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**TO:** Karen Gipson, Chair, ECS/UAS; Gayle Davis, Provost

**FROM:** Robert Hollister, Chair, FSBC

**SUBJECT:** Fiscal Support for Sabbaticals

**DATE:** April 17, 2015

**CC:** Lisa Surman Haight, Senate Assistant

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*Administrative Handbook*

*Chapter 4, Section 2.30 – Benefits*

**4. Sabbatical Leave.** *A sabbatical is defined as a period of release to provide an opportunity for the faculty member to learn, develop or enhance understanding or skills that will improve the applicant's teaching, scholarly/creative and/or professional competence beyond their normal workload (as described in Section D). Sabbaticals are part of the university's responsibility in relation to faculty growth and development. Such leaves contribute to the accomplishment of these ends by enabling the faculty to undertake specific, planned activities involving study, research, or creative work of mutual benefit to the applicant and to Grand Valley State University. The provision of resources necessary for sabbatical leaves is a high priority for the University.*

In 2013, at Provost Davis's request, GVSU modified the procedures by which sabbaticals were awarded. The most significant change was to have the campus-wide Sabbatical Review Committee review and rank sabbatical proposals. The main purpose of these changes was to help ensure that (1) all funded sabbaticals are worthy of support from GVSU's finite financial resources, and (2) that all sabbatical proposals are held to a consistent campus-wide standard. On March 7, 2014 ECS/UAS tasked FSBC to evaluate the fiscal feasibility of funding sabbaticals and the sabbatical approval process at peer institutions. We summarize our findings below.

FSBC recognizes the need to use our financial resources wisely and, therefore, strongly supports the recently enacted sabbatical review process. Only quality sabbaticals should be supported.

We acknowledge that in the short term, sabbaticals take tenured faculty out of the classroom, which may affect the quality of education received by some students for 1-2 semesters. However, in the long-term, sabbaticals significantly enhance faculty members' effectiveness in the classroom, creating value added for students and the University.

GVSU's status as a top state university comes, in part, from the professional growth of its faculty and their eagerness to embrace the teacher-scholar model. As a result, GVSU offers students many research and creative opportunities in all areas of study. These opportunities depend upon students receiving hands-on experience, faculty mentoring, and detailed training. To provide these experiences, faculty must be productive scholars. Periodic leaves allow faculty to initiate and sustain ambitious and significant research and creative projects, to take full advantage of external grants and fellowships, and to complete extensive writing projects. Limiting periodic leaves will limit scholarship and has the potential to significantly dilute the student experience.

Upon review of GVSU peer universities, FSBC learned that practices vary so widely among universities that GVSU should not interpret any particular set of policies as a “best practice” or “norm” that we should move toward. Instead, we should establish a sabbatical policy that is consistent with our culture, history, and needs.

FSBC recommends the Provost provide funds for sabbaticals commensurate with the number of approved sabbatical proposals. The same quality standards should apply regardless of the number of sabbatical proposals submitted (greater or fewer than average). Although GVSU's financial resources are finite and must be carefully managed, the cost of funding sabbaticals has historically been manageable. FSBC sees no reason that funding every approved sabbatical will become unmanageable.

We understand that every organization must plan and budget; however, the Provost’s budget should not be considered a hard limit on the number of sabbaticals funded any more than the natural gas budget should be interpreted as a hard limit. GVSU can handle *minor* fluctuations in the number of quality sabbaticals in the same manner all other unexpected expenses are handled. We cannot imagine any situation that would cause an *unanticipated* jump in the number of approved sabbaticals so large that it could not be accommodated in GVSU’s \$350 million budget (except, of course, in cases of financial exigency). We see sabbaticals as a critical component of maintaining the quality of the faculty. Assuming the sabbatical is of high quality, the process is an investment in the long-term health of the University and, as such, is as critical as the maintenance of infrastructure.

FSBC is aware of the current backlog of sabbatical eligible faculty and is not suggesting that GVSU could accommodate all eligible sabbaticals *en masse*. However, considering GVSU historical trends and the improved review process, a flood of approved sabbaticals is unlikely. A more likely scenario is that strong sabbatical requests could gradually increase. FSBC is recommending that the Academic Affairs and Instructional budget be responsive to a potential change over time. A large, unanticipated increase could be fairly handled by delaying sabbaticals and “re-setting the clock” as described in Section 4.F.2 of the Administrative Manual<sup>1</sup>.

Further details on the number of sabbaticals funded, estimated costs of sabbaticals, and practices of peer institutions are attached.

*In summary:* FSBC strongly supports recent initiatives to ensure that only quality sabbaticals are supported. Given GVSU’s history, culture, and mission, we believe that the Provost should make every effort to fund all sabbaticals approved by the University’s Sabbatical Review Committee. The conditions under which GVSU is not able to fund all approved sabbaticals should be exceedingly rare and the result of extraordinary unforeseen events.

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<sup>1</sup> From Administrative Manual Chapter 4, Section 2.30 – Benefits

*A faculty member whose sabbatical is delayed because of staffing problems will not be required to wait an additional 6 years from the later date before becoming eligible to apply for another sabbatical, but will be eligible to apply 6 years from the previous eligibility year provided an approved final report is on file for the delayed sabbatical.*

## Recent History of Supported Sabbaticals at GVSU

The recent numbers of sabbaticals supported by GVSU are listed in **Table 1**. There is a large backlog of faculty that are eligible for sabbatical but do not apply. Although no systematic impediment was identified, it may be useful to further explore why nearly 50% of faculty choose to defer this benefit.

**Table 1.** Number of Tenured Faculty (TF) eligible for sabbatical who take sabbatical. Note that 1/7<sup>th</sup> of all faculty should be eligible for sabbatical in any given year, however not all faculty take a sabbatical when they become eligible and there is a significant backlog of eligible faculty.

Academic Year	Tenured Faculty (TF)	Eligible TF	% of Eligible that take sabbatical	Funded Sabbaticals			1/7 <sup>th</sup> of TF
				Total	Semester	Year	
2006-2007	445	242	54.4%	58	49	9	64
2007-2008	479	197	41.1%	61	58	3	68
2008-2009	501	253	50.5%	56	42	14	72
2009-2010	541	277	51.2%	63	46	17	77
2010-2011	565	291	51.5%	82	67	15	81
2011-2012	582	225	38.7%	64	53	11	83
2012-2013	611	322	52.7%	73	57	16	87
2013-2014	632	259	41.0%	62	53	9	90
2014-2015	654	287	43.9%	60	47	13	93
Average			47.2%	64.3	52.4	11.9	79.5

## What is the Fiscal Cost of Sabbaticals at GVSU

Unlike most benefits afforded faculty, calculating university expenses associated with the awarding of sabbaticals is difficult. We do not have accurate reporting of sabbatical replacement costs. In some cases, a unit does not seek a direct replacement for the semester a faculty member is on sabbatical. Instead, course offerings are shifted to accommodate the sabbatical in a way that students can generally meet curricular needs within the resulting array of offerings. In most cases, a faculty member on sabbatical is replaced by an adjunct or a visitor; we assume the actual cost is between these two costs and likely closer to or below the adjunct replacement cost (**Box 1**). Replacing a faculty member on sabbatical for one semester with a visitor is impractical unless the unit has to replace two faculty on sabbatical and they alternate semesters. Most cases where a visitor is employed are to replace a faculty member on a year-long sabbatical; in these cases the cost of the visitor is primarily paid from the half of the salary not paid to the faculty member on sabbatical.

<b>Box 1.</b> Estimated cost of replacing all faculty on sabbatical with adjuncts or visitors.			
Cost of replacing faculty on sabbatical with adjuncts			
1/7 of Tenured Faculty	credits per semester	Avg. \$ per credit (includes payroll tax)	cost of sabbatical
93	9	\$1,292	\$1,081,404
Cost of replacing faculty on sabbatical with visitors			
1/7 of Tenured Faculty	Avg. \$ per semester (including benefits)		cost of sabbatical
93	\$27,000		\$2,511,000

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## Evaluation of Sabbatical Practices at Peer Institutions

This section reflects on quantitative information collected by the Provost's Office as well as qualitative information collected by FSBC. Information on the number of sabbaticals granted at a university are generally not made readily available and collecting such information is difficult. In 2013, the Provost surveyed a number of institutions about their sabbatical policies; the primary metric reported was the percentage of faculty on sabbatical during any given year as reported in **Table 2**. The table reflects the results of this survey and findings drawn from a 2002 query on an American Association of State Colleges and Universities listserv.

**Table 2.** Percentage of faculty on sabbatical. The information was gathered by the Provost's Office<sup>1</sup>. Using this reporting scheme the percentage of faculty on sabbatical at GVSU would vary between 9-13%.

University	%	University	%
Appalachian State University	4-7%	McNeese State University	3%
Auburn University Montgomery	4-5%	Morehead State University	2%
Bridgewater State College	8%	Northern Michigan University	3%
Central Connecticut State University	6%	Saginaw Valley State University	4%
Cleveland State University	5%	SUNY College at Brockport	5%
Eastern Illinois University	6%	Towson State University	5%
Eastern Michigan University	3%	University of Houston-Victoria	2%
Ferris State University	3%	University of Michigan -Flint	14%
Fort Lewis College	2-5%	University of Nebraska at Omaha	5%
James Madison University	2%	University of Northern Iowa	3%
Lake Superior State University	2%	University of Northern Iowa	3%
Lander University	1-2%	Western Michigan University	4%
Longwood University	3-4%		

<sup>1</sup> Note: The percentages reported are often best guesses by an administrator; sometimes they were the percentage of tenure-track faculty; other times they were the percentage of sabbatical eligible faculty.

In 2014, FSBC conducted a survey intended to understand how faculty at other institutions perceived their sabbatical processes. We received responses from faculty at 28 universities, including 10 of our 11 peers. The responses came from faculty, not from the administration. We outline below several factors that affect the sabbatical policies at different universities:

### "EVERYBODY EVENTUALLY" VS. "SAME FACULTY REGULARLY"

Some universities have very high standards for sabbaticals. As a result, only a few extraordinary faculty regularly take a sabbatical. In contrast, other universities approve all sabbaticals of sufficient quality, but delay approved sabbaticals to reduce the number of faculty on sabbatical at any one time (in other words, it is easy to get a sabbatical; but, difficult to take one every seven years).

### DECREASED PAY

Youngstown State only pays faculty 90% of their salary during a one-semester sabbatical, thereby reducing the number of applications. One respondent from Boise State claimed that faculty only received 65% of their salary during sabbatical. We read the policy, and it appears that the 65% rate applies to full-year sabbaticals only; but, not aggressively correcting such misunderstandings could depress demand.

## **SCHEDULING CONFLICTS**

Some faculty are discouraged from formally applying for a sabbatical until all personnel conflicts have been worked out. This artificially depresses the demand for sabbaticals when faculty who teach in less flexible units are effectively prevented from applying.

## **"HIDDEN" SABBATICALS**

Professors at two universities where sabbaticals have become almost non-existent have reported that units have begun unofficially providing sabbatical leave. Thus, the official percentage of faculty on sabbatical may not be a good approximation of the actual number of faculty on sabbatical.

## **EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS**

At several universities, the number of faculty on sabbatical each year is dictated externally. These external constraints can be formal (e.g., the state government or a union contract), or informal (extremely limited funding from the state).

## **SABBATICAL VS TOTAL COMPENSATION**

Universities have different mixes of salary and benefits. Any university's sabbatical policy should be viewed in light of how sabbaticals contribute to the faculty's total compensation which varies greatly among institutions.

Thus, in our opinion, the percentage of faculty on sabbatical should be used only to determine whether GVSU's policies are *grossly* out of line with other universities nationwide. We conclude that GVSU provides more sabbatical opportunities than most (but not all<sup>1</sup>) of our self-identified peers and for this we are very grateful. It is apparent from conversations with Provost Davis that the value of sabbaticals is recognized and every attempt will be made to support all sabbaticals recommended by the University's Sabbatical Review Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Montclair State, Bridgewater State, and UM-Flint also provide a similar amount of support of sabbaticals.