

SPECIAL STUDIES PROGRAM POLICY 2015

The Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, as delegate of the Senate of the University of Sydney, adopts the following policy.

Dated: 10 December 2015

Last amended: 21 June 2017 (administrative amendments)

Signature:

Name: Professor Stephen Garton

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1 Name of policy

This is the Special Studies Program Policy 2015.

2 Commencement

This policy commences on 1 February 2016.

3 Policy is binding

Except to the extent that a contrary intention is expressed, this policy binds the University and its staff.

4 Statement of intent

This policy:

- (a) affirms the University's commitment to providing all academic staff with the opportunity to maintain and enhance their professional skills to support the University's goals; and
- (b) sets out the University's objectives for special studies programs, and the terms upon which such programs may be undertaken.

5 Application

This policy applies to all special studies programs.

6 Definitions

academic planning and development review	means the process of performance review, planning and development, and evaluation for academic staff, as provided in the <i>Performance Planning and Development Policy 2012</i> .
Dean	means: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• in relation to a faculty, the Dean of the relevant faculty;• in relation to a University School, the Head of School and Dean (University school) of the relevant University school
Deputy Dean	means: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• in relation to a faculty, the Deputy Dean of the relevant faculty;• in relation to a University school, the Deputy Head of School and Deputy Dean (University school) of the relevant University School
faculty	means a faculty or University School, as established in each case by its constitution or, where applicable, a board of studies.
Head	means, as appropriate, a Head of School or equivalent budget unit.
research-only	means a research-only position or role defined as such by the University's enterprise agreement or University policy.
SSP	means special studies program, which is a period of release from normal duties to allow academic staff engaged in or resuming teaching and research, or teaching-focused roles to undertake a

structured program of research and related scholarly work.

SSP Committee means a committee established by a Dean or Deans in accordance with the requirements of clause 12 of this policy.

7 Purposes of SSP

- (1) SSP is a benefit that may be offered to eligible staff when circumstances permit. It is not an entitlement.
- (2) SSP is designed to assist research and teaching academics to balance both activities and genuinely require a period of time to allow them to focus on research.
- (3) An SSP must be intended and designed to achieve one or more of the following objectives:
 - (a) maintaining or achieving currency in a staff member's academic discipline;
 - (b) establishing links with other institutions and organisations through engagement with leaders in the field;
 - (c) undertaking a major scholarly activity, such as writing for publication or developing and producing substantial creative works;
 - (d) investigating and developing new and innovative ways to enhance teaching and student learning;
 - (e) acquiring new skills and knowledge applicable to teaching and research; or
 - (f) consolidating and writing up existing research.

8 Alternatives to SSP

- (1) SSP may not be the most appropriate arrangement to achieve the desired academic outcome. Before SSP is applied for or approved, those involved should consider whether alternative arrangements are available.
- (2) Alternative arrangements may include:
 - (a) a travel requisition, where a staff member is to participate in a range of conferences or various periods of fieldwork;
 - (b) rearranging a staff member's duties to allow adequate uninterrupted time, where time is required to complete a substantial work;
 - (c) a period of leave without pay, where a staff member is to visit an institution for a significant period of time and salary or reimbursement of costs are available;
 - (d) secondment arrangements, whereby the staff member remains on the University's payroll and the institution being visited reimburses the University for the staff member's services; or
 - (e) staff exchanges, which may be available if all affected parties agree. In such cases the 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.

9 Eligibility

- (1) SSP is only available to eligible staff who meet the requirements set out in this clause.
- (2) The following staff may apply for SSP:
 - (a) Academic staff with continuing appointments who are currently engaged in positions that are classified as either teaching and research, or teaching-focused.
 - (b) Academic staff with fixed-term appointments:
 - (i) who have served for three or more years; and
 - (ii) whose contracts have at least two more years remaining; and
 - (iii) who are engaged in positions that are classified as either teaching and research, or teaching-focused role.
 - (c) Academic staff currently engaged in positions that are classified as research-only and qualify under 9 (3) below:
 - (i) who are resuming a substantive teaching and research appointment, providing the proposed period of SSP is not immediately after the cessation of employment as a research-only academic (unless there are exceptional circumstances approved by the dean and Provost); and
 - (ii) that appointment is for three or more further years.
 - (d) Academic staff currently engaged in management roles (e.g. Head or Pro-Dean):
 - (i) who are resuming or taking-up a substantive teaching and research appointment; and
 - (ii) that appointment is for three or more further years.
 - (e) A staff member re-appointed as a Head, Deputy Dean or Associate Dean may also apply for a period SSP falling within the term of their reappointment, subject to the approval of the relevant Dean.
- (3) Academic staff whose positions are classified as research-only are not eligible to apply for a period of SSP that would take effect in the period they are classified as research-only.
 - (a) This includes:
 - (i) staff with substantive teaching and research positions who have been transferred to research-only positions for a fixed-term period, such as those who have been awarded competitive research fellowships; and
 - (ii) staff engaged in research-only positions who undertake some teaching and supervision, since it is normal for such staff to devote up to 20% of their workload to administration, supervision and teaching.
 - (b) There are two exceptions:
 - (i) University of Sydney Equity Fellows, who will be eligible to accumulate SSP entitlement at the rate for teaching and research academics during the term of their Fellowship; and
 - (ii) Research only Fellowships funded by external competitive grants where the granting body stipulates a minimum of 0.2 FTE (of a full time role) for teaching purposes. Such staff will accumulate an

entitlement at the pro rata rate for the proportion of their Fellowship stipulated for teaching provided other conditions for award of SSP are met.

- (4) Staff members applying for SSP should have:
 - (a) satisfactorily completed probation;
 - (b) completed confirmation;
 - (c) served for three years or more; and
 - (d) undertaken at least two academic planning and development reviews in the three years before application.
- (5) Staff who have previously taken SSP but have not provided an appropriate report in relation to it are ineligible to apply for a further SSP until such a report has been provided to, and accepted by, their faculty.
- (6) At least three years must have elapsed between the conclusion of a staff member's previous SSP (including SSP undertaken at another university) and the commencement of a proposed SSP, except in the following circumstances:
 - (a) where the staff member's previous period of SSP was less than 4 months because the academic or practical needs of the project concerned justified a short period of SSP (e.g. research involving the breeding of plants and animals with only a narrow window of opportunity or where access to advanced instrumentation is required but its availability is limited, such as a radio telescope) or their carer responsibilities at the time were such that they were unable to take any more SSP; or
 - (b) where there is documented evidence that the staff member was required to defer a period of approved SSP because of the organisational needs of their school or faculty.

10 Accruing SSP

- (1) SSP accrues at the rate of two months for each year of academic service in a teaching and research, teaching-focussed, or academic management role, up to a maximum of twelve months.
- (2) Staff employed part-time accrue SSP on a pro-rata basis. For example, a half-time staff member accrues SSP at the rate of two months for each year of relevant academic service, up to a maximum of twelve months, but during a period of SSP is only paid a half-time salary.
- (3) SSP does not accrue for any periods of academic service in research-only positions except:
 - (a) in the case of University of Sydney Equity Fellowships;
 - (b) when the staff member has externally competitive funding that provides for periods of teaching relief. In such cases SSP will accrue pro-rata with the extent to which this teaching relief covers the staff member's usual teaching duties (e.g. if it fully covers the staff member's usual teaching load, accrual of SSP will be at the rate of 100%); or
 - (c) in the case of research only fellowships funded by external competitive grants where the granting body stipulates a minimum of 0.2 FTE (of a full time role) for teaching purposes. In such cases SSP will accrue pro rata with the proportion of the fellowship stipulated for teaching, provided other conditions for award of SSP are met.

- (4) SSP does not accrue during a period of absence on SSP or leave without pay, except for parental or carer's leave without pay.
- (5) Where a staff member has held an appointment in another Australian higher education institution immediately prior to taking up an appointment at this University, up to six months' SSP credit may be granted by the relevant dean provided that:
 - (a) no more than two months has elapsed between ceasing employment with the releasing institution and commencing employment at this University;
 - (b) the category of previous employment was one which would be eligible for SSP at this University;
 - (c) the staff member has completed probation and confirmation; and
 - (d) the staff member has served at least three years at this University.

11 Criteria for approving SSP

- (1) An application for SSP may only be approved if it would result in a significant benefit to a staff member's research or other scholarly activities beyond that which would occur in the course of the staff member's normal University activities.
- (2) All of the following conditions must also be met.
 - (a) The proposed activities must be academically sound and essentially concerned with research or scholarly activities.
 - (b) The location(s) for the SSP must be well suited to the proposed activities and the period requested must be appropriate. Consideration must also be given to the health, safety and wellbeing of a staff member in geographical areas identified as posing a potential danger or high risk. SSP may be undertaken on one of the University's campuses if this would not compromise the academic merits of the project concerned.

Note: Travel to restricted areas will be governed by the [Travel Policy](#) and by the travel advisories of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).
 - (c) The proposed program must genuinely enhance the staff member's contribution to research or scholarship within her or his academic unit.
 - (d) The staff member must have the capacity to make effective use of the opportunity, having either a proven and sustained record of productivity in research or scholarship, or having considerable potential for such achievement.
 - (e) The program must be consistent with the academic unit's needs and strategic plan.
 - (f) The staff member must have successfully completed any similar activities previously undertaken, including submitting appropriate reports.
 - (g) Satisfactory arrangements must be able to be made for the staff member's teaching, supervision and other duties. Staff who wish to take SSP must be willing to assist their Head in making satisfactory arrangements.

12 Assessing and approving SSP applications

- (1) Each Dean will establish a faculty SSP Committee to consider and make recommendations about SSP applications. The Dean will determine the

composition of the committee and may decide to use the faculty's Research Committee for this purpose.

- (2) Rescinded.
- (3) SSP Committees will make their recommendations after considering advice from the relevant Heads.
- (4) Depending on the level of funding available and the faculty's ability to sustain the absence of all eligible applicants, it may not be possible to approve all applications meeting the criteria in clause 11. In such cases, the SSP Committee should rank applications and give priority to applicants submitting their first SSP application and to those with a strong record of research output relative to opportunity.
- (5) Deans may approve SSP applications for up to six months.
- (6) The Provost is responsible for approving SSP applications for more than six months.

13 Timing and duration of SSP

- (1) The period of time granted for SSP should not normally exceed six months and should not be less than four months unless:
 - (a) the academic or practical needs of the project concerned make a shorter period of SSP preferable; or
 - (b) the staff member concerned has carer responsibilities that prevent them from taking any more SSP.
- (2) If approval is given for a staff member to take less than four months SSP, they must undertake their normal teaching and administrative duties for the remainder of the semester in which the SSP falls.
- (3) SSP of more than six months and up to 12 months may be approved by the Provost if the staff member has accrued sufficient SSP and:
 - (a) it is the staff member's first period of SSP at this or any other university and it is for the purpose of establishing or consolidating her or his academic standing; or
 - (b) the staff member has previously taken periods of SSP of less than four months on academic grounds or because of carer responsibilities; or
 - (c) the intrinsic nature of the project requires more than six months; or
 - (d) the staff member has held a senior management position (e.g. Head or Deputy Dean) and needs to redevelop research and scholarship.
- (4) No period of SSP may exceed 12 months.
- (5) Staff should only be permitted to be absent from duties within a single semester. Periods of SSP should therefore not traverse semesters and should not prevent a staff member from undertaking the full range of teaching, research and administrative duties in the immediately preceding or following semester. The only exception to the requirement that SSP fall within a single semester is where the academic or practical needs of the project concerned are such that this would be genuinely undesirable.

14 Leave in conjunction with SSP

- (1) Staff taking SSP must also take the following minimum amounts of annual leave:
 - (a) one week for up to four months SSP;
 - (b) two weeks for more than four and up to six months SSP;
 - (c) three weeks for more than six and up to nine months SSP;
 - (d) four weeks for more than nine months SSP.
- (2) Staff who wish to take less than the minimum amounts of annual leave specified in sub-clause 14 (1) must demonstrate exceptional circumstances and obtain approval from the Provost through the relevant Dean.
- (3) All leave taken in conjunction with SSP must be specifically approved at the time the SSP is approved. This includes annual leave, long service leave and leave without pay.
- (4) Requests for additional leave submitted after SSP is approved will not normally be considered.

15 Outside earnings while on SSP

The [Outside Earnings of Academic Staff Policy 2011](#) applies to any outside work undertaken while on SSP.

16 Financial support for SSP

- (1) The University will contribute towards travel costs and living expenses for a staff member on SSP, up to the amounts specified in the procedures associated with this policy.
- (2) Financial assistance will be available for a partner (unless the partner is a member of staff who is also taking SSP) and any dependent children under the age of 18 years accompanying a staff member on SSP (if they will be travelling with the staff member for a period of at least two months. The amounts payable will be as specified in the procedures associated with this policy.
 - (a) If the staff member's partner is also a staff member, and is also taking SSP, each staff member may only claim half the standard partner allowance.
- (3) The Director, Human Resources may specify the manner in which financial support may be paid, including partial payment of salary in advance, in procedures associated with this policy.
- (4) A *per diem* allowance may only be paid to a staff member undertaking SSP if it is associated with an activity unrelated to the SSP (such as approved attendance at a conference which falls within the SSP period). A *per diem* allowance must not be paid to a *staff member* on SSP in any other circumstances, regardless of the source of the funding (including consultancy accounts).
- (5) Subject to the provisions of this sub-clause, staff members may supplement their SSP funding through other appropriate accounts, such as those for research and consulting.
 - (a) The person with budget responsibility for the source of the proposed supplementary funds ("the relevant officer") must approve their use in advance.



- (b) Before approval is granted, the staff member must provide the relevant officer with:
 - (i) a budget detailing the extra costs envisaged;
 - (ii) the account number(s) to which the supplementation is to be charged; and
 - (iii) a brief signed statement that the additional costs relate directly to the staff member's approved SSP program.
 - (c) Staff may also be able to supplement their funding by obtaining payments from institutions visited in the course of an approved SSP, such as support for travel and living expenses not covered by contributions made from University sources.
 - (i) Any such payments must not be for activities above and beyond those described in the approved program.
 - (ii) In particular, it would be inappropriate to receive payment for teaching undertaken for an institution, unless that teaching was of a very minor nature.
 - (d) In cases of exceptional financial hardship, staff may also make an application for additional financial assistance funded by either the academic unit or faculty concerned. If the academic unit or faculty is willing to provide such funding, the request will be referred to the relevant SSP Committee, which will make a recommendation to the Provost, who will be responsible for approving it.
- (6) If costs exceed approved funding, staff members must bear the excess personally.

17 Insurance

- (1) Staff members on SSP while fulfilling their University employment duties are entitled to workers' compensation benefits in accordance with workers' compensation legislation.
 - (a) Any staff member who is injured while on SSP should immediately contact the Injury Management and Workers' Compensation Group. Failure to do so may affect a staff member's access to workers' compensation benefits.
Note: See also the [Work Health & Safety Policy 2016](#)
- (2) The University maintains a travel insurance policy for staff members and details of the coverage provided may be found in the procedures associated with this policy.
- (3) Staff members requiring insurance cover for trips of more than 270 days must contact the Audit and Risk Management Office prior to their departure.
- (4) Staff are responsible for arranging and paying for any additional travel insurance that may be required, including travel insurance for any persons who accompany the staff member on SSP, such as family members.

18 Variations to an approved SSP

- (1) An approved SSP may only be varied if the variation is formally approved.
- (2) The relevant Head may approve any minor variations, such as:

- (a) a variation to the dates for the SSP within the same semester or teaching session, which changes the duration by no more than 15 working days;
 - (b) attendance at extra conference(s) totalling less than 10 working days;
 - (c) inclusion of short visits to additional institutions and countries totalling less than 10 working days; or
 - (d) cancellation of portions of the program totalling no more than 15 working days.
- (3) Major variations to an approved SSP require a new application to be lodged and considered in accordance with this policy. Examples of such variations include:
- (a) substituting a different project for the approved project;
 - (b) moving the program to a different country;
 - (c) changing institution;
 - (d) attending extra conference(s) for 10 working days or more;
 - (e) changing the semester or session(s) in which the SSP will occur; or
 - (f) varying the program's duration by more than 15 working days.
- (4) A variation to an SSP may make a staff member ineligible to receive a previously approved level of financial support for travel and living expenses. If an overpayment has already occurred, the staff member concerned will be required to repay it as a matter of urgency. The consequences of a failure to do so include termination of the SSP.

19 Reporting after SSP

- (1) On return to regular duties after SSP, staff must submit a written report of sufficient detail to enable assessment of the program's success and whether it has led to a development, maintenance or improvement of work related skills, knowledge and competencies. Where the projected program was changed, reasons for the change must be given.
- (2) The report will be assessed by the Head and the relevant SSP Committee.
- (3) 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, in such cases the staff member will normally be required to reimburse travel and living expenses paid by the University.

20 Period of duty to be served upon return from SSP

- (1) All SSP is approved on the condition that the staff member undertakes to resume normal duties in the University on completion for a period equal to at least the period of the absence.
- (2) 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 any travel and living expenses paid by the University on a *pro rata* basis.

21 Dispute resolution

Disputes relating to decisions about SSP will be determined by a joint meeting of the Provost, the Dean of the faculty concerned and one other Dean nominated by the Provost.

22 Rescissions and replacements

This document replaces the Special Studies Program Policy which was adopted on 10 October 2006 and which is rescinded as from the date of commencement of this document.

NOTES

Special Studies Program Policy 2015

Date adopted:

Date commenced: 1 February 2016

Date amended: 23 August 2016 (administrative amendments)
21 June 2017 (administrative amendments)

Administrator: Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost

Review date:

Related documents:

Outside Earnings Of Academic Staff Policy 2011

Travel Policy

Work Health and Safety Policy 2016

Intellectual Property Policy 2016

Special Studies Program Procedures 2015

Work Health and Safety Procedures 2016

AMENDMENT HISTORY

Provision	Amendment	Commencing
Related documents	Updated reference	23 August 2016
6; 9(2)(d); 13(3)(d)	Consequential amendments arising from organisational design change	21 June 2017



Provision	Amendment	Commencing
12(2)	Rescinded – consequential amendment arising from organisational design change	21 June 2017
17(1)(a) note; related documents	Updated reference to Work Health and Safety Policy	21 June 2017
Related documents	Updated reference to Work Health and Safety Procedures	21 June 2017