

## Special Studies Program

For the definitions of terms used in this procedures document refer to the <u>University of Sydney (Delegations of Authority - Administrative Functions)</u> Rule 2010 (as amended)

### 1. Conditions

### A. Period and timing of SSP

Ordinarily, the period of time granted for SSP will not exceed six months. A longer period up to twelve months may be approved in exceptional circumstances<sup>1</sup> where the staff member has accrued sufficient entitlement and:

- it is the staff member's first period of SSP at this or any other university and is for the purpose of establishing or consolidating his/her academic standing; and/or
- the intrinsic nature of the project requires more than six months; and/or
- the staff member has held a senior management position (eg Head, Dean) and needs to redevelop research and scholarship.

The staff member will normally be permitted to be absent from duties within a single semester only, that is, the SSP should not cross semesters and should not prevent a staff member from undertaking the full range of teaching, research and administrative duties in the semester immediately preceding or following the semester in which they have taken SSP.

#### B. Leave taken in conjunction with SSP

Staff must take the following minimum amount of annual leave in conjunction with their period of absence on SSP:

- one week annual leave for three months SSP
- two weeks annual leave for six months SSP
- four weeks annual leave for twelve months SSP.

Staff are required to apply for all leave to be taken in conjunction with SSP on a separate leave form to be submitted with their SSP application. All leave taken in conjunction with SSP requires specific approval at the time the SSP application is approved. This includes applications for annual leave, long service leave and leave without pay. Requests for additional leave submitted after SSP is approved will not normally be considered.

### C. SSP for staff holding senior management positions

Staff appointed to senior management positions (eg Head, Dean) will not normally be permitted to be absent on SSP during the period of the appointment. However, in recognition of the need of such a person to regain currency in their academic discipline, an extended period of SSP (of between six and twelve months) may be granted following such appointments.

### D. Outside earnings by staff while on SSP and the Intellectual Property Rule

The University policy on outside earnings and the <u>Intellectual Property Rule</u> apply to any outside work or research undertaken while on SSP.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This requires approval by the Provost and DVC

#### E. Attendance at conferences during SSP

A staff member must obtain approval if they wish to attend any conference(s) in addition to those included in the approved SSP application (see procedures for variation to approved SSP below). Staff are not entitled to claim a per diem for conferences attended while on SSP.

### F. Reporting on completion of SSP

On return to regular duties following SSP staff are required to:

- submit a written report to the Head within one month. Where appropriate this can be followed with a subsequent report documenting outcomes.
- make a presentation to colleagues and/or students, as appropriate for their teaching and research program, within three months.

The report should provide sufficient detail to enable judgement of the success in carrying out the Special Studies Program and an evaluation of whether it has lead to a development, maintenance or improvement of work related skills, knowledge and competencies. Where the projected program was changed an explanation of the reasons for the change should be given. The Head will provide written comments regarding the extent to which the stated objectives have been achieved before forwarding the report to the Faculty Committee for consideration. Staff may be asked to resubmit if their report is considered unsatisfactory.

When they are satisfied with the report, the Faculty Committee will forward the report summary to the Publications Office for use in University publications as deemed appropriate. A copy of the report will also be sent to the HR Service Centre for placement on the staff member's file.

Future applications for SSP will be considered in light of previous reports as well as other information provided with the application. Staff should therefore retain a copy of their report. An application for SSP will not be considered if the report from a previous program has not been submitted.

If the outcome of a staff member's SSP is deemed to be unsatisfactory, including not providing an SSP report, the University's provisions for handling unsatisfactory performance may be followed. In addition, the staff member will normally be required to reimburse the travel and living expenses amounts paid by the University.

#### G. Period of duty to be served after return from SSP

SSP is approved on the condition that the staff member undertakes to resume normal duties in the University on completion of the period allowed for SSP, for a period equal to at least the period of the absence.

Staff who do not return to duty at the University following SSP, or who leave before fulfilling the equal period of return requirement will normally be required to reimburse the travel and living expenses paid by the University on a pro rata basis.

There are no other sources of financial support for SSP, other than those indicated below. (Note: set costs will be reviewed annually) Where costs exceed approved funding, staff members will be required to bear the excess costs.

#### A. Airfares/Travel costs

The University will contribute towards an economy class, advance-purchase return airfare **up to** the amounts contained in Schedule A.

Staff may normally apply for airfare/travel cost contributions six weeks ahead of proposed departure date.

### **B.** Living expenses

Staff members will be provided with assistance towards living expenses up to the amount shown in Schedule A for overseas and outside NSW.

Staff may normally draw living expenses contributions six weeks before departure.

### C. Support for family

Financial assistance will be available for a partner and dependant children under the age of 18 years accompanying the staff member on SSP of two months or longer. The University will contribute towards the economy class, advance-purchase return airfare **up to** the amounts contained in Schedule A for each family member accompanying the staff member.

### D. Half salary in advance

A member of staff may elect to be paid fortnightly during their SSP at half the normal rate with the remaining portion payable in advance without income tax being withheld. The half-salary in advance may be released within six weeks of departure. Staff members who wish to receive the half-salary in advance free of tax are required to provide the University with the relevant tax year's *PAYG withholding variation short application* form approved by the Australian Tax Office. This form may be found on the Australian Tax Office's Forms and Services webpage under *PAYG Withholding*.

Please be aware that the application procedure to obtain this approval may take up to two months. It is therefore recommended that staff members who wish to apply for a tax exemption should do so as early as possible.

The half-salary in advance will be shown separately on the staff member's Group Certificate under the heading "Allowances". Amounts shown under this heading will be deemed to be assessable for taxation at the end of the tax year in which they are paid to the staff member.

It is left to the staff member to claim expenses incurred during their SSP as deductions against the half-salary in advance. Retention of receipts or similar documents is essential for the purpose of claiming these expenses as a deduction for income tax purposes.

It is important to note that this information is not intended to replace advice from your taxation advisers. You should seek your own taxation advice if you have any further queries on this matter.

If you have further queries in regards to this, please contact the <u>Australian Taxation Office</u> in Upper Mt Gravatt;

**ATO** 

Income Tax Withholding Variation Section

PO Box 9990, Upper Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122

Phone: 1300 360 221

### E. Supplementary funding of SSP

a) Use of research and consulting accounts

Staff members are permitted to supplement their SSP funding through other appropriate accounts such as those for research, consulting and staff development.

Approval to use supplementary funds from **any** source must be obtained from the Head. To obtain approval the staff member must submit to the Head:

- a budget detailing the extra costs envisaged
- the account number(s) where the supplementation is to be charged; and
- a brief signed statement that the costs are additional to those detailed in sections A, B and C above and relate directly to the staff member's approved SSP program.

### b) Exceptional circumstances

In cases of exceptional financial hardship staff may make an application for financial assistance. Such applications are considered by the Faculty Committee who make a recommendation to the Provost and DVC for approval. A staff member must be able to demonstrate financial need.

### F. Other funding-related issues:

a) Taxation

The amounts paid by the University towards travel costs and living expenses are paid without deduction of taxation instalments and will be shown in the 'travelling or other allowances' section of the Payment Summary to enable a staff member to claim travel expenses against these payments. The amounts will be taxed where they are not offset by allowable expenditure ie they need to be substantiated by evidence of costs incurred. Please contact the <u>Australian Taxation Office</u> for advice regarding SSP and taxation. Staff are advised to retain receipts for their expenditure.

### b) Per diems

Under no circumstances will a per diem allowance be paid to a staff member who is undertaking SSP, whether in Australia or overseas.

### 3. Insurance

Staff members on SSP while fulfilling their University employment duties are entitled to workers' compensation benefits in accordance with Workers Compensation legislation. Any member of staff who sustains an injury while participating in SSP should immediately contact the <a href="Audit and Risk Management Office">Audit and Risk Management Office</a> for advice regarding entitlements, procedures etc. Failure to do so may affect a staff member's access to workers compensation benefits.

In addition, the University maintains a travel insurance policy on behalf of its employees. This cover is in effect whilst employees are travelling and residing outside Australia on SSP for periods up to 180 days at any one time. The policy is in force 24 hours a day until the staff member returns to his/her normal residence or place of employment. The insurance coverage is subject to the travel insurance policy's conditions and exclusions. The policy does not provide coverage for:

- a) high-risk recreational activities,
- b) any associated holiday travel undertaken during the journey or
- c) any person(s) who accompany the staff member on SSP.

The staff member will be responsible for arranging any additional travel insurance that may be required.

The approval of the SSP itself is sufficient to effect the insurance cover, and there is no need to advise the <u>Audit and Risk Management Office</u> unless the staff member expects to be outside Australia for a period of more than 180 days on SSP. Employees requiring cover for trips of more than 180 days must contact the Audit and Risk Management Office prior to their departure

For details of the University's insurance cover see: <a href="http://www.usyd.edu.au/audit\_risk/insurance/travel/index.shtml">http://www.usyd.edu.au/audit\_risk/insurance/travel/index.shtml</a>

### 4. Travel to Restricted Areas

The University has a duty of care for the health, safety and well being of all persons travelling on University business and as such the University has an obligation to:

- 1. identify potential dangers or risks present in particular geographical areas where University travelers may travel;
- 2. advise such travelers on the potential risks they may face; and
- 3. take reasonable measures to control risks, where possible.

Travel to restricted areas will be governed by the University's Policy on Travel to Restricted Areas or in the absence of such a policy by the travel advisories of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade ("DFAT").

## 5. Applications

Applications are normally called for twice a year, once in March for the first six months of the following year and once in September, for the second six months of the following year. Faculties may however elect to have only one application round per year (at either of these times). Staff are strongly advised to negotiate with their Head well in advance of this schedule.

Staff seeking approval to carry out a SSP should apply using the <u>Special Studies Program (SSP)</u> <u>application</u> form (available on the <u>HR forms website</u>), submitted to the Head by the closing date. Late applications will not be considered in that round.

## Report of Head

Before consideration by the Faculty Committee, the Head shall comment briefly in the application on the following issues:

- 1. Which other members of the Department will be away during the period (giving names and dates of absence).
- 2. What arrangements will be made concerning the undertaking of the staff member's teaching, the supervision of postgraduate students and other departmental duties and to what extent the functioning of the Department will be impacted.
- 3. The academic value of the proposed leave (consistent with Section 8 of these procedures), to the staff member concerned, to the Department and to the University. In making comments under this heading the Head should consult the senior members of the Department who are best able to offer advice and will indicate the extent of this consultation. Comments should include how the proposed SSP fits with the Department's strategic plan.

4. Whether the proposed SSP will achieve the objective of developing, maintaining or improving employment related skills, knowledge and competencies.

## 7. Composition of the committee

The Faculty Committees will normally comprise of the Heads (or nominees) within the Faculty and be chaired by the Dean (or nominee).

Smaller Faculties may benefit from combining with other Faculties to form a joint committee which would assess the applications from each participating Faculty.

## 8. Criteria for approval

An application can only be approved if it would result in a significant benefit to the staff member's research, or other scholarly activities beyond that which would occur in the course of the staff member's normal University activities.

Specifically, the Faculty Committee must be satisfied that the following eight criteria have been met.

- 1. The proposed SSP activities are academically sound and essentially concerned with research and/or scholarly activities,
- 2. The location(s) for the SSP is/are well suited to the proposed activities and the period requested is appropriate.
- 3. The proposed program will enhance the contribution of the staff member to research and/or scholarship with significant benefit to the Department and the University.
- 4. The staff member has the capacity to make effective use of the opportunity, having either a proven and sustained record of productivity in research and/or scholarship or having considerable potential for such achievement.
- 5. The staff member has the support of the Head and the SSP is consistent with the Department's needs and strategic plan.
- 6. The staff member has successfully completed any similar activities previously undertaken, including submission of reports.
- 7. That satisfactory arrangements have been made with regard to the staff member's teaching, the supervision of postgraduate students (including the appointment of an alternative supervisor) and other departmental duties.
- 8. Consideration has been given to the health, safety and wellbeing of a staff member in geographical areas identified as posing a potential danger or high risk. Travel to restricted areas will be governed by the University's Policy on Travel to Restricted Areas or in the absence of such a policy by the travel advisories of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade ("DFAT").

Dependant upon the level of funding available in a Faculty for SSP and/or the Faculties ability to sustain the absence of all eligible applicants, it may be the case that some applications that have met the above criteria may not be able to be approved.

In cases where a Faculty cannot approve all applications that have met the above criteria, it is recommended that priority go to applicants who are submitting their first SSP application and to applicants who have a strong record of research output. Applicants who have met all criteria but have been unable to be approved should be given priority in the next application round (assuming of course that they again meet all of the above criteria).

Documentation confirming the outcome of each application for SSP considered by the Faculty Committee, including reasons for the decision and details of any approved SSP, is to be forwarded from the Faculty Committee to the HR Service Centre for placement on the staff member's file.

For details of circumstances in which arrangements other than SSP may be more appropriate (eg SDO/A, secondment, staff exchange), please refer to Appendix 1.

## 9. Dispute Resolution

In the case of disputes relating to decisions about SSP, a joint meeting of the Provost and DVC, the Dean of the Faculty concerned and one other Dean nominated by the Provost and DVC will adjudicate.

## 10. Variation to approved program

Variations to an approved SSP will only be permitted if formally approved. The Head may approve any minor variation to the program, while major variations to SSP will require a new application (refer to Appendix 2 for guidelines on what constitutes a major or minor variation). Requests for additional leave submitted after SSP is approved will not normally be considered.

In cases where a variation to an approved SSP is approved, documentation confirming the details of the variation is to be forwarded by the Head to the HR Service Centre for placement on the staff member's file.

Staff members should note that variations to an approved SSP may result in the need to repay significant sums of money to the University.

## 11. Return to regular duties

Following an approved period of SSP, the staff member must fulfil all requirements in terms of reporting and period of service as set out in parts F and G of 'Section 1. Conditions' in these procedures.

## Administration

## Background/Context

In conjunction with the revised SSP policy, these procedures replace the SSP policy that was originally approved in 1994 and is designed to assist the University to maintain this important academic activity. These updated procedures clarify the responsibilities of academic staff undertaking SSP and provides a fair and equitable process for dealing with applications.

## 1 Authority/consultation

These procedures has been developed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Employee Relations) in conjunction with: the Academic Staffing Committee, the Pro-Vice-Chancellors (College); the HR Director's Unit; Deans; College Administration Managers; Financial Services, Remuneration Services; the HR Services Team Managers; and the Industrial Relations Office.

2	Management	responsibility
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Deans

## 3 Implementation responsibility

Deans

### 4 Dates

Approval	
By	Professor Ann Brewer
Dy	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Infrastructure)
Date	10 October 2006
Signature	

#### **Date of Effect**

Date: At Faculty discretion, but no later than September 2005

### **Proposed Date of Review**

Date 10 October 2007

## 5 References

- A Policies, procedures etc which will be superseded by this document
  - Special Studies Program (Study Leave) Policy and Procedures June 1994
- B Relevant industrial awards/agreements
  - NA
- C Other related policies/references
- Outside Earnings of Academic Staff Policy 2011
- University of Sydney (Intellectual Property) Rule 2002 (as amended)
- Special Studies Program Policy

### Appendix 1

In the following circumstances arrangements other than SSP are more appropriate.

- 1. Where a staff member is to participate in an important conference or meeting or to undertake academic community service (for example as an examiner, adviser or consultant) short periods of Special Duty Overseas/Australia are appropriate.
- 2. For the purpose of writing up work it may be possible for the Head to rearrange duties to allow adequate uninterrupted time. It is in such periods as well as in the normal course of duties, that new coursework should be developed, and degree study, creative work or research be pursued.
- 3. Where the staff member is to work for the institution visited for a significant period of time and salary and/or reimbursement of costs are available, leave without pay for part or all of the period may be appropriate. Alternatively, secondment arrangements are possible, whereby the staff member remains on the University's payroll and the institution being visited reimburses the University for the staff member's services.
- 4. Where it can be arranged between individuals or departments, and all affected parties agree, staff exchanges are possible. In this case each individual remains on his or her home institution's payroll while fulfilling a full range of duties and responsibilities for, and defined by, the host institution.

Details of the arrangements for 3 and 4 above should be obtained from the HR Service Centre and negotiated with the Head. Applications should be sent to the Dean for approval.

### Appendix 2

Examples of 'major variations' to SSP include (but are not limited to):

- substitution of a different project for the approved project
- move to a different country
- change of institution
- attendance at extra conference(s) totalling 10 working days or more
- changing the semester/session(s) in which the SSP will occur
- varying the duration by 10 working days or more.

Examples of 'minor variations' to SSP include (but are not limited to):

- a variation to the dates for the SSP within the same semester/session which changes the duration by less than 10 working days
- attendance at extra conference(s) totalling less than 10 working days
- inclusion of short visits to additional institutions and countries (less than 10 working days in duration)
- cancellation of a portion of the program (less than 10 working days in duration).

# Schedule A

Type of financial support	Amounts
Airfares/Travel costs	A\$1,000 for travel in Australia, the Pacific and South East Asia;
	A\$2,800 for travel elsewhere overseas.
	For other forms of travel within Australia reimbursement or payment of costs may be made up to $A$1,000$ .
Living Expenses	Up to A\$800 per month pro rata, for overseas and outside NSW.
Support for family	A\$700 for travel in Australia, the Pacific and South East Asia;
	A\$1,500 for travel elsewhere overseas.

Note: These levels of financial support will be reviewed annually.