

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
*Human Resources*



**Mission of AUSD:**

The mission of Albany Unified School District is to provide excellent public education that empowers all to achieve their fullest potential as productive citizens. AUSD is committed to creating comprehensive learning opportunities in a safe, supportive, and collaborative environment, addressing the individual needs of each student.

**California Ed Code 44966:**

The governing board of any school district may grant any employee of the district employed in a position requiring certification qualifications, a leave of absence for not to exceed one year for the purpose of permitting study or travel by the employee which will benefit the schools and pupils of the district. The governing board may provide that the leave of absence be taken in separate six-month periods or separate quarters rather than for a continuous one-year period, provided that the leave of absence for both of the separate six-month periods or any of all quarters shall be commenced and completed within a three-year period. Any period of service by the individual intervening between the two separate six-month periods or separate quarters of the leave of absence shall comprise a part of the service required for a subsequent leave of absence.

**Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA):**

ATA/AUSD contract Language may be found in *Article 17* of the CBA, under “Leaves”. Please click [here](#) to view.

**In order to be considered for a sabbatical leave of absence, you must have:**

- Worked 7 years of consecutive certificated service, served as a regular, full time unit member over no more than an eight (8) year period

**Application Instructions:** Submit the original application to Human Resources, who will distribute to the Sabbatical Committee, the Superintendent, and to the Board of Education for review. A copy will be returned to the applicant after final action by the Governing Board.

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
Human Resources

Applicant

Name: Rusich

Last Name

Shawn

First Name

P

Middle Initial

Employee ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Site: Albany High School

Grade/Subject: 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> English

Number of Years in Education:

9 Years (7 as Full English  
Teacher, 1 as Student Teacher, 1  
Year as Substitute Teacher)

Date of Hire: 8/22/2014

List of

Credential(s)/Supplementary Credential(s): Provisional and Clear Credentials, Single Subject (English)

Dates of Sabbatical: Start Date 8/13/2021

End Date: 6/3/2022

If granted, request for 50% salary during sabbatical:    Yes  No

Request for payment:

XXXX **During Sabbatical** (monthly installments)  Upon Return (2 annual installments)

If granted, request for health benefits:  Yes  No

Applicants who desire to receive salary payments and/or health benefits during the Sabbatical Leave must furnish a bond or sign a written agreement to return and render at least two years of service to the District after termination of the leave. Bonds shall be filed in the Superintendent's office.

The unit member agrees to render a period of service equal to twice the length of the Sabbatical Leave in the employ of the Board following the unit member's return from leave of absence.

In the event that the unit member fails to return and render aforementioned service, the unit member agrees to reimburse the District for the compensation and benefits provided to the unit member while on Sabbatical Leave.

The debt shall be exonerated in the event the failure of the unit member to return and render the aforementioned service is caused by the death or physical or mental disability of the unit member.

If the Board finds and by resolution declares that the interests of the District will be protected by the written agreement of the unit member to return to the service of the District and render the aforementioned service therein following the unit member's return from leave, the Board in its discretion may waive the furnishing of the bond and pay the unit member on leave in the same manner as though a bond was furnished (California Education Code 44969).

Non-liability of District and Board Both the Board and the District shall be freed from any liability for payment of any compensation or damages provided by the law for the death or injury of any unit member of the District employed in a position requiring certification qualifications when the death or injury occurs while the unit member is on any leave of absence granted under the provision of California Education Code 44962 to 44976, inclusive.

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
Human Resources

Return to Service. At the expiration of leave, the unit member shall be reinstated in the position, or a similar position, held at the time leave was granted, unless a change of assignment is mutually agreeable. Within sixty (60) days after returning from a sabbatical leave, the unit member shall be required to submit the following documentation as evidence of having performed the tasks agreed upon to be undertaken during the leave period:

- A. **Advanced Academic Study:** An official transcript of courses taken.
- B. **Independent Research of Study:** A statement from the sponsor verifying completion of study and level of accomplishment.
- C. **Travel:** A detailed itinerary of the trip and written report setting forth the participant's actions and benefits to the school and pupils of the District.

Please mark which of the following methods you will use to meet the criteria for a sabbatical. Note that "D" is a combination of two or more of the first three.

- A. **Advanced Academic Study:** Include a detailed description of the course of study or research project to be undertaken. A letter of acceptance from the individual who will direct the study needs to be forwarded to the committee prior to the commencement of the sabbatical.
- XXX  B. **Independent Research or Study:** Include a detailed resume of the study or project to be undertaken.  
 (see final page)
- C. **Travel:** Include a comprehensive itinerary of your travel plans.
- D. **A combination of the above activities:** Explain carefully how the activities are related and the special results that can be expected. Describe in detail the combination plan in which you are interested.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ *Jan Risch* \_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant

4/27/2021  
Date

**Sabbatical Committee**

Comments: The committee has reviewed the application.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ *[Signature]* \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Human Resources Officer or Assistant Superintendent Educational Services  
Date: 5/24/21

**Superintendent**  
 Recommended       Not Recommended

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
Human Resources

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Frank Wells Superintendent

Date 6/1/21

**Board of Education**

Recommended       Not Recommended

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Board of Education President

Date

**1. Purpose of the sabbatical:**

Please describe the nature and significance of the project, including a clear concise statement of your objectives.

Having teachers who are experts in their fields is extremely valuable to students. While most English teachers are experts in the field of literary studies or some related disciplines in the humanities, not many are experts in the field of writing.

Beyond studying English literature and creative writing in college, I came to teaching as an advertising copywriter and editor. As I approach the end of my first decade as a teacher, I've come to realize that an area for growth in my teaching is to teach my students more of the approaches a professional writer brings to the craft in the field of fiction, both in how they write but also in how they read (considering the craft going into the writing we engage with in class).

The project I am proposing is to have the time to develop my expertise as a fiction writer through the completion of a book-length collection of fiction (shorter fiction, as this is more appropriate for teaching in the classroom). I began this project somewhat during the shelter-in-place period last spring and it carried over into the summer. I noticed immediate benefits this year in how I teach a writerly approach to both reading and writing, as well as how I teach fiction writing.

However, since the academic year began, I have made little progress continuing to build expertise as a fiction writer, for the time commitments to be an exceptional high-school English teacher are significant (usually 55 to 60 hours a week but sometimes rising above 70 hours a week).

Thus, the time afforded by the sabbatical would allow me to focus in and make progress on the project with respect to the following objectives:

Progress through the process for a book-length work of fiction (from planning and drafting to developmental-, line- and copy-editing, as well as proofing and preparing for submitting to market and publication).

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
*Human Resources*

Develop the professional approaches needed to be successful writing this book-length work, from planning and drafting to editing, proofing, and preparing for publication.

Reflect on current practices in lieu of new expertise, particularly in how I construct planning documents for student fiction and creative nonfiction writing projects

Adjust resources and rollout of mini lessons for fiction and creative-nonfiction writing projects based on work on book-length fiction.

Adapt more robust treatment of stylistic-element analysis and writerly questions in the curriculum of my English classes based on the work involved in this project

**2. Work to be accomplished:**

Please describe specifically what you plan to do and how you expect to accomplish it.

I intend to complete a book-length collection of professional-quality fiction stories (roughly 100,000 words or 350 pages [6 stories: 1 novella, three novelettes, and two short stories]), with a target goal of 5,000 words per week on first drafts and 100 to 200 pages of revision per week (depending on whether it is at the developmental or line-/copy-editing stage).

I intend to take notes on two books on writing (*Stein on Writing* by Sol Stein and *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* by Renni Brown and Dave King) similar to these notes intermittently throughout the sabbatical to help enhance my expertise and enrich mini-lessons for future use in class curriculum

I intend to conduct overview analysis of scenes and chapters (at least 20 such scenes and chapters) in a range of stories similar to this example, helping solidify my grasp of narrative structure and provide models I can then use for literary analysis and fiction-writing instruction in my classes; this will be done intermittently throughout the sabbatical

I also intend to conduct detailed, paragraph-level analysis of pivotal scenes and chapters (at least 5) in a range of stories similar to this example, helping to strengthen my knowledge of the nuances of narrative flow in terms of actions and reaction as well as how writers mix action, dialogue, description, and narrative summary to produce their works

I intend to create a list of points of emphasis while writing and during revision—at developmental-, line-editing, and copy-editing stages, as well as during proofing—based on working on the book-length project and on research into the writing craft; this will be done intermittently throughout the sabbatical

Upon return from sabbatical, I intend to adjust my teaching practices for fiction and creative nonfiction writing instruction and literary analysis (structuring of planning documents, resources and rollout of mini lessons for writing projects, points of emphasis during literary analysis activities).

**3. Institution(s) and/or location(s) where work will be performed:**

Where will the work be done, and why has that location/program been chosen?

This work will be done primarily at my home office, as it is a quiet place where I can work at an optimal level with the resources needed to complete the work.

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
*Human Resources*

**4. Projected results:**

What tangible results will your project have, what form will the results take, and how are you contemplating the manner in which you are going to share your results with others (e.g. publication, exhibition, sharing of new pedagogical techniques or materials with peers)?

**Tangible Results:** Having a stronger basis of expertise in the field of English studies will allow me to model the approaches a professional employs and aid me in developing instructional practices that meet students where they are and help them develop their individual plans for growing as writers and critical readers.

**Form Results Take:** The results will occur in the form of support materials and changes in how I teach writing instruction (for both stylistic-element analysis [reading comprehension] and for fiction and creative-nonfiction [narrative writing]). Some of the related projects will also help me to teach analyzing narrative (the scene or chapter overview and paragraph-level analysis components in particular).

**Manner of Sharing Results with Others:** In the English department at Albany High School, we carve out time for teachers to share lesson plans or units of study and get feedback and ideas from fellow colleagues. I plan to use one or more of these sessions to share the adjustments and additions I implement to my instruction based on the work I conduct for the sabbatical.

**5. Justification:**

How will this project contribute to your own scholarly development?

My bachelor's degree was in creative writing; I completed the coursework for a master's in English literature and another master's degree in curriculum development culminating in a research study into how to effectively conduct peer-review to drive improvement with respect to argumentative writing.

I have taught all four levels of English at the high school, including general-education, intervention, and accelerated classes. I have had the opportunity to teach the junior honors class, preparing students for the AP Language and Composition test; the focus on rhetoric at the junior level leveraged my background in advertising copywriting; the more traditional work in English studies draws heavily on my background in creative writing and literature.

For the first six years of my teaching, my focus was largely on what I believed to be the more useful forms of writing students would need for college and career (argumentative and analytical writing). I did teach narrative writing but as a secondary concern to more traditionally academic forms of writing.

However, I've come to see the value of teaching story explicitly, as this translates to all types of communications (even a scientific research study is telling a story with a beginning, middle, and end, employing the conventions of a genre of writing).

The project I propose would allow me to deepen my knowledge of story and how professionals employ a knowledge of and level of craft with respect to story. I have an extremely strong academic understanding of how narrative works but a working knowledge, the knowledge of a practitioner is an area where I see growth, which is why I am proposing this project. It will help me to develop my expertise, and this will in turn inform my instruction in the craft of writing.

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
*Human Resources*

How does this proposal fit the Mission and Strategic Plan (goals) of AUSD? Please click [here](#) for a full list of AUSD objectives and goals. (*Your proposal may not relate to all of them*).

**Objective / Goal #1: Assess and Increase Academic Success:** The project I propose will allow me to provide an even more comprehensive educational experience for my students, integrating understanding of professional fiction writing into my stylistic-element analysis instruction with respect to reading comprehension as well as narrative writing for both fiction and creative nonfiction. As a result, I will have additional tools to help driving engagement and facilitating learning for my students.

Additionally, a better understanding of the field of writing will allow me to make my assessments more authentic in nature, as I understand the real-world implications of the work we do with respect to reading comprehension and narrative writing.

Finally, this project helps me to become an even more qualified staff member and resource not just for my student but for my colleagues as well.

**Objective #2: Support the Whole Child:** The impacts with respect to this objective and goal are more limited. Integrating what I learn from this project into my instruction can lead to a more positive relationship for students, as I am able to craft more high-engagement learning experiences that will help students to understand the craft of writing and fine-tune the activities I already employ.

**Objective #3: Communicate and Lead Together:** As with goal and objective #2, the impact of the project is more limited than for objective and goal #1. That said, the work I do on this project will help me to contribute to collaboration with other staff with an appreciation of the work of an expert in the fiction-writing field.

How will this sabbatical benefit the pupils and schools of AUSD?

There is value in having a staff with unique perspectives and experiences, who teach their subject matter in different ways that can reach students who might not be as strongly impacted if all their teachers come from the same background and have similar perspective and approaches.

To a certain extent, I already address the writerly craft (mostly from a nonfiction writer and editor's perspective given my advertising copywriter and editor experience). To my knowledge none of the other English teachers come from a similar background. Adding expertise in fiction writing gives me yet another facet to my teaching that provides a unique perspective and distinctive insights some if not all students will find compelling.

Additionally, students who are interested in becoming writers outside academia would have an even better resource to rely on, someone who has gone into the field and has background and knowledge that can help them to understand both what is involved and if this field is something that could interest them.

Furthermore, this project allows me to more accurately structure my instruction with a goal of setting students on the path toward the highest level of the craft. Obviously, how I do this will depend on the skill level of my students (and the grade level), but having a keener understanding of the ultimate goal and stronger working knowledge of the profession at its highest level will help me adapt my instruction to drive growth for my students in terms of writing and reading comprehension.

Albany Unified School District  
Request for Sabbatical Leave of Absence  
*Human Resources*  
**Supporting Documents/Materials:**

If you checked option:

- A. **Advanced Academic Study:** include a detailed description of the course of study or research project to be undertaken AND a letter of acceptance from the institution to be attended or a letter of acceptance from the individual who will direct the study.
- B. **Independent Research or Study:** include a detailed description of the study or project to be undertaken.
- C. **Travel:** include a comprehensive itinerary of your travel plans.
- D. **A Combination of Two or More of the Above Activities:** explain carefully how the activities are related and the special results that can be expected. Describe in detail the combination plan in which you are interested.

B. The info here is largely the same as in section #2, work to be accomplished.

**Development to Publication of Book-Length Fiction:** I want to take the time to work on the craft of writing, solidifying a professional expertise in writing genre-literary fiction by bringing a book-length collection of stories to market. The target for the project is a 100,000-word collection of stories (1 novella, three novelettes, and two short stories). This project will allow me the space to hone my practice from planning and drafting to revising strategies and approaches, improving my understanding of the developmental editing, line editing, and copy-editing process to fiction creation.

**Notes on Two Books on Writing** (*Stein on Writing* by Sol Stein and *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* by Renne Brown and Dave King) Similar to these notes

These books have extremely useful info on the writing process. Taking notes that can be revisited at regular intervals will help strengthen my knowledge base around fiction writing and give me examples I can use for mini-lessons in class (either around fiction writing or analysis).

**Overview Scene or Chapter Breakdown** for 5 Scene or Chapters (Hook, Plot/Conflict Summary, Hot Spot [Moment of Highest Dramatic Tension], Prompt On) See this example

These analyses will help me to see the general structure of scenes and chapters, helping get a sense of how to develop narrative structure (and aiding me in teaching this to students and making this an element of focus as we analyze fiction writing by others)

**Detailed, Paragraph-Level Analysis of 5 Pivotal Scenes or Chapters**, noting movements within important scenes in novels and short stories [dialogue as reaction to an action, observations of viewpoint character, exposition on environment, description of physical movements]: See example here.

This type of analysis aids me in seeing the movements within the text at the sentence and paragraph levels, which in turns strengthens my working knowledge and ability to teach the nuances of action and reaction progressions in fiction writing, as well as how writers mix of action, dialogue, description, and narrative summary to produce their works.

Creation of a **List of Points of Emphasis While Writing and During Revision** (both at developmental and line-editing levels)

## Focus Item Responses: Sabbatical Leave Request Addendum

1) Will there be a mentor or other supervisor for this project who can provide feedback for you? Marina was in favor of this idea. If you don't plan on it, it would be helpful to know how you will hold yourself accountable.

I had not planned on the use of a mentor. I will be working with a set of **beta readers**—test readers who provide feedback on drafts at the developmental and line-editing stages—sending them work once the stories are ready for feedback. I could provide manuscripts with their comments and copies of their **correspondence** to show progress and serve to demonstrate accountability.

Also, I planned to have certain **milestone targets**: 60,000 words of first draft by 3-month mark (November 13), completion of first draft by 5-month mark with roughly 100,000 words (January 13), beta-reader feedback on two-thirds of the stories by the 8-month mark (April 13), and a manuscript ready for submission by the 10-month mark (June 13).

Perhaps I could reach out to Jessica Park in the English Department to set up check-ins where I show evidence of meeting these milestone targets as progress benchmarks.

2) You mention in your Purpose paragraphs: "I noticed immediate benefits this year in how I teach a writerly approach to both reading and writing". What specific benefits have you noticed?

As English teachers, we look at narrative structure in terms of the dramatic arc (wait on the link and it'll take you to the dramatic-arc section for one of my resource documents), how the story builds tension toward the climax, the important point where events in the story come to a resolution.

However, as a fiction writer, I am thinking **more precisely about how the dramatic arc is achieved**. I found I was able to **broaden discussion** of how a writer crafts scenes, thinking of scenes and chapters as mini dramatic arcs of their own, and how within the scene a writer blends dialogue and action, as well as narrator thoughts, description, and background to create a compelling story.

An **example** of this came from my first unit with the junior honors students. We looked at a story by Malinda Lo, "New Year," about a second-generation–Chinese-American girl discovering her sexuality as a lesbian against the backdrop of anti-Chinese discrimination in 1950s San Francisco (rather apropos this year in light of the increase in anti-Asian hate due to Covid and political rhetoric around it). Here are my annotations, which I drew upon in discussion to call out the craft of the story at times in discussion with my classes:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GPoYckY05EbR8-KazZhacrRms\\_Cn0Qnd/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GPoYckY05EbR8-KazZhacrRms_Cn0Qnd/view?usp=sharing).

Thus, my opening efforts on this project allowed me to teach more of the concerns of the fiction writer—setting up narrative writing instruction to come—and helped students to focus in on how writers create narratives. As a result, I was able to increase engagement and foster a deeper understanding of how narratives are crafted while also giving students additional opportunities to practice critical thinking skills (giving them new avenues to practice inferencing, analysis, and evaluation), thereby leading to richer instruction and instruction that provides additional points of interest for students than I otherwise would've had if I'd restricted my instruction to more traditional literary-analysis concerns.

**3) You mention how this independent study may benefit students who want to pursue writing as a career, but how might it help students who are marginally attached to English and just trying to avoid taking remedial English in a JC?**

Through this project, I seek to deepen my expertise and understanding of story and its importance as a tool of communications. I'm not just looking at the task of teaching from a traditional English-teacher perspective: The project has led me to be more comfortable abandoning the traditional text, as I can still teach the skills of narrative and communications to reluctant readers by using media more familiar to them, such as videos and films.

This isn't to say I haven't taken similar approaches before. In my English 2 classes, I use nontraditional texts to engage reluctant readers and teach students that almost anything can be a text we can consider in the English class: I use a video about learning new skills and activities while experiencing other cultures to teach inferencing ("Learn" [YouTube]), a Pixar short film to begin discussion of basic literary devices (characterization, symbolism, setting, plot, and theme) ("La Luna" [YouTube]), and a Star Wars Anti-Smoking PSA from the 1980s (YouTube) to teach the basics of rhetoric (speaker, audience, occasion, purpose, and tone).

For the student who doesn't see themselves as a reader or might say "I'm not good in English," this project is helping me to get at the fundamentals of story, how we communicate our messages and convey important meanings. A byproduct of this point of emphasis has been a secondary obsession with YouTube videos that analyze the way story is crafted in films (videos on how to craft the perfect scene, handle character arcs, and maximize the effectiveness of endings).

Based on new directions opened up to me by the sabbatical project, I envision using films as texts for more traditional literary analysis, allowing students to interact with high-engagement texts and using formats that may be more relevant and accessible to them, such as video essays. As I continue working on the sabbatical project, I hope to develop more ideas for how to build high-engagement activities and content into the class to allow students who don't always see themselves as strong English students to

get the meaningful applications of skills and competencies that will serve them in their growth as keen critical thinkers and articulate communicators.

This brings me to what the key of the sabbatical project is: By stepping away for a year and focusing on this project, I come back to my teaching with fresh perspective and new ideas that will benefit my teaching—and through collaboration with others, the work we do as teachers at the high school.

In my department, I hear the voices of teachers, people in the education field or coming into the field with great ideas based on scholarship around education, but I don't hear the voices of practitioners very often, and I suspect the inclusion of these voices would make our discipline even richer and more valuable to students. Ultimately, I think this is a vital part of what interests me in this sabbatical project.

## **Shawn Rusich**

The sabbatical committee reviewed the application through the lens of how it would benefit AUSD students. We identified areas that would benefit students and additional areas for consideration.

### **Areas of Student Benefit:**

- Clear and ambitious plan of objectives of sabbatical
- Clear vision of how project will add instructional value in addition to existing strengths
- Clear results that will improve his instruction and English department overall
- new and relevant skills that could be brought into the classroom
- real-life application of skills that could be helpful to some students

### **Additional Areas of Consideration:**

- Having a mentor/sponsor for this project
  - the amount of time that was devoted to self-reflection and teachable skills in relation to writing of the book
  - amount of new skills brought to the classroom and staff
  - Can you reach marginally attached students
- (applicant has provided additional information in addendum)