

**Collin County Community College District
APPLICATION FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE**

Name Larry Stern CWID _____

Title Professor of Sociology Division: Social & Behavioral Science

Have you ever been granted a sabbatical? Yes If yes: Date: Fall 2000

Please provide a brief description of your *previous* sabbatical project:

The main objectives of my sabbatical were (1) to examine the complex legal, ethical, and social implications and concerns raised by recent developments in biotechnology and (2) using a sociological framework, analyze the various ongoing debates and attempts to resolve the disputes that have emerged. During the course of the sabbatical I examined the diverse and competing opinions expressed by ethicists, theologians, scientists, citizen groups, politicians, and legal analysts concerning genetic engineering and stem-cell research, gene therapy and genetic enhancement, cloning, and the human genome project.

Sabbatical Leave Period Being Requested

Dates: Beginning Date Spring, 2017 Ending Date Summer, 2017

Length: [] One semester [] Two semesters [] Other _____

Applicant's Agreement

Robert K. Merton: The Pursuit of Social Justice and the Production of Knowledge

Robert K. Merton was among the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century. He taught his students to embrace the highest standards while conducting careful scholarship and, more important, to make sure that the work *mattered*. Produce knowledge, he said, that could inform practical action and/or the formulation of social policy with regard to the urgent social problems of the times. But at the same time, drawing upon his vast experience, RKM stressed the importance of understanding the symbiotic relationship between sociologists, who as "experts" are called upon to produce sound knowledge, and policymakers, who either use, abuse or ignore it.

What is the appropriate role of scholar-experts in the process of policymaking? Can scholar-experts produce objective "value-free" knowledge or is bias unavoidable? How are conflicts between experts and policymakers resolved? To what extent do politicians "spin" the knowledge produced in the public arena to fit their preferred position, and, perhaps most important, to what effect? I intend to spend my sabbatical semester exploring these concerns, using RKM's work in the areas of race relations and anti-Semitism as a case in point. To do so, I shall rely upon both published and archival materials that are housed in three archives, each located in New York City: (1) the Robert K. Merton Papers, 1928-2002, and (2) the papers of the Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR), where Merton served as Assistant Director, each housed at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and (3) the papers of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), where Merton served as consultant to the Committee of Scientific Research, 1945-1946.

This sabbatical will yield clear benefits in a number of ways. My professional development, of course, will be greatly enhanced, as will work in the history of sociology. But my students, the college, and the broader community will be the prime beneficiaries. The main goal of my Introduction to Sociology and Social Problems classes is to get students to realize that sociology has relevance to their daily lives and that it can also deepen their understanding of the larger issues of the day. The incorporation of more incisive discussions of issues of social justice in my courses, while at the same time indicating how sociologists investigate these issues and provide meaningful knowledge to policymakers, will certainly enrich my classes and perhaps lead to the creation of an Honor's class devoted to this topic. In addition, I think that this fits nicely with the Coordinating Board's commitment to include "social responsibility" as a core component in student learning objectives in nearly every area taught at the college.

In addition, I propose to organize a program that focuses on the symbiotic relationship between social scientists and policy makers. Social scientists affiliated with the Society for the Study of Social Problems and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, as well as local politicians, will be invited to serve on a panel to discuss whether or not scientifically valid knowledge, free of bias, can ever be produced and then, what the proper relationship between "expert scholars" and policymakers should be when addressing the urgent problems of our day.