

A Reader's Guide to Leaves and Course Buy-outs for Faculty Members

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Union provides a variety of opportunities for leaves of absence and course buy-outs that support faculty members in pursuing research and other professional development opportunities as well as in taking personal and medical leaves. The College wishes to support the needs and interests of faculty members, recognizing that activities undertaken with leaves and course buy-outs, often with funding from prestigious fellowships and grants, provide value for the College as well as for individual faculty members. At the same time, there are important benefits to students and colleagues associated with having faculty members present on campus and in the classroom. In implementing leave and course buy-out policies, the academic deans seek balance of these priorities. Creative combination of sabbatical leaves, teaching credit policies (see the teaching credit approval memo on the Policies & Forms website), and other types of leave and course buy-outs support a wide-range of faculty interests and activities.

This document supplements the Faculty Manual and the Human Resources website by providing answers to frequently asked questions about leaves and by describing common practices used by the academic administration in implementing leave policies. It also describes our practices for reducing course load through salary reduction or other funding.

Please note that leaves and course buy-outs require written approval in advance, to be arranged as far in advance as practicable (please check relevant sections of the Faculty Manual for any deadlines.) Sabbatical leaves are the only type of leave explicitly restricted to tenure-track faculty members. Please note that leaves occur within appointments; they do not extend appointments. Also, please note that normally the tenure-clock is not delayed for any type of leave; however, in the instance of a very lengthy medical leave (e.g. half a year), a tenure-track faculty member should discuss the possibility of delaying the tenure clock with the Dean of the Faculty.

The Human Resources office is the primary contact point for medical leaves and the dean of the faculty is the primary contact point for all other leaves and course buy-outs. Each request is reviewed on a case by case basis.

This list of leaves is not exhaustive of all types of leave to which a faculty member may be entitled by law. It does not replace or replicate relevant text from the Faculty Manual or the Human Resources (HR) website, which are definitive. Implementation practices are at administrative discretion and therefore are subject to revision and do not necessarily apply in all circumstances.

Medical and Personal Leaves:

A. Paid medical leave

Policy Reference: Faculty Manual Section I.III.K, "Short term disability insurance."

- Paid medical leave ("short term disability insurance") applies to the medical condition of an employee only and does not apply to the medical conditions of family members. There is no paid leave related to the medical conditions of family members.

- Paid medical leave provides the pay that covers leave associated with the medical conditions related to giving birth; there is no leave that is given the name “maternity” or “paternity” leave. Leaves options related to giving birth consist of paid medical leave, unpaid FMLA leave, and personal leave without pay.
- **Faculty members are not obligated to disclose the nature of a medical condition to anyone other than the HR staff member to whom required medical documentation is delivered.**
- When paid medical leave spans only part of a term, faculty members returning to work or awaiting leave for a medical procedure likely are not teaching for the entire term since they will be on leave for part of the term, but they can fulfill their employment obligations through scholarship, service, advising, and other activities, in consultation with the relevant department chair and the dean of the faculty.
- Tenure clocks have been delayed by a year only in rare instances of serious and sustained illness on the part of the faculty member that affects his or her ability to work over a period of at least several months. Tenure clock delays on the basis of the birth of a child (Faculty Manual II.III—third paragraph) are not tied to leaves but rather are available to any eligible faculty member who “has substantial responsibility for the care of a new-born or newly adopted child.”
- Paid medical leave beyond that provided by short term disability leave is funded by long-term disability insurance (see Faculty Manual Section I.III.L.) Employees have the option to contribute to long-term disability insurance to supplement the amount covered by the College.

B. Leave taken under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

Policy Reference: Faculty Manual Section I.VI.A

- FMLA is a Federal law designed to guarantee qualified employees the right to take a certain amount of time off of work without pay for certain serious documented medical situations of the employee or an immediate family member without compromising employment status. The provisions and implementation of FMLA are determined by statute, which informs the College’s policy.
- Paid medical leave for an employee counts towards the total time off provided by FMLA.
- Leave related to a family member’s condition is unpaid. Unpaid leave that is covered by FMLA involves salary reduction at a rate of 1/43 of annual salary per week of leave (there are 43 weeks in a faculty member’s ten-month academic year contract.)
- When FMLA leave spans only part of a term, faculty members likely are not teaching for the entire term since they will be on leave for part of the term, but they can fulfill their employment obligations through scholarship, service, advising, and other activities, in consultation with the relevant department chair and the dean of the faculty.

C. Adoptive parent leave

Policy Reference: Faculty Manual Section I.VI.B

- The one course off provided in the policy described in the Faculty Manual can be taken as five weeks off full-time. With this option, one can either work (which may or may not involve teaching) or take unpaid personal leave during the remainder of the term during which the leave is taken.

D. Personal Leave of Absence without pay

Policy Reference: Faculty Manual Section I.VI.C

- One year of leave taken for personal reasons may be spread out over multiple academic years (i.e., a ½ year leave for two years; ⅓ year leave for 3 years, or 6 individual courses off in different years with reduction of 1/6 of salary per course.)
- See sections below on length & frequency of leaves and effects on sabbaticals and benefits.

Professional Leaves:

A. Sabbatical leaves

Policy Reference: Faculty Manual Section II.VII.A

Note: Sabbatical leave policy pertains to tenure-track faculty members only.

- See the Faculty Manual for eligibility and sabbatical timing options.
- The option of a full-year, half-pay sabbatical creates an opportunity for additional unpaid leave beyond that provided by other forms of unpaid leave.
- Faculty members on sabbaticals are considered to be working in accordance with their regular appointments; sabbaticals are not leaves of absence in the sense that they do not affect employment status or benefits.
- Procedures for applying for sabbaticals and faculty members' sabbatical-related obligations are outlined in a "Sabbatical Request Procedures" memo and form available on the Academic Affairs Policies & Forms website.
- Faculty members on a half-year, full-pay sabbatical are asked to perform service responsibilities equivalent to half of a regular service load for the year. Faculty members taking a one-term, two course mini-sabbatical will be asked to take on a normal level of service during the remaining two terms. Leave from service responsibilities is not extended when a faculty member spreads a sabbatical over more terms.
- Faculty members who are eligible for sabbatical leave but do not take it may choose to request a sabbatical in any subsequent year. However, the faculty member does not accumulate additional years of eligibility (i.e., to be applied to a future sabbatical) if a sabbatical is delayed.
- If a faculty member delays a sabbatical at the request of the College (e.g., service requested by the College as Department Chair or Program Director, spreading out sabbaticals of members of a department eligible for sabbatical simultaneously), then the subsequent sabbatical will revert to the original sabbatical schedule. Such arrangements should be confirmed in writing at the time a decision is made to delay a sabbatical.
- Sabbatical leave eligibility for individual faculty members is recorded in appointment letters, sabbatical approval letters, and letters approving leaves of absences when eligibility is affected by such leaves.
- Please see the section entitled, "Effect of Leaves on Sabbatical Eligibility" below.

B. Leaves without Pay for Professional Development

Policy Reference: Faculty Manual Section II.VII. B.

- One year of leave for the purpose of professional development may be spread out over multiple academic years (i.e., a ½ year leave for two years; ⅓ year leave for 3 years, or individual course buy-outs with reduction of 1/6 of salary per course.)

- See sections below on length & frequency of leaves and effects on sabbaticals and benefits.
- See comment below in “Leaves of Absence for Winners of Prestigious Grants” regarding the option of course buy-out with salary reduction at the rate permitted for prestigious professional activities without external funding.

C. Leaves of Absence for Winners of Prestigious Grants (including fellowships and grant-funded course releases)

Policy Reference: Faculty Manual Section II.VII.C.

Note: Single “course buy-outs” are not considered a “leave of absence” in the sense that the faculty member in question is in residence, participating in other teaching, research, and service activities. This topic is contained in this section since there is no separate section in the Faculty Manual on course buy-outs and this is the most pertinent category for discussion of grant-related course buy-outs.

- Faculty members applying for prestigious grants, including fellowships, are asked to fill out “Grant Proposal Approval Form (GPAF for grants or GPAF-F for fellowships)” available on the grants office website early in the grant or fellowship application process (<http://muse.union.edu/grants/>).
- Prestigious fellowships typically cover only a portion of the faculty member’s salary (see Faculty Manual for information regarding salary supplementation.) A typical salary supplement for a prestigious grant is 1/6 of salary for the year (in many cases, sabbatical, fellowship and salary supplement are combined to comprise full salary.)
- Prestigious grants may provide funding to offset salary reduction associated with course releases (course “buy-outs”). The rate for salary reduction associated with prestigious grants is 1/10 of salary per course. The 1/10 of salary rate for a course-buy-out assumes that regular service activities are still undertaken as well as non-classroom teaching activities such as advising. The buy-out rate is 1/6 of salary per course if all service and non-classroom teaching activities are also being bought out.
- For prestigious professional activities without external funding, course buy-outs can be taken with salary reduction at the prestigious grants course buy-out rate (1/10 of salary per course), with the same expectation of non-classroom teaching and service activities.
- The status of a grant or professional activity as “prestigious” is a judgment call by the dean of the faculty.
- See sections below on length & frequency of leaves and effects on sabbaticals and benefits.

Length and frequency of leaves and course buy-outs

- Length and frequency of medical leaves that qualify as paid short-term disability leave and leaves governed by law, such as the FMLA, are determined by documented medical necessity and by law and are not subject to limitations described below.
- Sabbaticals do not affect eligibility for other leaves or course buy-outs. For example, taking a full-year, half-pay sabbatical as opposed to a half-year or a mini-sabbatical does not reduce eligibility for other types of leave or course buy-outs.
- It is our practice not to approve more than a total of one year of unpaid personal leave and unpaid professional leave **in combination** in a given ten-year period. (Disability, FMLA, and adoptive parent leave described above are not included in this limitation.) The ten-year period is measured starting with the first unpaid leave taken.

- It is our practice not to approve more than a year of prestigious grants leave in any ten-year period (in addition to sabbatical leaves, unpaid leave, and medical leave.) This is extended by an additional four courses to a total of ten courses in a ten-year period when prestigious grants support course buy-outs at a 1/10 salary reduction, with the grant funding benefits for the course buy-out, and with the faculty member reducing only teaching, retaining service, advising, and participation in department and College affairs.
- To summarize, aside from approved medical leave and leaves covered by law, it is our practice not to approve leaves of absence and course buy-outs that exceed two full years in a ten-year period (one for prestigious grants and activities, as determined by the dean of the faculty, and one for unpaid personal and unpaid professional leave combined.) An additional four courses of prestigious grant funded course buy-outs can be taken under the conditions described above. Sabbatical leaves are in addition to these types of leave and course buy-outs.

Effects of leaves on sabbatical eligibility

- According to the Faculty Manual, leaves of absence without salary do not count towards eligibility for sabbatical leaves. In practice, sabbatical eligibility is delayed by a year once a full year of unpaid leave has been taken (we keep track of sabbatical eligibility on a year basis rather than on a term or a course basis.) Leaves of absence and course buy-outs with salary, such as those funded by grants and fellowships, do not affect sabbatical eligibility.
- Medical leaves that qualify as paid short-term disability leave and leaves governed by law, such as the FMLA, typically do not affect sabbatical eligibility.

Effects of leaves on benefits

- Benefits typically are affected by unpaid leaves. See the Faculty Manual and consult with HR for details.
- Full-time health-care benefits typically apply to employees working at least two-thirds time in an academic year; half-time health-care benefits typically apply to employees working half-time in an academic year. Retirement benefit contributions are typically prorated with salary. As with all benefit eligibility matters, consult HR for a definitive policy statement.