito College, Golden West College, Long Beach City College, LACCD, and CSUs

#### Education Qualifications:

- Doctoral studies in International Political Economy (IPE), 1996~2000.
- MBA - International Business and Finance. Graduate with Merits.

#### Most Recent Economics Conferences Attendances:

- The Economic Education Conference at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, “Meet the Experts: Teaching Monetary Policy,” on May 27, 2023.
- The Annual AEA Conference on Teaching (at the undergraduate and graduate levels) and Research in Economic Education, 5/28-6/1, 2023
- Cutting Edge Webinar, Race and the Teaching of Economics, the MacArthur Fellows Program on Webinar, March 22, 2023

#### Academic Awards and Memberships (selected):

- American International Studies Association
- American Economic Association
- Western Economic Association
- Irvine Fellowship-Minority Merit Institutional Award
- Phi Beta Delta International Scholars Award

- Chairman Circle's Scholarship

### **Examples of Contributions to the College:**

1. Contributed to Program Plans and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for Economics since 2005, with a significant role in the comprehensive three-year review in Fall 2024 following the retirement of a senior colleague.
2. Attended over 50 seminars, workshops, and webinars related to educational policies and institutional enhancement during and after the pandemic, enriching both the college and our students (detailed in my annual Flex Report).
3. Effectively taught a series of Global and Domestic Economy Lecture Series.
4. Successfully developed and secured approval for the Economics Transfer Model Curriculum (TMC) AA-T, including the drafting and updating of the program description.
5. Revised Course Outline of Records (CORs) for existing economics courses and created new CORs for additional economics offerings.
6. Served on numerous hiring committees for both full-time and part-time economics faculty since 2009.
7. Acted as the Department representative on various committees, including Fiscal, Multicultural Day, Safety and Wellness, Honors, Faculty Development, Study Abroad, and Distance Education since 2009.
8. Authored "A Non-essential Rebate Card for a Short Run Fiscal Stimulus," published in the Ventura County Star.
9. Authored "A Wrong-footed Tax Stimulus—A Critique of President Obama's Tax Rebate Proposal," featured in Moorpark College's Student Voice.

## **II. The Rationales of this Sabbatical Leave**

The purpose of my sabbatical leave is to dedicate the upcoming academic semester(s) to two critical areas of professional development. This focused effort will enhance my capabilities as a full-time economics faculty member, align with our institution's mission, and ultimately improve student outcomes in retention and completion.

### **1. Advanced Study in Higher Education**

I plan to audit or, if financially feasible, take several upper-division or graduate courses at a national or regional university, focusing on Higher Education Studies or Community College Leadership. After twenty years of teaching practice in the community college system, I have encountered numerous challenges and complexities, particularly regarding student learning outcomes. This sabbatical will provide me the opportunity to explore these issues more deeply and to investigate the foundational elements of our educational structure. By gaining a clearer understanding, I aim to enhance my teaching practices and foster a stronger sense of community among my online and on-site students. Furthermore, I aspire to share my insights with colleagues, especially newcomers, to help them navigate the challenges I have faced. Ultimately, my goal is to better serve our students,

improving their sense of belonging and learning outcomes—a common objective we all share as advocates for higher education.

## 2. **Research on Faculty Development and Student Success**

This sabbatical will also allow me to concentrate on my ongoing research into faculty development, student retention, sense of belonging, and student completion rates. I intend to explore effective teaching pedagogies and higher education theories, while also collecting data on institutional student learning outcomes and existing faculty development initiatives. My hope is that this research will contribute valuable insights to enhance our institution's goals in retention and completion, helping us to avoid the pitfalls that some community colleges and state universities have encountered in the past.

To that end, I propose developing tailored faculty training programs to be shared during our Flex training sessions. Additionally, I envision implementing a freshman seminar course or a short, mandatory four-week orientation to help new students acclimate to the academic environment more effectively. While I recognize potential challenges in implementing these ideas, I believe that experimenting with these strategies could lead to significant advancements in our institutional mission.

By blending these two approaches, I am confident we can create a positive impact on our college community. My sabbatical leave will serve as a catalyst for a new faculty development plan and the establishment of innovative support structures for our diverse students. With thorough research and a pilot program targeting a specific population, we can assess the effectiveness of these initiatives before broader adoption.

In summary, I believe this sabbatical will not only benefit my professional growth but will also pave the way for meaningful contributions to our college and its students. I am eager to embark on this journey and am committed to returning with insights and strategies that will enhance our educational environment.

### **III. Sabbatical Proposal: Detailed Plan**

My sabbatical plan is two-fold:

#### 1. **Graduate Coursework in Higher Education Leadership**

If my application for a sabbatical year (Fall 2025-Spring 2026) is approved, I intend to audit or, if financially feasible, enroll in graduate courses focused on higher education and community college leadership at a regional or national university. During this time, I will also immerse myself in extensive reading and create an annotated bibliography of relevant articles and monographs in the field. While undertaking the coursework, I will continue my research on faculty development, student retention and completion, and the sense of belonging within our academic community. See Appendix 1 for a list of potential courses based on previous offerings.”

## 2. Field Investigations and Data Collection

In either Fall 2025 or Spring 2026, I plan to conduct field investigations and data collection at our institution or a similar college. This research will help me assess the feasibility and effectiveness of the programs I have outlined in previous sections, ensuring they are logically compatible with our institutional framework.

As I engage with graduate coursework, I will systematically read a variety of educational journal articles and current monographs related to higher education and community college leadership. Having already reviewed numerous articles relevant to my research themes, I feel an urgent need to deepen my understanding of effective practices for serving today's diverse student population, particularly underserved, first-generation, and ethnic minority students. This sabbatical represents a vital opportunity for professional rejuvenation and academic engagement—essential for my growth as an educator.

While I regularly read reports and literature related to economics and higher education, the demands of my current role limit my ability to dedicate the necessary time for a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the field. This sabbatical will enable me to focus on addressing the challenges of serving and teaching community college students more effectively.

Throughout my leave, I will not only tackle the complexities of graduate coursework but also develop an annotated bibliography of my readings. This record will serve as both a documentation of my learning process and a valuable resource for crafting new professional development strategies and training sessions tailored for our community's students and faculty.

Below is a preliminary list of articles I have encountered through higher education journals and websites that I plan to explore. This list is not exhaustive; I anticipate that my readings will lead me to additional sources that I have yet to discover. I will submit a comprehensive annotated bibliography along with my sabbatical report, reflecting the depth of my inquiry and the insights gained throughout my research.

### Examples include:

- Arslan, G., & Duru, E. (2017). *Initial development and validation of the School Belongingness Scale*. *Child Indicators Research*, 10(4), 1043-1058.
- Bettencourt, G. M. (2021). "I Belong Because It Wasn't Made for Me": Understanding Working-Class Students' Sense of Belonging on Campus. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 92(5), 760–783. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2021.1872288>
- Cao, W., & Yu, Z. (2023). *Exploring learning outcomes, communication, anxiety, and motivation in learning communities: A systematic review*. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02325-2>
- Garza, T., Huerta, M., García, H. A., & Lau, J. (2021). *Exploring Sense of Belonging, Socioacademic Integrative Moments, and Learning Communities Related to ELs' Persistence Based on Reenrollment Decisions in Community Colleges*. *Community College Review*, 49(1), 30–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552120964873>

- Hill, A., Kaya, M., & Martin, B. (2019). *The Measurement of Emotional Intelligence: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Researchers and Practitioners*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10.
- McDonald, A. T. (2021). *The importance of cultivating emotional intelligence in schools*. *NAIS Magazine*.
- Gutiérrez-Cobo M. J., Cabello R., Fernández-Berrocal P. (2016). *The relationship between emotional intelligence and cool and hot cognitive processes: a systematic review*. *Front. Behav. Neurosci.* 10:101. 10.3389/fnbeh.2016.00101
- Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship. (n.d.). *Education evaluation toolkit: What can I evaluate? Sense of belonging tools for assessing sense of belonging [Sense of belonging scale]*. Imperial Home Research.
- Newman, C. B., Wood, J. L., & Harris, F. I. (2015). *Black Men's Perceptions of Sense of Belonging with Faculty Members in Community Colleges*. *Journal of Negro*, 84(4), 564–577.
- Pattiasina, P. J., Zamakhsari, A., & Halim, C. (2024). *Exploring the role of emotional intelligence training in enhancing teacher-student relationships and academic performance*. *International Education Trend Issues*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.56442/ieti.v2i2.713>
- Reyes, M. (2023, December 5). *Emotional intelligence: The key to academic success and well-being for teachers and students*. Satchel Pulse.
- Reyes, M. R., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., White, M., & Salovey, P. (2012). *Classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and academic achievement*. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104, 700–712.
- Rivers, S.E., Brackett, M.A., Reyes, M.R., Elbertson, N.A., & Salovey, P. (2013). *Improving the social and emotional climate of classrooms: A clustered randomized controlled trial testing The RULER Approach*. *Prevention Science*, 14, 77-87.
- Won, S., Hensley, L. C., & Wolters, C. A. (2021). *Brief Research Report: Sense of Belonging and Academic Help-Seeking as Self-Regulated Learning*. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 89(1), 112–124.
- Wu, Y., Lian, K., Hong, P., Liu, S., Lin, R., & Lian, R. (2019). *Teachers' emotional intelligence and self-efficacy: Mediating role of teaching performance*. *Social Behavior and Personality: An international journal*, 47(3), e7869
- Won, S., Wolters, C. A., & Mueller, S. A. (2018). *Sense of Belonging and Self-Regulated Learning: Testing Achievement Goals as Mediators*. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 86(3), 402–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2016.1277337>

Below is an outline of the specific data I plan to collect during my sabbatical, along with the rationale for this research.

### 1. Examples of Data Collection:

- **Student Demographics:** I will gather data on the demographics of students enrolled in Economics courses, focusing on underrepresented groups, including first-generation college students, ethnic minorities, and women.

- **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):** I will analyze existing SLOs for Economics courses, including pass rates and completion rates. This analysis will help identify gaps in student achievement.
  - **Course Evaluations:** I will likely employ a mixed method to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data from course evaluations and conduct before and after or parallel surveys to understand student perceptions of the learning environment, sense of belonging (sob), and instructional methods.
  - **Retention Rates:** Data on retention and completion rates among different demographic groups will be collected to assess patterns and challenges specific to the Economics discipline.
- 2. Purpose of Data Collection:** The primary goal of this research is to gain insights that will enhance student success—retention and completion in Economics. Specifically, I aim to:
- Identify barriers that prevent diverse student populations from completing Economics courses.
  - Understand how current SLOs align with student experiences and outcomes, and determine whether adjustments are needed to improve clarity and relevance.
  - Explore effective teaching strategies that could better engage underserved and diverse student populations.
- 3. Addressing Diversity Challenges in Economics:** There is a recognized challenge within the Economics discipline regarding the underrepresentation of certain demographic groups. Research indicates that Economics has a diversity issue, particularly a lack of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (the latest Econ Program Plan Review findings). My goal is to address this gap by:
- Using SMART tools to attract more students from underrepresented groups to the Economics program.
  - Developing targeted support and resources to increase the success and retention rates of these students.

By focusing on these areas, I hope to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that meets the needs of today’s diverse student population.

#### **IV. Contribution to Professional Development and Relationship to Current Teaching Assignment**

The core of my work is to foster student learning and serve our community in alignment with the college’s mission. My sabbatical leave project will provide me with the dedicated time to deepen my knowledge and understanding of higher education—an area I have not fully explored during my two decades of full-time teaching.

By engaging in broad study within higher education and related fields, such as educational psychology (e.g., EI), I aim to enhance my professional growth significantly. This exploration

will enable me to understand the foundational principles and historical context of our field, thereby sharpening my comprehension and practices in both online and face-to-face classroom settings. Furthermore, it will allow me to analyze contemporary trends in community college education, enriching my classroom discussions and benefitting my students directly.

My study will concentrate on student learning outcomes and the methods and tools to improve them within the community college context. This focus will not only facilitate my professional reflection and rejuvenation but will also yield valuable insights that will benefit our students and the institution as a whole.

Additionally, this sabbatical will afford me the opportunity to catch up through graduate coursework and to engage deeply with primary sources in the field. Research is essential for a more profound understanding of higher education, and it will enable me to contribute meaningfully to my program, department, and division.

Ultimately, this sabbatical leave represents a critical investment in my professional development, which will have lasting benefits for my teaching and for our students' learning experiences.

## **V. Benefits to our Students**

The projects I propose for my sabbatical will yield numerous benefits for our students, institution, and district. First and foremost, our students deserve professors who are not only experts in their fields but also attuned to the evolving needs and perspectives of the student body. By staying current in my knowledge and practices, I will enhance my teaching pedagogies and methods, creating a more engaging and effective learning environment.

The insights gained from my graduate coursework and research will directly enrich my classroom practices, stimulating and motivating student learning. I hope to uncover valuable materials during my studies that may serve as the foundation for potential publications in higher education journals—an ambitious goal, but one that is certainly within reach.

My students will specifically benefit from the additional training and research I undertake, as these new insights can enhance my pedagogical approaches to equity and inclusivity. This will provide all students, particularly first-generation, underserved, and ethnic minority students, with improved opportunities for success. The research I conduct on student learning outcomes and faculty development will have a direct impact on the college and district, fostering an environment that prioritizes student achievement.

Ultimately, my sabbatical experience will infuse our classrooms with new standards, innovative styles, and fresh ideas that are essential for meeting the needs of today's diverse student population. By investing in my professional development, we are collectively investing in the future success of our students and the continued growth of our institution.

## **VI. Sharing the Outcomes—Benefits to our Institution and District**

Upon completing my sabbatical, I will submit a comprehensive report detailing all that I have accomplished during my leave. This report will include an annotated bibliography summarizing each article I have read, along with documentation of the coursework I have undertaken in higher education and community college leadership.

I am eager to share my findings with colleagues, the district, students, and any community audiences that the college may wish to engage. Additionally, I would be delighted to present my insights during selected Flex activities for those interested in learning more. I believe my research on faculty development and student learning outcomes will resonate particularly well with my colleagues, as these topics are central to our mission.

While my primary focus during this sabbatical is enhancing student success and retention, I also recognize the importance of contributing to our college and district as a whole. To that end, I plan to offer Professional Development workshops designed to equip faculty with effective strategies for engaging diverse student populations and improving student learning outcomes.

### **Proposed Workshops:**

1. **Inclusive Teaching Practices:** This workshop will focus on strategies for creating an inclusive classroom environment that supports all students, particularly those from underserved backgrounds.
2. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Faculty will learn how to analyze student performance data to inform their teaching practices and curriculum development, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.
3. **Emotional Intelligence in Education:** This session will equip faculty with tools and skills for managing classroom challenges and supporting students during crises, enhancing their overall resilience.
4. **Engaging First-Generation and Underserved Students:** This workshop will explore specific strategies for connecting with and supporting first-generation and minority students, understanding and addressing their unique needs and challenges.

By offering these workshops, I aim to foster a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration among faculty, which will benefit both our institution and our students.

As mentioned above, I will also share my findings with the college by presenting during Flex week and potentially at department and division meetings, ensuring that the insights gained during my sabbatical are disseminated widely for the benefit of all.

Thank you for considering my proposal. I genuinely appreciate the time and dedication you, as members of the sabbatical committee, have committed to evaluating my application.

With gratitude,

– Ray Zhang



## Appendix 1: Potential Courses in Higher-Ed

1. **Leadership Theory in Higher Education**

This course examines various leadership theories and their application in higher education settings. Topics include transformational and transactional leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, and the impact of leadership styles on institutional culture.

2. **Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education**

This course addresses the critical issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the academic environment. It explores strategies for fostering an inclusive campus culture and enhancing access for underrepresented populations.

3. **Problem-Centered Research in Higher Education**

A thorough understanding of crisis management and problem-solving strategies is crucial for leaders in higher education. This course focuses on developing effective resolutions for crisis situations, enhancing problem-solving techniques, and improving decision-making processes within academic institutions.

4. **Ethical Leadership in Higher Education**

This course delves into the ethical dilemmas faced by leaders in higher education. It emphasizes the importance of ethical decision-making and the role of values in leadership.