

Competitive Sabbatical Leave Applications
Factors that Made a Difference
February 2011

There were more meritorious applications for full-pay, one-semester sabbaticals than could be recommended for the ten available sabbaticals. While some sabbaticals stood out as significantly higher ranked than others, and some were significantly lower ranked than others, there were several applications on which opinion was very close and about which the committee felt torn in recommending one over another. While there is no single factor or set of factors that each and every member of the sabbatical committee found decisive in every case, here is a summary of factors that had an impact on the committee's recommendations and which future applicants might find helpful to consider.

1. A track record of productivity in the activities for which a sabbatical is sought is likely to persuade the committee that the sabbatical will be put to productive use. An applicant who can demonstrate that he or she has used whatever time and resources have been available without the sabbatical to do scholarly and creative work, to take advantage of professional development opportunities and to seek funding and support is much more likely to be successful in being recommended for sabbatical than an applicant who has not consistently attempted to keep his or her productivity going after an award of tenure. In making that judgment, it is helpful for the committee to have the applicant's CV available. Applicants who fail to include a complete CV may be overlooked because committee members cannot make informed decisions about past performance. Other factors being equal, the applicant who seeks a sabbatical to "jump start" flagging productivity is not as likely as the applicant with a demonstrated history of continuing productivity to be recommended for a competitive sabbatical.
2. Other factors being equal, proposals for activities that require travel for work in labs or libraries or extended field work are more likely to be recommended than proposals that can be accomplished without extended periods away from campus. An applicant who can demonstrate that he or she has already applied for, been granted or received commitments or funding for travel or field work or fellowships elsewhere has an advantage over an applicant who could accomplish his or her proposed project on campus, perhaps by seeking a change in assignment rather than a sabbatical leave. (It should be noted that an applicant who seeks time to travel without a clear plan about the project that will result from such travel is not likely to be recommended over applicants who may not need to travel, but do have a specific and realistic work plans.)
3. Plans that seem realistic are more likely to receive recommendation than plans that appear vague or overly ambitious. The more the applicant has done to move the work ahead prior to the beginning of the sabbatical, the better chance that applicant has of showing the committee that the plan is realistic. Documentation of commitments (or at least applications) for grants or lab space or fellowships help the committee to make such judgments.
4. Other factors being equal, the committee is more likely to recommend applicants whose proposals would bring added recognition or prestige to both the university and the applicant.
5. The committee is made up of representatives from each of the colleges and schools. That helps to bring a variety of experiences and perspectives to the committee. However, an applicant should make every effort to clearly explain factors about his or her discipline that may be unfamiliar to some of the committee members and could adversely affect their evaluation of the application (e.g. whether contracts with publishers typically are awarded prior to the completion of a manuscript).