

**Sabbatical Leave Report
Academic Year 2025–2026**

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Project: Toward a Pedagogy of Care in the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies

During the 2025–2026 academic year, I completed the primary objective of my approved yearlong half-pay sabbatical project by attending the Sonoma State University Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program as a full-time graduate student. This professional development experience fulfilled the central goal outlined in my sabbatical proposal: to gain advanced knowledge and practical skills in counseling that will strengthen my teaching, enrich Hutchins School pedagogy, and better support the social-emotional well-being of Sonoma State students.

Throughout the academic year I enrolled as a full-time student and completed graduate coursework in counseling theory, diagnosis, multicultural counseling, ethics, relationships, substance use, psychopharmacology and related areas of professional preparation. Immersion in the counseling curriculum provided me with a strong foundation in evidence-based counseling practices while deepening my understanding of the psychological, developmental, and social challenges faced by today's college students. During the spring semester, I completed a Counseling Experience practicum course which provided supervised training in fundamental counseling skills. As part of this practicum, I had the opportunity to counsel Sonoma State undergraduate students in a series of ten counseling sessions with each client, allowing me to apply counseling theories and techniques in practice while developing competence in building therapeutic relationships, active listening, case conceptualization, and reflective practice under faculty supervision.

The counseling program emphasized active listening, empathy, reflective practice, cultural humility, trauma-informed approaches, and ethical decision-making. These experiences significantly expanded my understanding of how learning environments can be intentionally designed to promote belonging, resilience, and student success. While my role as a faculty member is distinct from that of a licensed counselor, the knowledge and communication skills developed through graduate study are directly applicable to fostering healthier and more supportive educational environments within the Hutchins School.

This year of graduate study reinforced the rationale presented in my sabbatical proposal. As higher education continues to address increasing levels of student stress, anxiety, grief, isolation, and other mental health challenges, faculty are often among the first professionals to recognize students who are struggling. My coursework provided valuable insight into recognizing signs of distress, responding appropriately within professional boundaries, making effective referrals to campus resources, and cultivating classroom practices that encourage trust, engagement, and persistence.

Equally important, the counseling curriculum encouraged critical reflection on diversity, equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive practice. Working alongside other counseling graduate students from a variety of professional backgrounds broadened my perspective on serving students with diverse identities, life experiences, and educational needs. These experiences complement the Hutchins School's longstanding commitment to student-centered, discussion-based learning and provide new frameworks for creating inclusive seminar environments that support all learners.

The sabbatical provided me with dedicated time for intellectual growth that would not have been possible while carrying a full faculty teaching and administrative workload. Returning to the role of student allowed me to experience graduate education from the learner's perspective, strengthening my appreciation for effective teaching practices, thoughtful assessment, and the importance of supportive faculty mentorship. This perspective will inform my own teaching and advising as I return to the classroom.

The knowledge gained during this sabbatical will be incorporated into my teaching beginning in the 2026–2027 academic year. I plan to revise my Hutchins seminar curricula and classroom practices to incorporate principles of compassionate pedagogy, social-emotional learning, restorative dialogue, and trauma-informed educational practices where appropriate. I also intend to continue sharing these approaches with colleagues through departmental conversations and broader campus discussions about student success and well-being.

This sabbatical represents the beginning of a longer-term professional development trajectory. Continuing graduate study in counseling will further enhance my ability to bridge liberal studies pedagogy with contemporary research on supporting student development and well-being. During my first year in the program, I developed a growing interest in grief counseling, particularly in supporting individuals navigating bereavement, chronic illness, caregiving, and other significant life transitions. This emerging area of interest builds naturally upon my work with Sonoma State University's Palliative Care Faculty Learning Community and will continue to shape both my graduate studies and my future contributions to student support and compassionate pedagogy. Ultimately, I hope this work will contribute to innovative teaching practices that strengthen student learning, improve retention, and support the Hutchins School's mission of providing transformative, interdisciplinary education.

I am grateful to Sonoma State University for providing the opportunity to pursue this sabbatical leave. The experience has been intellectually rigorous, professionally transformative, and directly relevant to my work as a faculty member. I look forward to applying what I have learned to benefit Hutchins School students, my colleagues, and the broader university community.