Please accept this as a report of my professional accomplishments during my sabbatical, taken during the fall semester of 2012.

Statement of Purpose of Sabbatical

My goal for my sabbatical was to earn my Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) certification. This certification will enhance my ability to work with credential candidates who teach children with autism or behavior disorders, as well as with master’s degree candidates who wish to do research using Applied Behavior Analytic (ABA) techniques. Finally, the content knowledge I gained through the coursework for the BCBA will provide me with the ability to conduct research and publish in ABA journals.

Description and Results of Project

A Board Certified Behavior Analyst conducts functional behavioral assessment of the behaviors of individuals with disabilities or behavior disorders and uses the assessment results to design and implement interventions that will help the individual integrate better in the community. Effective, scientifically validated therapies for children with autism, a growing population, are often based in the Applied Behavior Analytic techniques employed by BCBAs.

A BCBA is an increasingly desirable credential for individuals who teach children with special needs, particularly those with autism or emotional disturbance. According to CalABA, the California Association for Behavior Analysis (http://calaba.org/bacb.shtm), "This certification is recognized by the State of California, Department of Developmental Disabilities with regards to practitioners who provide behavioral services. In addition, an increasing number of regional centers and school administrators are stipulating that those who provide behavioral intervention to their consumers and students must hold this certification." In the past few years, several of our master’s degree candidates have become interested in earning the BCBA certification and have pursued the coursework at online universities, transferring the units back into their SSU MA programs. Working with these candidates increased my interest in earning that same certification.

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB, http://www.bacb.com/index.php) has developed strong requirements for the training, certification, and continuing education of individuals who wish to work as behavior specialists. Not only does the BACB emphasize the need for well-trained practitioners, they promote the ethical and humane use of ABA techniques as a means to better the lives of individuals with disabilities. One must hold, at minimum, a master’s degree, meet 225 hours of coursework or college teaching in the prescribed areas, and engage work with individuals requiring behavioral supports to qualify. In addition to coursework and fieldwork, candidates must pass the BCBA certification examination.

I completed the required BCBA coursework through an accredited online program offered through the Florida Institute of Technology (http://www.fit.edu/bst/listing.php). This involved four ten-week courses. Unfortunately, the supervised independent fieldwork hours that I had arranged fell through and I was unable to work with clients. However, I also learned that it is possible for me to sit for the BCBA exam based on my doctoral work, plus coursework, and extensive experience working with individuals with disabilities. I intend to sit for the exam in mid-September, 2013, which is the next available exam window. This date is within the window of what I expected to be possible.
The work I have done in the BCBA courses, along with outside study, have strengthened my understanding of the needs of students with behavior and communicative disorders. I have learned single-subject research methods that I previously knew about, but didn’t fully understand. I will be able to assist future MA candidates here at SSU with conducting single case research. I hope, also, to be able to conduct ABA studies with my students, getting them involved in experimental research with an eye toward publishing results in peer-reviewed journals.

Finally, once I have BCBA certification, my department and the School of Education could investigate the feasibility of offering a BCBA program at Sonoma State. The nearest certification program is at Sacramento State University and none of the six California State Universities that do offer the BCBA have online programs. I believe there is a local need for a BCBA program; offering the courses online would also give us the potential to attract students from California and the nation. This is a lofty future goal that will require significant resources, but one that I believe is worth pursuing.