

16.02 Special Studies Program Policy – Academic Staff

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This policy should be read in conjunction with the Special Studies Program (SSP) Procedures.

Rationale and Scope

The purpose of the SSP is to strengthen the University of New England by fostering the intellectual and professional development of its academic staff. SSP provides an opportunity to undertake an approved program of scholarly and research activity of mutual benefit to the University and academic staff.

This policy specifies the terms and conditions under which approval may be granted to eligible academic staff wishing to undertake a period of SSP.

Principles

SSP is designed to contribute to furthering the University's Strategic Plan and to produce research, scholarly or pedagogical outcomes that will contribute to the University's profile and provide career development for academic staff.

SSP is available, on application, to eligible academic staff. However, it is not a right to which an academic staff member is automatically entitled at the end of each qualifying period. The Head of School's report will include comment on the academic merit of the proposed program. It will also include certification that the School has adequate resources to accommodate the proposed deployment of the staff member on SSP. In making such a decision, Heads of Schools must be mindful of the School's teaching, supervisory and administrative obligations. While keeping in mind resource limitations, the Head of School is to make reasonable provision to allow applicants to undertake SSP.

SSP is not leave, and is considered to be academic work, in the form of individual research and/or scholarship. As SSP is considered a normal part of university business, staff on SSP are covered by, and must comply with, UNE policies. Staff are encouraged to undertake a significant period of SSP away from the UNE campus.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Agreement means University of New England Academic Staff-Union Collective Agreement 2010-2012 or current workplace agreement as applicable.

Dependant means accompanying dependent spouse/partner and/or children.

Staff means a staff member, who is not a casual employee, and is covered by the University of New England Academic Staff-Union Collective Agreement 2010-2012, or the replacement Agreement.

School means School and other organisational units, such as Oorala, Teaching and Learning Centre, and UNE research centres.

Head of School also means Director of Centre, Head of Cost Centre or equivalent.

Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean (PVC/D) means the PVC/D aligned with the school.

Policy

1. An SSP must provide academic staff with the opportunity to:
 - undertake sustained research and/or creative activity relevant to the research or academic directions of the University;
 - develop research (particularly with government, commerce and industry, professional organisations, other institutions of learning and the community);
 - obtain practical or developmental experiences in the workplace relevant to teaching responsibilities and/or research activities;
 - develop, maintain and improve professional networks nationally and internationally in order to contribute to the University's Strategic Plan;
 - complete or make progress towards an additional qualification relevant to the applicant's University role; and/or
 - Carry out work to fulfil commitments to outside funding bodies or pursue research outcomes.
2. SSP accrues at the rate of two months for each full year of service, up to a maximum of twelve months.
3. Recognition of prior service towards SSP accrual must be determined at the time of appointment to the University.
4. Academic staff undertaking SSP are required to return to normal duties for a period of time equal to the period of time spent on SSP.
5. Where a staff member resigns from UNE while on SSP, he/she will be expected to return to UNE within one week to resume normal duties for the duration of the term of notice.

Eligibility

6. Academic staff appointed on a continuing basis with three or more years of service may be eligible for SSP.
7. If there is a term in the contract to allow it, a staff member may be eligible to apply for SSP where he/she has held a fixed term contract for a minimum of three years and has been reappointed to a fixed term contract of sufficient length to enable him/her to comply with the requirement to return to the service of the University following the completion of SSP.
8. Academic staff who are appointed to fixed term positions and are subsequently appointed without a break in service to a continuing position, may count continuous prior service towards eligibility for SSP.
9. Academic staff appointed to organisational units other than a School, e.g. the Teaching and Learning Centre, are also eligible to apply for SSP.
10. Part-time staff in continuing positions may apply for SSP on a pro rata basis.
11. Periods of long service leave, leave without pay or SSP will not count as service for the purpose of SSP eligibility or accrual.

Duration of SSP

12. The period of time granted for SSP will be no less than three months and no more than twelve months. The timing must conform with the School's requirements.

Annual Leave

13. An SSP may incorporate a period of pro rata annual leave within the proposed SSP period (e.g. two weeks in a six month SSP). Such annual leave will be deemed to be part of the total SSP period.
14. Public holiday entitlements will be those applicable in the country in which the staff member is undertaking SSP when the holiday occurs (rather than as gazetted for Australia).

Application

15. Applications will be assessed by the SSP Committee on the basis of a complete and accurate submission which will include:
 - the academic merit and relevance of the proposed program and its capacity to contribute to furthering the University's Strategic Plan and to produce pedagogical, research and/or scholarly outcomes that will contribute to the University's profile;
 - the demonstrated capacity of the applicant to undertake, and produce outcomes from, the proposed program;
 - the record of achievement (including, where applicable, outcomes from previous SSP/study leave);

- evidence that all teaching, research, service and administration obligations and commitments can be accommodated to the satisfaction of the Head of School;
 - evidence that an SSP Committee member has been consulted in its preparation;
 - comment by the Head of School; and
 - evidence of the mutual benefit that the proposed program will bring to the University and the staff member.
16. Applications that do not meet the above requirements may be rejected by the SSP Committee.
 17. If the application is not supported on academic grounds by the Head of School and/or PVC/D, the applicant has a right to submit a rebuttal with their application. The final decision on the academic merit and relevance of the proposal is a matter for the SSP Committee.
 18. If the Head of School and/or PVC/D do not support the application on the basis of resources, there is no right of rebuttal on that ground.

Location

19. The University will determine the most appropriate location for the SSP program, taking into consideration a staff member's justification for the proposed location.

Committee Membership

20. The SSP Committee will have the following membership:
 - Chair or Deputy Chair of the Academic Board or nominee (Chair);
 - Two academic staff members from each Faculty, nominated by the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean - at least one of these will be at the level of Professor or Associate Professor;
 - One academic staff member from each Faculty, elected by the relevant Faculty.

Entitlements

21. Eligible staff on SSP will be entitled to financial assistance as determined by the University.

Variations to Approved Programs

22. Minor variations must be approved by the Head of School. Major variations must be supported by the Head of School and approved by the Chair of the SSP Committee. Definitions of minor and major variations are provided in the SSP Procedures.
23. A period of SSP may be postponed up to a maximum of 12 months, with the approval of the Head of School and Chair of the SSP Committee.

Unforeseen interruptions in the SSP Period

24. The University may direct a staff member to postpone or interrupt a period of SSP. Before doing so, the relevant University officer/s will consult staff in the affected area and explain the reason. If such a direction is issued, the staff member will usually be permitted to undertake SSP in the next available period and will continue to accrue SSP up to the maximum of twelve months.
25. While on SSP, and only in cases of extreme urgency, a staff member may be asked by the University to assist in a specific situation, such as renegotiating a memorandum of understanding with an overseas institution. In these circumstances appropriate expenses will be paid.
26. A staff member on SSP may apply for leave (other than annual or long service leave) as allowed for under University policies. Such leave will normally be deemed to be part of the total SSP period and must be applied for through the Head of School.
27. Where more than five consecutive working days are lost to the SSP for unforeseen interruptions the staff member may apply to extend the SSP period or to have the days re-credited.¹

Medical and Risk Assessment

28. Staff, who have a current workers' compensation claim at the time of SSP or an existing medical condition, must contact the Return to Work Co-ordinator in HRS prior to departure. Commencement of the SSP will be dependent on medical clearance.
29. Staff, who incur an injury while on SSP, should contact the Return to Work Co-ordinator and refer to the SSP Procedures for further information.
30. The University reserves the right to recall a staff member to Australia if he/she incurs an injury overseas, and the University judges that the treatment of the injury can be managed more cost effectively in Australia.
31. A staff member may be required to change itinerary or to return to UNE, if, in the view of the University the staff member is, or will be, exposed to significant risks to well-being and safety by visiting a specific country or location during the SSP period.
32. Staff on SSP undertaking fieldwork must comply with the University's Fieldwork Policy where applicable. Prior to the commencement of any fieldwork he/she must, as a minimum, submit a completed Fieldwork Risk Assessment form to the Supervisor for approval.

¹ No additional financial assistance will be provided for re-credited days.

Report

33. Within two months of the return to normal duties the staff member must complete and submit an SSP report to the Head of School and HRS that conforms to the SSP Report pro-forma.
34. The Head of School will provide an evaluative comment on the report within four weeks of submission. The staff member will sign that they have seen the evaluative comment and submit it to HRS.
35. A copy of the report, together with the SSP Committee Chair's comments, will be forwarded to the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean for information.
36. A supplementary report may be submitted to the Chair of the SSP Committee at any time.
37. If the report is not submitted within two months of returning to normal duties, further SSP accrual will not commence until the date on which the report is submitted to the Head of School.
38. Where there is an outstanding report, no further application for SSP will be considered.
39. A staff member may apply to the Chair of the SSP Committee for an extension to the date for the submission of the report. An extension will not normally be given retrospectively.
40. The Chair of the SSP Committee will present an annual report to the Academic Board summarising the results achieved by all those who undertook SSP in the preceding calendar year. The Chair's report shall contain the précis submitted by the staff member.

Financial Report

41. The financial report will include a written statement detailing any outside earnings and other assistance, including research grants, travel grants and/or scholarships, which relate to the value of travel and accommodation, received by the staff member during SSP.
42. A staff member who accepts a position with an external body must comply with the UNE's Paid Outside Work Policy.
43. The University reserves the right to seek clarification of grants and earnings received while on SSP.
44. The University may seek repayment of the travel grant if, in its view, the financial assistance received is not consistent with University policy or with the goals of the SSP program as set out by the staff member.

Compliance

45. If an SSP Report has not been received from the staff member within six months of the return to normal duties at UNE and no extension has been approved, disciplinary action

may be taken against the staff member. Such action may range from initiation of Unsatisfactory Performance procedures to recovery of any financial assistance provided for the SSP.

46. A deliberate misrepresentation in an application or a report under this policy, or failure to make a good faith attempt to carry out the approved SSP program may constitute unsatisfactory performance or misconduct, as defined in the Agreement, depending upon the gravity of the case.
47. Actions taken in respect of SSP will be subject to the University's monitoring and compliance framework.

Repayment of an SSP Debt

48. Where the staff member does not return to normal duties as required under clause 4, the staff member will repay to UNE any SSP financial assistance (or appropriate proportion as determined by the Chair of the SSP Committee in consultation with the Head of School and PVC/D).

Records

49. A copy of the report, together with the SSP Committee Chair's comments, will be recorded on the staff member's personal file, together with all other documentation relating to a staff member's SSP.

Further Information

Academic Services Unit, HRS, ext 3612 and 3417.