

Proposed Leave Time:

also coincide with the age of onset for serious mental illnesses and can be a crucial time to diagnose and treat young people in the early stages of mental illness.” According to our own college website (see “About Moorpark College”), most of our students are between 18 and 30 years old, which places them in an age group in which mental health problems usually make themselves apparent. A 2007 *Los Angeles Times* article confirms, “Colleges today are seeing more students with mental illness for a variety of reasons. For starters, some mentally ill students aren’t diagnosed until then. After all, some illnesses, such as schizophrenia, are most likely to

sensitive and aware of mental illness can go on to promote awareness and reduce stigma off campus and in their futures.

The literature of mental illness need not be used only in English classes. The literature of mental illness can be utilized across the disciplines. For example, during the year that *The Soloist* was Moorpark College's One Campus, One Book selection, we held a multidisciplinary panel discussion on mental illness. Psychology and biology faculty, as well as NAMI volunteer Candace Jackson, all participated. During that year, even the music department got involved: the college orchestra performed a concert based on Nathaniel's favorite music, and selections from the book were read between pieces of music. Thus, the literature inspired awareness-building and

bringing it into the house. She wore gloves to go out shopping and stopped using cash; you can wash plastic credit cards after the salesperson has touched them.

Predictably, my mom's increasingly erratic behavior threw our family life into turmoil. After the initial confusion, my father sought medical help for my mother. One day, he came home and handed me a book. He advised my younger brother and sister and I to read *Brain Lock*, by Jeffrey Schwartz, so that we would understand what was happening to our mother. Little did I know that that book would reveal what had been happening to me since I was thirteen years old.

I cannot begin to explain the joy and relief that washed over me as I realized that I had a condition that could be named and treated. I didn't have to live that way forever. I experienced all the clichés that people attribute to the reading experience: whole new worlds opened up; it was like I had a new freedom and the possibilities were endless. I saw myself in this book, and because of that I was able to change my life. I had always loved books (I was a graduate student in English by this time), and they had transformed my thinking before, but this was a whole new level of profundity.

I am currently teaching my sixth full-time year at Moorpark College. Prior to that, I taught English part-time here. In the past, I taught

Objectives/Outcomes

- **List**
 1. Use nonfiction narratives in my English composition (1A) courses.
 2. Use fictional titles in a themed English 1B course (Critical Thinking and Literature).
 3. Provide better YA information when I teach the upper elementary and middle school segments of Children's Literature (English 40).
 4. Write Course Outline of Record for Young Adult Literature Class. Take the COR through Curriculum and teach this class in the future.
 5. Write and publish a scholarly journal article on the young and early adulthood narratives of mental illness.
 6. Write an annotated bibliography on young and early adulthood narratives of mental illness. Provide this bibliography to the English Department, the Library, and the Student Health Center of Moorpark, Ventura, and Oxnard College campuses.
 7. Advise a Moorpark College student chapter of NAMI and/or lead a campus book discussion group using the literature of mental illness.
 8. Give Flex activities on this and other campuses to teach faculty and staff about the literature of mental illness.
 9. Present my sabbatical findings o

mental illness. In the future, I would like to teach a Young Adult literature class at our college, and I would write a course outline for that during my sabbatical. In researching young adult stories, I can bring the YA perspective to my children's literature class as well.

In addition to writing a scholarly article in the course of my sabbatical and seeking to get it published, I would like to assemble an annotated bibliography. At our college and at our sister campuses, this annotated bibliography of the literature of mental illness could be used for faculty development (to build awareness of titles that might be appealing for use in various disciplines) and for recommending titles for library purchase. I would like to work with our campus health center to use books to help build awareness and reduce the stigma of mental illness so that students, faculty, and staff who see others struggling with mental illness can offer support and will know how to refer the person to get help. Perhaps we could start a campus book discussion group. I also think I would be in a good position to advise a student chapter of NAMI on our campus.

Size and Scale of Project

Because I have seen the profound capacity of books in my own life and in my teaching life to affect perceptions of mental illness and to give students both hope and referrals to support services, I would like to spend my sabbatical leave researching fictional and non-fictional narratives of mental illness, particularly ones with teen or twenty-something protagonists. I have chosen narratives because in my education, I specialized in fiction, and in my teaching of composition, I often teach narrative non-fiction which shares many of the same characteristics of narrative fiction. Both can express coming of age journeys in adolescence and early adulthood. In the literature, the young/early adult protagonists/narrators themselves may be suffering from the mental illness, or they may be dealing with a family member who has a mental illness, as this is another important branch of the literature.

Insanity has had many manifestations in literature, so I would like to specify my focus in relation to others'. While I will acknowledge some other approaches and mention them briefly for the purposes of comparison and contrast, I will not be focused on them. For instance, I will not be focusing on novels like Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, in which insanity is depicted as the label given to the sane in a corrupt society. Nor will I be focusing on madness as a trope in literature of oppression (*The Madwoman in the Attic* strain of feminist writing).

Interestingly enough, a quick internet search reveals that most college courses regarding mental illness in literature study these types of works and are usually titled “Madness and Literature.” Such courses also tend to focus on very old texts, such as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. The most recent they get is Sylvia Plath (1932-63), who was writing long before the current explosion in YA publishing and before our current era of greater social awareness of mental illness. My research on the new literature of mental illness and the teaching of this literature is therefore truly original and timely.

I will also caution readers against outdated perceptions of mental illness, such as that depicted in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964), in which traditional psychotherapy and resolving of childhood issues are depicted as cures for mental illness. I will focus on problems resulting from chemical imbalances in the brain, such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). I will also look at some autism and Asperger’s titles, as these conditions result from brain structure and chemistry issues, and because OCD falls on the autism spectrum. Eating disorders, too, are now recognized as having some commonalities with obsessive disorders, so I will explore some of that literature as well. I want to focus on mental illness as defined by NAMI as “a medical condition that disrupts a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning” (“What Is Mental Illness?”). To keep the scope manageable, I will focus on mental illnesses that are largely genetic and hereditary, rather than those that result from traumas such as rape or war. The burgeoning of YA literature and the increased social awareness and acceptance of mental illness also narrows my focus to books that have been published within the last ten to fifteen years.

Please see the reading list (Appendix A).

Timeline (Please also see the graphic, Appendix B.)

Before the sabbatical, I would like to attend the annual nationwide NAMI Conference in June of 2013 and their California Conference in Cheimhen the/TT3 teppendi Cheee to attend th

Appendix A: Reading List

(Any books with publication dates before the 1990s are included because they are classics in the

Cheney, Terri	<i>The Dark Side of Innocence</i>	Bipolar	2011
Cheney, Terri	<i>Manic</i>	Bipolar	2008
Costello, Victoria	<i>A Lethal Inheritance</i>	Schizophrenia	2012

Davis, Tom

	<i>Night</i>	bipolar and depression	
Rio, Linda and Tara	<i>The Anorexia Diaries</i>	Anorexia	2003

Appendix B: Timeline Graphic

Before
Sabbatical

- June, 2013: National NAMI Conference
- August, 2013: California State NAMI Conference
- August, 2013: YALSA Strand at ALA
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