PennState
Office of the Executive
Vice President and Provost

PREPARING SABBATICAL LEAVE APPLICATIONS: A GUIDE FOR FACULTY

The purpose of this document is to assist faculty members in understanding the University policy on sabbatical leaves (AC17) and to recommend a format for proposals that will present the project in the clearest and most compelling way.

I. Purpose of the Sabbatical Leave

Penn State shares with other major research universities the traditional responsibilities to discover, develop, preserve, and disseminate knowledge. Much of this mission is achieved through the professional, scholarly, and creative activities of faculty members and through their interactions with students in classrooms, seminars, laboratories, and studios. Faculty development is a critical element in maintaining Penn State's excellence as an educational institution. The Task Force on Faculty Development, in a 1990 report, drew attention to the need for growth and renewal throughout a faculty member's professional career. The leave of absence with pay (sabbatical leave) is one mechanism for encouraging such development, and it is in this spirit that applications for sabbatical leave are reviewed.

II. Eligibility of Faculty Members for Sabbatical Leaves

Sabbatical leaves are awarded to eligible faculty members on the basis of the strength of their applications. They are not awarded automatically at the end of a given period of time. Faculty members must meet the eligibility and conditions defined by Policy AC17.

Tenure-line faculty members must serve six (6) full-time contract years in a tenure-line position before they can apply for a sabbatical. A faculty member can apply during year seven (7), the first year of their tenure, and if approved, the sabbatical would commence the following contract year, during year eight (8). Faculty members who are awarded early tenure, or who are hired with immediate tenure, may apply for a sabbatical in year six (6) for a sabbatical to begin in year seven (7).

An individual becomes eligible for a subsequent sabbatical leave provided the minimum required contract years of full-time service have elapsed since the previous sabbatical leave. Extension and exempt staff permanently assigned away from University Park who have served the University for at least six calendar years of full-time service are eligible for leaves of absence with pay for the purpose of formal graduate training.

III. Types of Eligible Projects

Various types of projects can be undertaken during the sabbatical leave. These include formal research projects, pedagogical projects, or other kinds of scholarly and creative projects. The most common type of proposal is a formal research project that is expected to lead to scholarly publication. Examples of creative projects that further a faculty member's development include the creation of a series of paintings, musical compositions, or literary works.

IV. Guidelines for Preparation of Application

A sabbatical leave application need not be a lengthy document, but it must contain sufficient information for review committees and administrators to evaluate the merit of the proposal and the benefit it will have for the faculty member and for the University. The narrative portion of the application is usually between four and eight double-spaced pages in length.

The application should contain the following information:

A. Cover page (use application form)

- The summary statement (two to three sentences) should be brief and include a non-technical statement of purpose, work to be accomplished, and the institution(s) and location(s) where the work will be performed.

B. Narrative body

- **Purpose:** Describe the nature and significance of the project, including a clear, concise statement of your objectives.

- **Work to be accomplished:** Describe specifically what you plan to do and how you expect to accomplish it. Where will the work be done, and why has that location been chosen? Identify the individuals with whom you will affiliate and their expertise in the area(s) in which you plan to work and include letters of invitation from collaborators and/or host institutions or agencies. What can you cite as evidence that you have the skills and background to accomplish your objectives? Please include an estimated schedule for the major steps of the project.

- **Projected results:** Articulate what tangible results your project will have, what form the results will take, and how you will share your results with others (e.g., publication, exhibition, sharing of new pedagogical techniques or materials with peers).

- **Justification:** How will this project contribute to your scholarly development, and how will it benefit your department, college, or the University as a whole? In what way does this project require a time

commitment beyond that involved in the normal activities encompassed in teaching, research, scholarship, and service?

C. Supporting documents

- A curriculum vita or biographical data sheet including a list of publications and professional activities.

- If your project requires access to restricted libraries or laboratories, or affiliation with other institutions, please append invitations, letters granting access, space, or support from the relevant authorities.

V. Review Process and Criteria

Sabbatical leave applications must be forwarded by the academic deans to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost of the University by the weekday coincident with or immediately preceding November 1. This means that the deadline for submission of applications to the departments should be set early in the fall semester.

Applications are reviewed by the department/division head, a college committee, and the dean. For faculty members who are in residence in one college but tenured in another, the college of budgetary responsibility will make the sabbatical recommendation, which will include a supporting recommendation from the department or division head or the school or unit director of the faculty member's tenure locus. Applications of all faculty reporting through the Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses must be accompanied by a recommendation from the campus chancellor to the Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses. All applications that are supported by the deans and/or Vice President are forwarded to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost of the University, where they are reviewed and recommended to the University President, who makes the final decisions.

In general, reviewers at every level of review should ask the following questions about each sabbatical leave application:

- *Is the significance of the project established?*

- *Does the presentation show the reader how the goals will be accomplished?*

- *What is the likelihood that the project will be completed or nearly completed on schedule?*

- *Does the applicant have the skills and background to undertake the project or a plan to acquire these before the leave?*

- *Is the purpose of the project communicated clearly to non-specialists?*

- *To what degree is the sabbatical leave crucial to the completion of the project?*

- *Are the benefits of the proposed leave for the faculty member and for the University clearly articulated?*

Faculty members are notified of decisions, usually prior to the December holiday period, by their unit executive (dean/chancellor). All approved faculty members will receive a memo from the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs that contains details of the sabbatical and important sabbatical policies and guidelines.

VI. Returning from a Sabbatical

A. Sabbatical Leave Report

- Every faculty or staff member who is awarded a sabbatical leave is required to submit a written report to their dean/chancellor, specifying what was accomplished during the leave. After reviewing, the dean/chancellor will send the report directly to Shawnee Wagner (txe2@psu.edu) in the Human Resources Records Management team. The report must be submitted within two months of the return from leave. It is not necessary to include the sabbatical leave application with the report.

B. Return to Active Service Requirement

- An individual who is granted a sabbatical leave is required to return for a full contract year of service (i.e., two consecutive semesters) following the sabbatical leave. Any person who does not return, or does not remain for the full contract year following the sabbatical leave, will be required to refund the amount of salary received from the University during the sabbatical leave.

C. Arrest and Conviction Self-Disclosure

- According to Policy HR99, Background Check Process, all faculty returning from an approved leave of six months or longer must complete a Penn State Arrest and Conviction self-disclosure form before returning to work. The form is available at http://guru.psu.edu/policies/OHR/Self_Disclosure_Form.pdf.

Revised July 15, 2023