

# Sabbaticals at Colorado State University

Rick Miranda, Fall 2013

Sabbatical leaves are an important element in fostering the continued research vitality of the faculty. We expect that activity during the period of the sabbatical will result in the faculty member's professional growth, will enhance the institution's reputation, will benefit our students' educational experience, and will increase the overall level of knowledge in the faculty member's area of expertise. While sabbatical leaves are not a mandatory right of any faculty member, they can be considered as a legitimate expectation, providing that the faculty member satisfies the criteria of the College and University.

Our Faculty Manual addresses the policies related to sabbatical leaves in Section F.3.4. According to state statute, a faculty member may not take sabbatical leave more often than once every seven (7) years. According to University policy, a faculty member does not become eligible for sabbatical leave until the accumulation of six (6) years of service as a regular faculty member at Colorado State University since the faculty member's initial appointment or most recent sabbatical leave. A faculty member must have tenure in order to take sabbatical leave.

We offer two forms of sabbaticals: the half-year and the full-year options. The salary of a nine-month faculty member while on sabbatical leave shall be either one-half of their base salary for the full-year sabbatical or full salary for the half-year sabbatical.

## **Application Procedures**

A request for a sabbatical leave is first discussed with the faculty member's department chair, usually no later than the spring before a fall request. Preliminary plans are formulated, and the provisional agreement of the Chair to proceed with the application is obtained. The faculty member proceeds to prepare the formal Request For Sabbatical Leave, which is submitted to the Dean's Office in late August (typically).

We ask that the applicant provide the following:

- A. Denote specific arrangements for covering assignments during absence;
- B. A detailed sabbatical plan;
- C. The request must specify how the sabbatical activity
  - a) will result in your professional growth,
  - b) will enhance Colorado State's reputation
  - c) will enhance the students' educational experience at our institution, and
  - d) will increase their overall level of knowledge in their area of expertise;
- D. Specific goals to be achieved while on sabbatical should be included;
- E. A copy of the current CV is required.

A supporting memo from the Department Chair is requested.

At this point different Colleges have slightly different mechanisms to evaluate the applications. Most Colleges convene a faculty sabbatical review committee (usually consisting of tenured faculty who have recent sabbatical experience), and initially they work with the applicants to revise and strengthen the applications in various ways, primarily clarifying the sabbatical plan proposal. Finally, they would transmit their evaluations to the Dean, typically with recommendations. This would happen in late September.

The Dean then provides his or her own recommendation to the Provost's Office, in early October. Our Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs typically reviews the applications again and makes a recommendation to the Provost. The Provost reviews the applications and then makes a recommendation to the President, who makes the final decisions. He then communicates these decisions to the Board of Governors in a report delivered at the December Board meeting. In my experience, most sabbatical applications are quite well prepared and clearly worthy; we have however denied sabbatical requests when this is not the case.

Post-sabbatical, we require that the faculty member submit a formal report on the sabbatical activities; these reports are forwarded to the Board of Governors. We also insist (via a formal MOU mechanism) that a faculty member return to CSU following their sabbatical, for at least one year.

### **Sabbatical Policies**

A number of elements are considered when reviewing sabbatical applications. These vary somewhat across the colleges and disciplines; but there are also a number of common principles in play each year. We urge faculty to keep the following in mind in preparing a sabbatical application.

#### **Early Planning**

We expect a timetable of the sabbatical activity, including exactly where and when the faculty member will be in various locations. This means that faculty members should be thinking about possibilities and writing to obtain invitations well in advance of the deadlines. Since recent deadlines have been about September 1, realistically this means making contacts as early as possible in the previous academic year. As a corollary, we expect the faculty member to communicate with their Chair early in the process so that he or she is aware of what the faculty member is planning and can help if needed. If external funding is needed or desirable for the sabbatical project, that will need to be sought very early.

#### **A Solid Proposal**

The detailed plan should specify how the sabbatical will:

- a. result in the faculty member's professional growth;
- b. enhance the University's reputation;

- c. enhance our students' educational experience here;
- d. increase the overall level of knowledge in their area of expertise.

In particular the project should not simply be to write down work which has already been accomplished, valuable though this may be: sabbaticals which are forward-looking are more compelling.

We urge faculty to be as specific as possible about the goals that they intend to achieve while on sabbatical. It is more effective to plan to execute specific projects, even if somewhat blue-sky, than to simply plan general research in a broad area. We look for the faculty member to be specific about the future work that will flow from the sabbatical activity, including publications, new grant applications, articles, and invitations, and student recruitment.

The four points noted above are taken most seriously, and all should be addressed. In particular, we look for the application to demonstrate how the sabbatical activity will benefit the Department/College/University, in addition to the hopefully obvious benefits to the applicant's personal research. If there is a curricular component to the sabbatical activity, we want to know that as well.

#### Support Letter from the Chair

The Department Chair will need to write a memo supporting the sabbatical request, and as noted above the faculty member should communicate their sabbatical plans well in advance of the submission of the application to their Chair and obtain their support. Clear statements by the Chair of the value of the sabbatical to the faculty member, to the Department, and to our students are expected. For these reasons it is prudent for the faculty member to plan to have their Chair review the entire application in advance of its submission to the Dean's office.

#### A Current CV

We make sure that the faculty member provides an up-to-date CV as part of the application. It is an opportunity for the faculty member to be as convincing as possible that accomplishing the goals of the sabbatical project is realistic.

#### Letters of Invitation

For sabbaticals that involve visiting other institutions, the sabbatical committee and the Dean generally want to see evidence that the faculty member has applied for and obtained some support from the visited institution. Promise of an office and computer/library facilities is a minimum. We look for at least a mention of the colleagues or research groups with whom research can be performed. Indications of external funding at any level are certainly a sign of interest by the other institution.

#### Full Year Proposals

Faculty have the option of proposing either a one-semester sabbatical or an academic year sabbatical. There are several dimensions in which it is easier to argue that a full-year sabbatical may be more worthy:

- more time spent on the research project presumably will imply more benefit;
- any external support/funding for the project already represents a positive 'peer review' of the project which is most welcome;
- the College and Department can more easily argue that the funds released by the full-year sabbatical will enable the Department to cover its instructional responsibilities.

### Leaving Fort Collins

"Stay-at-home" sabbaticals are subject to various criticisms, including:

- it is easier to argue that the research project may be accommodated by modifications in one's normal assignment;
- forging and strengthening of professional relationships with colleagues at other Universities, institutes or archives, organizations (e.g. companies or NGOs), and research locations, and the opportunities to recruit good students, would be diminished.

These criticisms are valid, and should be addressed clearly if a sabbatical proposal is being developed which does not involve visiting another location. There may well be compelling reasons why the sabbatical project may be more appropriate and more easily accomplished by remaining here at CSU; the faculty member should explain this clearly. In particular the reasons why the activity that is being proposed cannot be handled in the normal course of business must be addressed. A common compromise for faculty who find leaving Fort Collins for many months to be impossible is that the sabbatical include regular shorter-term visits to other research sites that provide the necessary resources or collaborations to enable the sabbatical project to flourish.

### Don't Withdraw

It happens more often than one might think that faculty have sabbaticals approved, but end up not taking them. In an environment where in any given year, we may be forced to make hard choices about sabbatical approvals, it would be very unfortunate to have this happen to any great extent. Unpredictable turns of events always may occur. But we have a right to expect that sabbatical applications are quite serious, and if granted that the faculty member will make every effort not to withdraw. Department Chairs in particular should make this a part of the conversation when discussing upcoming sabbaticals with faculty, and should address this in the support letter. Occasionally we do defer or alter sabbaticals by a year in extraordinary circumstances.

It does happen that sabbatical plans are contingent on external funding or other factors that are not completely under the control of the faculty member. Any factors that are known to the applicant should be mentioned in the proposal.

### Sabbatical Reports

A final report must be submitted to the Department Chair who will forward it to the Dean and the Provost and Executive Vice President for review and submission to the Board of Governors. We ask that this be done within three months of the completion of the sabbatical leave. In addition to the full report, we ask that faculty include a two-

paragraph summary of the activities and benefits derived from the sabbatical for submission to the Board of Governors. Those summaries are quite valued by the Board – it is a chance for them to get a real window into our faculty’s research efforts, a window that they do not regularly enjoy; we ask that some care be taken so that we can drop them into a Board report without substantial editing in the Provost’s office.

### **Summary**

Here at Colorado State University we do our best each season to make the sabbatical process fair, and to do what we can to support worthy sabbatical applications. I am well aware that sabbaticals can be a wonderful time for renewal and for redirection, I would like to err on the side of generosity, and each year I look forward not only to reviewing the applications, but also reading the (mandatory) sabbatical reports that describe the wonderful work our faculty have been involved in, in the last cycle’s sabbaticals.