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Educational Leave Policy Discussion

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Submitted By

Rob Yarbrough, Michael Moore, Robert Costomiris, Michelle Haberland, M.J. LaMontagne, Kathleen Comerford, and Scott Beck

Educational Leave Policy

Submitted by: Rob Yarbrough

10/3/2012

Discussion:

In a memo dated Sept. 7, 2012, Provost Bartels expressed concerns that she and President Keel share regarding criteria for Educational Leave. Specifically, the memo noted that “The problem with the criteria is that it is difficult to differentiate normal expectations for scholarship and creative activity related to promotion, tenure, and faculty role responsibilities/expectations from expectations for scholarship and creative activity meriting additional time, resources, and support.”

What criteria should be used to evaluate Educational Leave proposals? In addition, from where should those criteria originate (e.g. departments, the college level, the Provost’s office)? Should there be a uniform set of requirements/evaluation criteria for all proposals across the university? Who is ultimately responsible for approving or not approving applications for leave? Given that no university resources are allocated for Educational Leave, what specific role should the Provost and President play in the approval process?

Rationale:

Undoubtedly, most of the university community views the return of Educational Leave as a welcome development. However, given the confusion engendered during the recent round of proposal reviews and President Keel’s oft-stated commitment to decentralized decision-making (i.e. criteria coming from department and college levels), a discussion of this topic at the Faculty Senate seems warranted. We expect this discussion might help with “the process of clarifying expectations immediately with the hope that we can move forward quickly to entertain new proposals for Fall 2013.” (Provost Bartel’s memo 9/7/12).

Rob Yarbrough

Michael Moore

Robert Costomiris

Michelle Haberland

MJ LaMontagne

Kathleen Comerford

Scott Beck

Response:

10/27/2012: 9. Discussion: Educational Leave Policy Rob Yarbrough (COSM):

“In a memo dated Sept. 7, 2012, Provost Bartels expressed concerns that she and President Keel share regarding criteria for Educational Leave.

Specifically, the memo noted that ‘The problem with the criteria is that it is difficult to differentiate normal expectations for scholarship and creative activity related to promotion, tenure, and faculty role responsibilities/expectations from expectations for scholarship and creative activity meriting additional time, resources, and support.’ What criteria should be used to evaluate Educational Leave proposals? In addition, from where should those criteria originate (e.g. departments, the college level, the Provost’s office)? Should there be a uniform set of requirements/evaluation criteria for all proposals across the university? Who is ultimately responsible for approving or not approving applications for leave? Given that no university resources are allocated for Educational Leave, what specific role should the Provost and President play in the approval process?”

Yarbrough then asked if Provost Bartels could give an update on what has been done since September regarding this issue. Provost Bartels said that the Deans’ Council had asked for a joint meeting with the Faculty Welfare Committee to further look at the issue to see if we can clarify some of the things that might be helpful for the decision-making process. They have been looking at other institutions’ educational leave policies to develop a clearer sense of what the expectations should be at the end of the leave time in terms of what the faculty member should produce, and how and by whom it will be decided whether resources exist to support the leave, and how and by whom oversight of the whole leave process will be conducted. There is also ongoing discussion of how to determine what activities require and/or justify educational leave. They also want to make sure that the process is conducted similarly by all colleges. Yarbrough asked if

she foresaw some flexibility across colleges in regards to how they define criteria, and to clarify her comment about who decides if resources are available: He said that particular departments would be “pick up the slack,” and asked how higher echelons, then, could be valid decision-makers given that situation. Provost Bartels agreed that “there should be a fair amount of decision-making done at that [department] level” as the current plan is structured. But deans and Academic Affairs have to be sure that we are not committing ourselves to something that we really can’t support so as to avoid a bombardment of “Oh, we really didn’t mean it, that we couldn’t cover it, now we need this.” She’s also concerned about fairness and avoiding “serendipity decision-making,” like who got there first with their proposal, and wants to ensure that at the department and college levels there is good analysis that these are priority things to support, and that they do not put a burden that may not be appropriate on an entire department.

Robert Costomiris (CLASS) asked Provost Bartels what she would tell people who are currently thinking of applying for an educational leave. Provost Bartels thought they should continue to put forward proposals via the existing process. As the process is refined, they may be asked to provide additional materials, and lower units to provide additional materials to show how the leave will be covered. She’s also concerned about the number of leaves that might in progress at any given time, not only because of concerns about covering them, “but also because of the message it sends when it’s made public that these are occurring. . . . if the Board of Regents says how can we do like 50 of these things at one time. Then the idea that we are short on faculty, need additional resources . . . might actually raise some undesirable questions we don’t want to have to answer.”

Marc Cyr (CLASS) noted that a colleague had just asked him – since he was “already in deep doo-doo” – to make a suggestion: Would it be possible to support educational leave with summer incentive monies? Provost Bartels said, “What a novel thought!” There was no further comment. Yarbrough noted that the Provost’s September memo mentioned the difficulty of comparing different proposals for educational leave. He asked if she could give an example of a legitimate proposal for educational leave as opposed to something that faculty should just simply be doing already. That seemed to be the crux of the memo.

Provost Bartels said she has probably had some change of heart since writing that sentence. That said, it is a question of things like “I want to have this semester off because I’m going to finish an article . . . that I haven’t gotten a chance to get around to” versus “I really need to get up to speed on a particular new concept and new development that is happening in the field so that I can improve the teaching that we’re doing in the program and the curriculum that’s there. I need to be able to have intense time to study that.” Or, better examples, “I might need to go and travel to look and see what’s going on with that,” or “I really have a commitment to write a particular significant work and I really need uninterrupted time.” She felt all would agree those were more

meritorious than “[I] just didn’t kind of get the article written and maybe I could have a semester off to do that.”

Tim Teeter (CLASS) asked whether the decision of whether a leave was validly coverable would be made at a level higher than the department involved. Provost Bartels said they want to be shown plans for coverage by chairs and deans. This didn’t mean higher levels would be making the decision, only that they want to be able to ask the questions that will ensure coverage without compromising programs and the university’s mission. She also wants to avoid overloading faculty who will cover their colleagues’ leaves.