

# LONG BEACH CITY COLLEGE

## Sabbatical Leave Proposal

**Matt Lawrence, Ph.D.**  
**Professor of Philosophy**

### 1. Purpose of Sabbatical Leave

I am requesting a sabbatical leave of one semester in order to begin writing a philosophy book for publication and use in *Introduction to Philosophy and Introduction to Ethics* courses. I plan to use the book in my *Phil 7: Introduction to Ethics* courses.

The book is tentatively titled:

#### ***Philosophical Ideas to Bend Your Mind and Change Your Life***

The fact that philosophy deals with all sorts of bizarre (if not downright crazy) theories and concepts has always served to attract many college students to its study. However, for many students it is this very feature that turns them off to philosophy. They end up feeling that much of what they learn, while perhaps interesting, is not really relevant to their daily lives. This has led me to try to focus my courses and research on those ideas that are deeply important and personally relevant. The inspiration behind this book proposal is to acquaint people with the ideas in philosophy that I have found to be most relevant and valuable for daily living. The “twist” of the book is that I simultaneously want to utilize the attraction of the bizarre nature of so many of the great philosophical ideas. Hence, my plan is to focus upon the bizarre, anti-intuitive or “mind-bending” ideas of philosophy that I believe can transform a person’s life for the better.

### 2. Details of My Proposed Sabbatical Plan

In order to give you a better sense of the book, here are a few sample chapter themes:

#### **The Buddha: *The Doctrine of Annatta***

*The Buddha’s Mind-Bending Idea: The “self” is a fiction. There is no thing that is “you.”*

#### **Jean-Paul Sartre: *Bad Faith***

*Sartre’s Mind-Bending Idea: You are responsible for everything you do. There are no excuses.*

#### **Pierre Simone Laplace: *Causal Determinism***

*Laplace’s Mind-Bending Idea: Everything happens exactly as it must.*

**Immanuel Kant: *The Categorical Imperative***

*Kant's Mind-Bending Idea: There is a universal moral order.*

**John Hick: *Religious Pluralism***

*Hick's Mind-Bending Idea: Conflicting conceptions can each be simultaneously true.*

**John Rawls: *The Veil of Ignorance***

*Rawls' Mind-Bending Idea: The best political principles are chosen by fictional people.*

**John Fire Lane Deer: *The Circle and the Square***

*Lame Deer's Mind-Bending Idea: Symbols are everywhere.*

**Thich Nhat Hanh: *Life is a Practice***

*Hanh's Mind-Bending Idea: Not only sports, but life itself, takes practice.*

**James Cone: *Liberation Theology***

*Cone's Mind-Bending Idea: God is black.*

**WK. Clifford: *The Ethics of Belief***

*Clifford's Mind-Bending Idea: Faith is a sin against humanity.*

**Henry David Thoreau: *Walden***

*Thoreau's Mind-Bending Idea: More is less and less is more.*

**John Stuart Mill: *Socrates and the Pig***

*Mill's Mind-Bending Idea: Ignorance isn't bliss.*

The structure for each chapter will run roughly along the following lines:

- (1) Explain the idea and how it fits into the philosopher's larger project.
- (2) Illustrate the idea through original, creative examples that contemporary readers can easily appreciate.
- (3) Show why the idea is important, and how it can be put into practice in one's own life.

Each chapter will be very succinct (approximately 8 pages). I expect to cover approximately 25 topics, so the total length of the book will most likely be approximately 200 pages.

### **3. Timeline**

I wish to apply for a Fall 2013 sabbatical. However, if necessary, it could be deferred until Spring. My strategy for a book such as this is to pick a topic and start researching and writing it (as opposed to researching all topics before actually writing anything). This is the way that I prefer to work, and it will allow me to have a larger tangible product at the end of the semester. I am confident that I can have substantive drafts of at least five chapters during the sabbatical period. Since I have already written and published two philosophy books since 2004, I feel that I have a fairly good understanding of what I can accomplish in the given time.

#### **4. How the project will contribute to my professional development and current assignment**

Researching the ideas for the book will deepen my subject knowledge on topics relevant to the three courses that I regularly teach: Intro Philosophy, Intro Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion. All of the topics covered are relevant to both Intro Philosophy and Intro Ethics, and about one fifth will be relevant to the Philosophy of Religion.

Writing the book with my LBCC students in mind will allow me a unique opportunity to develop innovative ways to present these ideas in a clear and engaging manner that is relevant to the lives of our students.

#### **5. How the project will benefit the college and students.**

There are a number of ways that this project will benefit the students of Long Beach City College. First, it will develop and improve my own understanding of a number of philosophical topics relevant to my courses. I believe that students always benefit from a professor's depth and breadth of knowledge. Second, through writing, one develops new and innovative ways to convey complex ideas. I have seen this firsthand with my other two books; *Like a Splinter in Your Mind: The Philosophy Behind the Matrix Trilogy*, and *Philosophy on Tap: Pint-Sized Puzzles for the Pub Philosopher*. My work on these books has greatly improved my teaching on a number of topics that I cover regularly in my courses. Plus, they have provided me with the competence and ability to teach various topics that I had never taught before. The same should be true of this book.

Another benefit is a significant cost savings to my students. I used to use a \$90.00 textbook for my *Introduction to Philosophy* students. Since writing *Like a Splinter in Your Mind* in 2004, I have used it as my primary text (along with some classic articles that are available free on the internet) and the total cost to students is only \$20.00 – and with better results. Similarly this book will also be a \$20.00 trade paperback which I will supplement with free classic works on the internet. This will save my ethics students quite a bit of money each semester.

One of the main reasons why professors write course-books is their dissatisfaction with other texts. When you write your own text, the material is covered in the way you like to cover it, addressing the issues that you feel need to be addressed, etc. I have experienced this sort of dissatisfaction with most of the intro ethics textbooks, and look forward to using my own text that addresses the issues in just the manner that I want to address them. And, I believe that the students will benefit from this harmony between the lectures and reading.

There are also ways that this project will benefit the college apart from its effects on my students. One of these ways is by bringing additional notoriety to the college. Through my readers, my public lectures (see section 7 for more on this), newspaper and magazine interviews, etc., the name of Long Beach City College is advertised and shown to be a place of innovation.

**6. Description of Tangible Products**

At the end of my semester sabbatical I will submit the partially completed manuscript. It will consist of drafts of at least five chapters and will comprise at least fifty pages.

**7. How I will share the outcomes of the product with other interested parties**

Since I intend to publish the work, (most likely with my current publisher Wiley-Blackwell), it will eventually be available to anyone who wants it. In addition, since I plan to use it in my Introduction to Ethics courses, many of my students will hopefully get much use and benefit from it. I will also have the publisher send complimentary copies to the philosophy faculty at LBCC who teach Introduction to Philosophy or Introduction to Ethics.

Also, after the release of my other books I did several public talks and book signing and plan to do the same with this book. For example, after the release of *Like a Splinter in Your Mind*, I gave public lectures on the Philosophy within the Matrix films at LBCC, CSULB, UC Irvine, and Rancho Santiago College, as well as at several Southern California Borders and Barnes and Noble bookstores. Since the release of *Philosophy on Tap*, I have done special events for the LBCC Alumni Association, the UC Irvine Humanities Alumni Association, the UC Irvine Business School, The Osher School of Life Long Learning, and have done interviews for *The Huffington Post*, *Zotzine Magazine*, and *The Beer Sessions Radio*.

**8. Disclosure of additional sources of employment earnings during the leave.**

None.

---

Signature of Applicant

---

Date Originally Submitted