

Faculty Development Committee

Recommendations re Strategic Bridge Plan milestone 21.ii: Options and Criteria for the sabbatical program.

Created with the full participation and input of the Committee, and the assistance of R. Lavender, Interim Co-Provost.

Submitted by Jason Burton, Co-Chair

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Concerns

The Faculty Development Committee (FDC) inherited responsibility for the review and prioritization of Sabbatical Leave applications in 2009, and was asked to study concerns within the Academic Assembly about sabbatical policy, and to make recommendations for possible revision. Specific concerns revolve around:

- 1) The small number of sabbaticals approved each year, in relation to the large number of FTF who are eligible for sabbatical leave.
- 2) The selections process—criteria for applications/proposals, application procedures, and the weighting of certain proposal attributes.
- 3) Real or perceived inequities regarding different *kinds* of proposals, or faculty needs that warrant sabbatical leave (i.e. external opportunities in-hand vs. the need to step back from teaching in order to complete new work for professional advancement and reinvigoration).

Committee Process

The FDC reviewed the Faculty Handbook language regarding sabbatical leave, surveyed FT Faculty within the College regarding interest, eligibility, the issue of competitiveness, and what role that might play in Leave application rates or tendencies. Faculty Development Committee representatives led a discussion at Faculty Senate regarding perceived inequities in the weighting of different kinds of sabbatical proposals.

Further research was conducted externally: a survey via the AICAD Deans group regarding comparable colleges' sabbatical leave policies and procedures provided input that helped the FDC view Otis and the needs of Otis faculty in a larger context.

Findings

Sabbatical leave is highly valued among Otis' FTF, and much consternation about the health and sustainability of this vital resource on behalf of faculty well-being and professional sustenance exists

within the academic community. It is widely recognized that, while not a right, sabbatical leave has been and remains an important attraction of high caliber faculty, a cherished opportunity to advance one's personal research, and a privilege enjoyed by many in higher education.

Currently, 34 FTF are eligible to apply for sabbatical at Otis (per Provost's office), although leave policy states that "a minimum of three" shall be granted per academic year. Further, the committee found that of the 34 currently eligible faculty members, 25 responded to the internal survey; of those 6 (24%) indicated that they "intend to apply for sabbatical leave during the 2011-12 academic year; 15 (60%) indicated that they "intend to apply for sabbatical leave in the near future (1-3 years)"; 11 (44%) (appendix 2). While the external survey (appendix 1) revealed little evidence to substantiate the recommendations here, most schools failed to respond fully, making it difficult to draw valid comparisons to Otis.

The Faculty Senate discussion revealed some concerns about "competitiveness" of the sabbatical process, including questions about the efficacy of the prioritization process itself, implying that all eligible faculty members should receive sabbatical leave upon reaching the 7 year service level. Others understood the value of existing weighting procedures, but expressed a desire to revise policy to ensure more inclusive and clearer definitions and criteria.

Recommendations

The FDC recommends that sabbatical leave policy and procedure be revised as soon as possible to provide a more balanced level of support for its dedicated full-time faculty who may be or soon will become eligible for sabbatical leave. Simply, the FDC recommends several policy revisions, as follows:

1. Revise policy language to **clarify proposal criteria** and insure that various kinds of proposals—from those citing pending fixed exhibition and/or publications opportunities to those seeking relief from FTF teaching and service duties in order to complete a body of work and/or an article, conference paper, or book for possible exhibition/presentation/publication—be regarded *equitably* in application reviews and priority-setting proceedings (appendix 3—suggested revisions).
2. Revise policy language to **add a necessary step in the application procedure**: applicants must submit proposals to their department Chairs by no later than March 1st each year. (Chair approved applications are due in the Provost's Office by no later than March 30th).
3. Based on the large number of eligible FTF, **increase the minimum number of sabbatical leaves** granted each year from 3 to 6, thus allowing more eligible faculty members to receive leave and produce College reputation-enhancing professional works, exhibitions, and/or publications. Increase the number of sabbaticals funded each year by 1 (as warranted by qualified applications and limited to a maximum of 10).

4. **Creation of a “pipeline” system**, in coordination with the Provost, that would *carry over* the 2 highest priority un-funded applications forward each year to the highest priority level in the next year’s pool.

The FDC believes that implementation of the above-stated recommendations will more properly meet the real and pressing needs of eligible FTF who require leave in support of professional activity, and at the same time fit within the College’s limitations regarding revenue/budgeting constraints affecting such programming over time. In committing more fully to faculty needs regarding leave policy and funding, the College would demonstrate proper support of its dedicated and successful teaching faculty, while maintaining fiscal discipline and limiting leave approvals to those distinguishing themselves as highly meritorious and promising of meaningful results.

Appendices:

1. Survey results—external
2. Survey result—internal
3. Faculty Handbook policy—current and proposed revision