

Sabbatical Leave Proposal

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Faculty member: **Susan Wiesinger**

Department: Journalism & Public Relations

Date of initial appointment: August 2005

Dates of previous sabbatical leave: None

Proposed leave period: Fall 2020

Renovations / Innovations in Multidisciplinary Media/Communications

Purpose / Brief Summary

My sabbatical plan is to accomplish three things:

1. **Rethink, reinvent The Orion** to better integrate coursework, skills development, and faculty expertise from the Journalism & PR News option major.
2. Pursue a multidisciplinary **Environmental Communication minor**.
3. Explore creation of the **Wildcat Media Network**, a multidisciplinary media hub that pulls together student-run media and strategic communications organizations at Chico State.

While these sound like three distinct proposals, the underpinning, common goal is to expand cross-campus collaboration, showcase student work, and secure resources, technology, and support for innovation.

Note: The broad strokes of this sabbatical proposal have been reviewed by Department of Journalism & PR faculty and approved in concept.

Qualifications and Expertise / Why Now?

I'm a former journalist and my research has been strongly focused on media evolution and innovation since I left the newspaper industry for academia in 2000. I am co-author of the books *Media smackdown: Deconstruction the news and the future of journalism* and *Digital literacy: A primer on media, identity and the evolution of technology*. I've also been chair of the Department of Journalism & Public Relations since 2011.

I was hired to teach in the News option at Chico State when the program was pretty much at its peak, with 169 News and 188 PR majors. Since that time the newspaper industry has been hit by precipitous declines in revenue due to the one-two punch of declines in print readership and control of digital advertising by Google and Facebook.

As jobs have declined, so have majors. Correspondingly, the Department of Journalism & Public Relations now has 73 News and 107 PR majors, respective 57% and 43% declines. We've responded to those declines by taking on JOUR 130W in the GE, continuing to innovate, and building strong partnerships across campus. I've been deeply involved in many of those efforts, facilitated in part by relationships across campus that I've built over the course of 14 years.

I also have a strong grasp on program review and multi-department curriculum development. I was actively involved in drafting both the Certificate in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations and the Agricultural Leadership and Communication major option; am working with College of Business faculty on revisions to the Entrepreneurship minor; helped create an multidisciplinary photo class for ARTS, CAGD, JOUR, and MADT; and have worked extensively with faculty in CAGD, JOUR, and MADT to create the Media, Entertainment & Technology experience (METX), which spans three programs across two colleges.

Having been on the CME Leaves Committee several times, I'm acutely aware that funded and academic research projects often take precedence over instructional/program improvement, although the latter is mentioned specifically in the first paragraph of [Article 27 of the CBA](#). This proposal makes the strong argument that

- a.) curricular work, particularly multidisciplinary work, is important and should be supported; and,
- b.) this is not work that can be accomplished without the time to focus, think, innovate, and share.

I love journalism, democracy, and this program. Changes to media and communication at Chico State need to happen sooner than later, before student opportunities for experiential learning evaporate for lack of financial support, interest, and innovation. Before I end my time as chair I want to know that I've done everything possible to enhance the viability and visibility of J&PR – and CME.

Scope: Background, Description of Projects & Timeline

Project 1: Rethink, Reinvent The Orion

Background

In 2011, all senior faculty in the Journalism News option retired, including the long-time adviser to The Orion. As a new chair who no longer taught in the News option core, it was pretty easy to turn over the reins of The Orion to its newly hired faculty adviser and entirely miss its declining integration with the program.

The editorial product gradually changed during that time from news-focused to opinion-heavy, a practice that continued through the 2018-2019 academic year. This corresponded with the national rise in social media dominance, fake news, and broad access to sources – generally opinion – that confirmed pre-existing biases.

Newton refers to this as an evolution toward “comfort news,” which bloats our brains much as consumption of too much comfort food bloats our bodies.

Comfort news is the brain candy of the news stream. Like comfort food, it brings temporary pleasure. Yet if we consume nothing else, society pays the price. (Newton, 2013b)

The trend toward “comfort news” has increasingly occurred across media channels and has been a relatively frequent conversation at J&PR faculty meetings. In response, changes were made to our curriculum to provide extensive student exposure to fact checking, source diversity, ethics, professionalism, multiplatform storytelling, and emerging technologies.

Somehow The Orion got left behind and we lost a critical connection to the program.

This was driven home through recommendations from our Advisory Board of Professionals, which reviewed our curriculum in April 2019. They pointed to the professional skills development that is evident in our reporting, editing, and applied visual skills classes, but noted that students would benefit from their assignments being created for and shared out to “real” audiences.

Advisory board members pointed to a notable example: JOUR 321, “Public Affairs Reporting,” students cover beats and generate 10 original news stories each semester, which are graded based on their adherence to professional standards of interviewing and research. That content has been posted in a public, online publication called [Chico Report](#), which has been in direct news competition with The Orion and has, in fact, included Orion reporters and editors every semester.

The advisory board suggested that the best coursework from all skills classes be pitched to the Chico E-R, Chico News & Review, North State Public Radio, and, yes, The Orion. This was an acute reminder that, a decade ago, it was a department goal for the best coursework from J&PR News skills classes to be published first in The Orion. That, in turn, created a pipeline of students being interested in working for The Orion and, ultimately, leading the student-run publication.

Project

Rethinking and reinventing The Orion has three key components: developing a cohort model for the News option, creating a plan for stronger integration of digital communication technologies, and recruiting non-majors to work on The Orion.

- Developing a cohort model for the Journalism News option

Following the April 2019 advisory board meeting, J&PR faculty briefly discussed a suggested cohort model that would require students to enroll in the same core News option classes and The Orion across a single academic year. There was support for

pursuing this option, but a strong awareness that it would require deeper exploration, development, and significant legwork toward implementation (i.e., *time*).

While The Orion itself would continue to be student run and faculty advised, it would become closer to a “teaching hospital” model, where course skills work could be specifically developed for publication in The Orion print and/or digital editions. Faculty would serve as editor-instructors, drawing from their newsroom experience and academic expertise to help hone student skills that could then be applied directly and publicly in The Orion. Such a model would go far toward stabilizing staffing, improving campus coverage, and creating a consistent, professional news coverage pipeline.

Eric Newton defines the “teaching hospital” model of journalism education as learning by doing:

“In this model, students, professors and professionals work together under one digital roof to inform and engage a community. They experiment with new tools and techniques, informed by research and studied by scholars, in a living laboratory.” (Newton, 2013a)

Newton was one of six co-authors of a letter sent to 500 college presidents demanding changes to journalism education. The letter noted that a “teaching hospital” model “better connects journalism schools with the rest of the university, encourages deep subject knowledge and involves the teaching of digital innovation and development of open collaborative work models.” (Newton et al., 2012)

The “teaching hospital” model since has been adopted by a range of leading journalism programs, but has been slow to trickle down to smaller programs, like Chico State’s. We have, however, integrated parts of it into our curriculum over time, largely in response to changes in accreditation standards.

Moving closer to a “teaching hospital” model is not without risk. Other educators have pointed to its potential for upending the existing learning lab model and diluting the student experience. Fromm notes,

“...student media are primed to provide the immersive experience journalism educators hope to provide their students. Take a look inside the best student newsrooms in the country, and you’ll find a level of buy-in and appreciation for journalism that is hard to establish when adults are at the helm.” (2015)

While Fromm’s concerns seem valid, it was significant to have a student leader from The Orion point out to our advisory board that News option students can easily avoid covering news as part of their experience on The Orion, which defeats the intent of the news lab and renders that experience less than worthwhile to the student, program, and future employers.

Goal

My goal during sabbatical would be to review “teaching hospital” models at some of the nation’s top journalism programs, examine the existing integration of the News

option skills classes and The Orion, and, hopefully, find an innovative, happy medium.

Benefits / student impact

Reinvention of The Orion would be aimed at keeping Chico State's award-winning newspaper relevant, professional, and award winning.

My plan would involve consultation with select student leaders across 45 years of The Orion, which would also foster the department's alumni relations work. Narrowing down alumni to contact will be facilitated by Meriam Library's recent addition of a complete archive of The Orion from 1975 to 2006 to its digital database.

Modifications to the department's approach to The Orion would allow students greater opportunities to hone and apply professional content creation skills that would help them land jobs across a wide range of digital communication industries.

- Creating specific plans for integration of newly purchased technology and tech innovations into The Orion experience

The J&PR Advisory Board of Professionals additionally recommended that students have broader platform options for stories. For example, one assignment or training exercise could be to produce the same story for web, print, radio and TV.

Print has always been the default for The Orion, as it requires no extensive technical expertise on either the part of the student or faculty adviser. This means The Orion remains print intensive, still largely functioning as a 20th century newspaper.

I had this epiphany after being thrust into the position of faculty adviser/instructor in spring, summer and early fall 2019. I discovered that "independent, student-run" had translated into benign neglect.

Although The Orion is technically a news lab/class (JOUR 329/331), active instruction in best practices for media technology use and integration appears to have been intermittent. This was a weird discovery, as we're quite proud of the innovations we've made in our curriculum and collaborations we've grown across the university.

At the close of spring semester 2019, there wasn't a computer in the newsroom that could run state-of-the-industry video editing software, audio and video equipment was missing or broken, and the server dated back to 2004. The chairs were a ramshackle bunch, with many dirty beyond belief and/or broken. The sole student leader with a key to the equipment closet had lost it in February, so the camera equipment inside wasn't being used and the lone functioning camera outside was sitting on a counter, unsecured. On inventory, we learned that it didn't really matter that the closet was locked, as most of the equipment purchased in the past few years was missing key parts, damaged, or *gone*.

Over the summer, The Orion invested roughly \$12,000 on three fast, memory-loaded computers, a server, and chairs. Another \$5,000 was expended to buy basic, industry-standard equipment, including a single camera and professional-quality lenses and

audio equipment. This was significant progress, but one of the student leaders said to me recently “I don’t know why we bought all this equipment – no one will use it.”

Those upgrades will be joined by cameras, audio, and video equipment planned for purchase between now and June 30, 2020. That equipment will be funded by a \$17,054 Student Learning Fee grant, appropriately entitled “Reimagining Chico State's Student Media Experience.”

Without some structural change, however, that equipment won’t be learned or used for the innovation for which it was intended.

Goal

My goal during sabbatical would be to come up with a plan for securing this equipment and encouraging its use through integration of communication technology skills into The Orion on a broad basis.

A better understanding of what The Orion does, how it connects to the skills learned in the program, and the role faculty play in teaching those skills is integral to this overall plan.

Benefits / student impact

Actual use of media technologies in the news lab should generate significant positive results for both students and The Orion:

- Students will have stronger, more relevant portfolio work with which to land internships and show potential employers;
- Being able to demonstrate extensive use of equipment purchased through things like Student Learning Fee awards, makes it easier to justify requests for future purchases; and, not insignificantly,
- Students will be exposed to professional standards for caring for the equipment and troubleshooting its challenges.

- **Recruiting and welcoming students majors from outside J&PR.**

In the not-so-distant past, approximately one-third of The Orion’s staff were non-majors. At some point in the past two years, our enrollment of non-majors in the news lab (JOUR 329/331) declined drastically.

In spring of 2019, students from MKTG 371, “Consumer Behavior,” spent the entire semester evaluating The Orion’s brand, hosting focus groups, sending out surveys, and creating several marketing plans. Among their findings were these notable gems:

- Half the Chico State students in the focus groups and online surveys didn’t know The Orion was a campus newspaper.
- Of those who did, few read it.
- Neither students surveyed nor those doing the surveying viewed The Orion as relevant to or part of their Chico State experience.

If The Orion is going to survive – and thrive – it needs to evolve. I’m particularly interested in The Orion being more welcoming and useful to students in majors that are writing oriented, but don’t provide technology skills, and majors that can apply a particular skill set not offered in the Journalism program. In either case, the nature of the news lab is that it has the potential to generate professional portfolio work and job experience.

For example, the Seufferlein Sales Program offers sales and leadership certificates that are open to any major. Interestingly enough, Seufferlein does not appear to offer actual sales experience to its students.

The program website touts a “Sales Lab” that “includes cameras and role play rooms that are used to record, stream, and archive class assignments/presentations, role plays, mock interviews, sales competition activities and elevator pitches.” While practice is great, these students also could apply those skills in community and national, digital and print ad sales for The Orion.

An Orion that embraces a wider range of majors would ideally be more inclusive of different voices and storytelling styles. That might look like a weekly spotlight on the interesting content creation work going on across the university as students and faculty engage in the study of math, science, ag, entrepreneurship, nutrition, fitness, recreation, etc.

In short, The Orion would be more visible and more relevant to the whole campus.

Goal and benefits / student impact

The final goal of this project, then, is to create a plan for outreach that would return a range of perspectives and skills to The Orion and refocus its mission to better connect it to the university it serves.

Students would have the distinct advantage of working in the collaborative teams they will encounter in most content creation work, regardless of industry.

Timeline

August-September 2020 – Curriculum review.

October 2020 – Meet with faculty individually to discuss how/where particular skills are taught and how technologies are integrated into the classroom.

November 2020 – Presentation of cohort model, equipment plan, and recruitment ideas to faculty for review; revision.

Spring 2021 – Early integration of coursework into The Orion.

Fall 2021 – Beginning of cohort model.

Project 2: Environmental Communication minor

Background

Nearly 15 years ago, Chico State launched efforts in earnest to gain recognition for its attention to environmental issues and sustainability.

Today, Chico State is widely recognized for its attention to sustainability, but there's a key piece missing: opportunities for students from a range of majors to gain expertise in professional communication around issues of the environment and sustainability.

Project

My sabbatical plan would be to craft an Environmental Communication minor that would build from existing strengths in four CME programs: CMST, JOUR, MADT, and RHPM.

This minor would have a strong relationship to the university's new strategic commitment to a "Culture of Excellence and Accountability." Correspondingly, a multi-department collaboration that focuses on environmental communication would represent wise stewardship of environmental, social, and economic resources.

Given the continuing, devastating impacts of climate change, jobs that require advocacy for environmental issues and sustainability are expanding to include nearly every industry (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

BestColleges.com cites sustainability studies as being among the most prominent interdisciplinary programs and includes communication in its list of critical skills for a green-job career:

"Regardless of their particular industry, all sustainability professionals must learn to speak cogently and listen effectively. Communication enables professionals to learn from and cooperative with each other. This skill also prepares them to write persuasively and present their findings in front of different audiences." (Sustainability Careers)

The Bureau of Labor Statistics cites communication skills and public relations knowledge as key to employment in sustainability management jobs, which often entail sharing information about environmental issues and sustainability plans with the public.

These are skills we teach in this college, but they're also skills that are incorporated into sustainability studies at top universities, such as The Earth Institute at Columbia University.

While there are relevant environmental and sustainability offerings across the university, this is at its heart a content creation-related minor. All the pieces for an Environmental Communication minor exist in CME:

Communication Theory (CMST)
Written Communication and Strategic Planning (JOUR)
Visual Communication (MADT)
Environmental Issues (RHPM)

Goal

My goal during sabbatical is to draft an Environmental Communication minor that builds on the strengths of existing courses in CME, then share that vision with departments and administration.

A multi-department plan brings with it a variety of complications, including the potential for lack of buy-in from programs and administration. While this project would not be overly complex in nature, it would require the keen focus and time to build support that are hard to find when working full-time on campus.

Benefit / student impact

A CME-based Environmental Communication minor would raise visibility for work being done within all four programs. It also would give faculty incentive to pursue their interests in research into environmental issues and sustainability and return it to the classroom.

Students would gain valuable skills that would help them convey information about environmental issues and sustainability for a range of industries to diverse audiences.

Timeline

August-September 2020 – Review of existing environmental communication programs; Chico State curriculum review and narrowing of courses for inclusion; initial contact with chairs of involved departments

October 2020 – Present minor to J&PR faculty for initial review, then distribute to chairs of departments with courses included. Follow up to assess interest.

November 2020 – Attend faculty meetings to answer questions; adjust proposal and redistribute.

Early December 2020 – Determine steps forward; shepherd the proposal through the process.

Project 3: Wildcat Media Network

Background

When I started at Chico State in 2005, it was still a world where newspapers, radio, TV, media design, PR, and online production existed largely independently of one another and media/strategic communication employers relied on our grads to have a distinct skillset related to one of these areas.

The pace, technology, and economics of these industries has undergone a rapid and remarkable transformation, yet I'm increasingly aware that Chico State approaches its student-run media and strategic communication programs much as it would have 20 years ago.

Project

My final sabbatical exploration will be to explore what it might look like to bring Chico State's student-run media and media-related programs into a virtual media hub.

Chico State has a range of these programs, all of which are anchored within departments and most require course enrollment to participate. The programs are siloed, program-specific, and running short on resources, technology, and/or support for innovation. They include, but are not limited to:

- KCSC – AS-sponsored internet radio (MADT internships)
- MadTech Group – media design (MADT)
- Milk Crate Productions – A defunct video production company that used the now out-of-date Studio B, but has potential student interest for return (MADT)
- The Orion – campus news coverage (JOUR)
- Seufferlein Sales (College of Business)
- Tehama Group Communications – full-service PR (JOUR)
- Watershed Review (ENGL)

Many of the top journalism programs in the country have brought student media together into a hub that has two chief benefits:

1. Higher visibility for student recruitment and university support, and
2. Shared technology/resources.

For example, the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State has an [Office of Student Media](#), which includes news, TV, radio and yearbook organizations, as well as an advertising and marketing department that serves all four. Arizona State University's Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication has also pulled its student media together into a hub, labeled simply [Student Media](#). Mizzou groups its student media into a hub labeled [Professional Media Outlets](#).

While the programs listed above meet the goal of pulling student media together, I prefer the model of Oregon State's [Orange Media Network](#), which was established in 2017 as major changes were made to multiple departments. Orange Media Network today boasts a robust website and email newsletter that weekly promotes work by all participating programs.

Orange Media Network is an optimal goal, as it elevates visibility of all student media programs under a catchy name that is promoted by and recognized at the university.

Goal / benefit / student impact

Even if Chico State's student-run media and media-related programs initially were grouped into nothing more than a website labeled "Wildcat Media Network," it might foster collaboration among them – potentially even shared communication technology resources – and increase campus visibility and, ultimately, support.

Greater visibility would likely raise student awareness of these student-centered, student-run programs and, correspondingly, increase interest in participation. This also ties back

to the goal of generating interest in The Orion for non-majors and including a wider range of campus voices.

Timeline

Summer 2020 – Travel to Oregon State to meet with faculty involved in creation of Orange Media Network.

September-October 2020 – Review of Chico State student-run programs for possible inclusion; contact with faculty advisers to assess interest.

November-December 2020 – Development of rough plan for what the Wildcat Media Network might look like and what its benefits could be.

Merit of Proposed Work

This proposal is in line with Article 27 of the CBA:

A sabbatical leave shall be for purposes that provide a benefit to the CSU, such as research, scholarly and creative activity, instructional improvement or faculty retraining.

The strongest argument for review of The Orion is the potential for it to improve/resuscitate a student-centered program that has brought consistent recognition to Chico State. The Orion has won the Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker 13 time and been a finalist 22 times. It is one of the most-awarded college newspapers in the nation and is entering its 45th at Chico State. The Orion also is a constant reminder of the importance of free speech on this college campus.

Exploration of an Environmental Communication minor and the possibility of a Wildcat Media Network each have the potential to generate cross-campus collaboration and shared resources, technology, and support for innovation.

Work on all three touches on both instructional improvement and faculty retraining, and would likely yield long-reaching benefits for J&PR, CME, and the university.

Deliverables

1. Plan for cohort model for the News option that creates a conduit for content and staffing to The Orion.
2. Review, create, share, and seek support for Environmental Communication minor.
3. Pursue support for one-stop-shopping for Chico State students to find places to get involved and showcase their writing, audio and video work, PR, marketing, sales, and brand management with proposed creation of the Wildcat Media Network.

CSU, Chico Resources

No additional Chico State resources are required for any part of this project.

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