

Sabbatical Report

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Overview and Purpose of the Sabbatical

The purpose of my sabbatical leave was to engage in applied research, community partnership, and professional development focused on accessibility, universal design, and inclusion in public recreation spaces. Specifically, I partnered with Sonoma County Regional Parks to support the development of physically accessible coastal environments and universally designed parks programming that ensures meaningful participation for individuals with disabilities across the lifespan and children with special needs in schools.

This work directly aligns with my role as a faculty member in the Education Specialist Department, where I prepare future educators, service providers, and leaders to design inclusive environments and programs. The sabbatical allowed me to extend my scholarly and professional expertise beyond the university and into a county-wide public system, creating a reciprocal partnership that benefits Sonoma County residents, SSU students, and the broader field of inclusive education and recreation.

Coastal Accessibility Research and Consultation

A central component of my sabbatical involved researching and evaluating adaptive mobility solutions that support physical access to Sonoma County's coastline. Coastal environments present unique accessibility challenges due to uneven terrain, sand, and changing environmental conditions. To address these challenges, I conducted in-depth research on evidence-based and emerging accessibility solutions, including:

- **Mobi-Mat® beach access systems**
- **Big wheel beach wheelchairs**
- **Freedom Trax mobility systems**

My work included reviewing existing research, examining implementation models from other coastal regions, and assessing the feasibility, durability, and usability of these systems within Sonoma County's specific coastal contexts. I consulted with parks staff regarding installation considerations, maintenance requirements, staff training needs, and user experience from a disability-access perspective.

This research informed recommendations for expanding physical access to beaches and coastal trails, with the goal of enabling individuals with mobility disabilities, older adults, and

families with adaptive equipment to experience Sonoma County's natural coastline safely and with dignity.

Accessibility Review of Parks Programs, Materials, and Digital Content

In addition to physical access, my sabbatical emphasized programmatic and informational accessibility. I collaborated with Sonoma County Regional Parks leadership to conduct a comprehensive review of:

- **All delivered and planned parks programs**
- **Program descriptions and brochures**
- **Parks website content and public-facing materials**

Using principles of **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** and **inclusive communication**, I evaluated these materials for accessibility barriers related to language, format, sensory access, and assumptions about participants' physical or cognitive abilities.

This process involved identifying exclusionary language, unclear participation expectations, and missed opportunities for inclusion. I worked closely with parks staff to revise program descriptions so that activities such as *Walking with Wildflowers*, *The Knute Commute*, and other guided programs clearly communicated accessibility features, participation options, and inclusive modifications.

The result was a revised suite of programs and materials that more accurately reflect Sonoma County Regional Parks' commitment to welcoming all community members, including individuals with disabilities, neurodivergent participants, and families seeking inclusive outdoor experiences.

Development and Delivery of Universal Design Training

A major outcome of the sabbatical was the development and delivery of a **Universal Design and Inclusion Training** for Sonoma County Regional Parks employees. This professional development training was designed to support staff across roles—rangers, program leaders, and administrative personnel—in embedding inclusive practices into all aspects of parks programming.

The training addressed:

- **Core principles of universal design**
- **Disability as a natural part of human diversity**
- **Designing programs that are flexible rather than “special”**

- **Practical strategies for adapting activities without segregating participants**
- **Inclusive language and communication practices**
- **Anticipating access needs in outdoor and recreational settings**

The training was grounded in real examples from Sonoma County Parks programs and emphasized proactive design rather than retroactive accommodations. Staff engaged in applied discussions about modifying existing programs and considering access at the planning stage rather than as an afterthought.

This work culminated in the renovation of all programs scheduled for delivery in Spring, ensuring they are intentionally designed for broad participation and inclusive engagement.

Ongoing Collaboration and Program Renovation

Throughout the sabbatical period, I met regularly with Sonoma County Regional Parks leadership and staff to provide consultation, feedback, and collaborative problem-solving. These meetings supported iterative program revisions and reinforced a shared commitment to access and inclusion.

Together, we renovated all Spring program offerings to reflect universal design principles, incorporating:

- **Multiple participation pathways**
- **Clear accessibility information**
- **Flexible pacing and sensory considerations**
- **Inclusive facilitation strategies**

This sustained collaboration transformed the work from a one-time consultation into an ongoing partnership, positioning Sonoma County Regional Parks as a regional leader in inclusive public recreation.

Impact on Teaching, Scholarship, and Service

This sabbatical has had a direct and lasting impact on my work as a faculty member. The applied research, program development, and training experience inform my teaching in the Education Specialist program by providing authentic case studies, real-world applications of universal design, and models of cross-sector collaboration.

The work also strengthens my scholarship by contributing to the growing field of inclusive outdoor education and recreation, an area that intersects disability studies, education, public health, and community engagement. Additionally, the partnership with Sonoma County Regional

Parks creates future opportunities for student involvement, service learning, and applied research.

Conclusion

My sabbatical supported Sonoma County Regional Parks in advancing accessibility, universal design, and inclusion across coastal access, parks programming, and public-facing materials. Through research, consultation, training, and sustained collaboration, this work resulted in concrete, systemic changes that will benefit community members with disabilities and their families.

This project reflects the mission of Sonoma State University and the School of Education by demonstrating how academic expertise can be leveraged to create meaningful community impact. The sabbatical strengthened my professional practice, expanded institutional partnerships, and reinforced the role of education specialists as leaders in inclusive design beyond traditional classroom settings.