

SoC Academic Leave Policy for Research, Creative Work & Faculty Development

Policy Statement

The School of Communication (SoC) Academic Leave (AL) is designed to augment faculty development, enrichment, and enhance the intellectual environment for students and faculty at the SoC. This policy has been developed to outline the SoC's process for academic leaves related to research, creative work, and faculty development. This policy establishes a process for how and when faculty in the SoC may request an academic leave.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to create an equitable and transparent system whereby faculty can avail themselves of academic leaves to enhance their research, creative work, pedagogy, general scholarship, or practice. By facilitating this avenue of faculty development, the School of Communication is investing in maintaining and enhancing the intellectual and academic environment of the school.

Audience

Pre-tenure and Tenured faculty (TE) and Non-tenure line (NTE) faculty in the School of Communication.

Definitions

Academic Leave (AL)- Academic leave is a leave with the purpose of furthering career development.

Pre-tenure and Tenured Faculty (TE)- Faculty who are in the probationary period on the tenure track and faculty who have an appointment for an indefinite period on the tenure line.

Non-tenure Eligible (NTE) Faculty- Faculty who are not eligible for tenure, who are benefits-eligible, and who hold positions in faculty member categories of "Regular Faculty."

Policy Implementation

Eligibility

Pre-tenure and Tenured faculty (TE) and Non-tenure line (NTE) faculty are eligible for Academic Leave (AL) in the School of Communication. Leaves are granted as a means of faculty development and enrichment of the SoC community as a whole. Consistent with University policy, academic leaves are given to allow faculty to be away from campus, released from service commitments with the exception of responsibilities for graduate students/post-doctoral fellows, and concentrate their energies on research or creative projects or to take advantage of special opportunities for growth and impact. Faculty members are not granted leave of absence to accept a tenure-track, tenured, or non-tenure line faculty appointment or permanent full-time administrative position at another academic institution. On occasion, faculty may be granted unpaid academic leave to permit them to accept visiting or non-tenure-track appointments at other institutions, though only upon written approval from the dean. It is noted that although a faculty member is eligible for AL, they are not entitled to the timing because teaching and program needs must be considered.

Procedure

Faculty members eligible for AL apply through submission of a current CV and SoC-supplied form during the Fall or Winter quarter of the year prior to the year in which AL is sought. Leaves of absence must be approved by the Provost and the Board of Trustees, following endorsement by the Chair and recommendation by the school Dean. Refer to details in the “Detailed Procedure” section.

Timing:

1. For TE faculty:
 - a. Pre-Tenure faculty earn one quarter of AL in the academic year subsequent to a successful third-year review.
 - b. TE faculty earn one quarter of AL following promotion from Assistant to Associate Professor with tenure.
 - c. For TE faculty, a regular cycle of AL eligibility begins after the two specific AL opportunities described in 1a and 1b above. The following schedule also applies for faculty starting their appointment at Northwestern with tenure.
 - i. TE faculty are eligible for one quarter of Academic Leave following 6 years of service (or equivalent) in SoC, and once every 4 years thereafter.
2. For NTE faculty:
 - a. NTE faculty are eligible for one quarter of Academic Leave following 6 years of service (or equivalent) in SoC, and once every 6 years thereafter. The difference in AL schedule between TE and NTE faculty is in recognition of the differences in their primary responsibilities. Teaching is the primary responsibility of and expectation from NTE faculty. In contrast, both teaching and research/creative work are the primary responsibilities of and expectations from TE faculty.
3. For both TE and NTE faculty:
 - a. Up to two quarters of AL can be banked, and then combined with a third quarter to secure a full year of leave.

Note that these commitments to faculty create a presumption that leave requests following reappointment, tenure, and promotion as described above will be approved. However, the faculty member still is responsible for preparing a persuasive and doable proposal and working with the department to ensure that the nature and timing of the leave will work for the program. The school reserves the right to return proposals to faculty for revision if they do not meet these conditions.

Duration:

AL is granted for a minimum of one quarter and can be extended based on the scope of the work to be conducted and extramural support. The duration of the AL can be extended by the Dean of the SoC to accommodate special circumstances.

The need for faculty to be away from campus for durations shorter than a quarter is acknowledged. However, these shorter intervals away from campus of varying durations for varying purposes are not the subject of this policy. When shorter intervals away from campus, congruent with faculty development and opportunity, are necessary, faculty members are encouraged to make arrangements with the Chair of their department. The Chair will be responsible for ensuring the arrangements are consistent with School and University policy in collaboration with the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs.

Internal/External Support:

In accordance with the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook, the faculty member is encouraged to secure outside funding to at least partially recover school costs. Provision of financial support is the responsibility of the faculty member in concert with the school dean. *In cases where funding for a warranted leave is not readily available, the applicant and the Dean should seek support in a variety of ways, making full use of all University resources.* On occasion, special circumstances may arise that warrant funding from central administrative resources to promote professional development.

Teaching:

For faculty with teaching loads of three courses or more per year, an AL will entail a two-course reduction per quarter of AL. For those with teaching loads of less than three courses per year, an AL will entail a one-course reduction per quarter of AL.

Return to Campus:

Faculty are expected to resume regular teaching, research, creative, and scholarly activities for one full academic year after returning from the leave.

Reporting:

Faculty will include a statement describing activities undertaken during the leave in the Annual Merit Report for the year in which a leave is availed.

Initiation:

As this leave policy is implemented, the following guidelines will be used to prioritize AL for existing SoC faculty. Faculty members who have evidence of strong teaching, consistent service, and productivity in research or performance activity will be eligible for AL and receive priority.

Detailed Procedure:

1. Following recommendation by the department chair, the faculty member submits the Academic Leave form and an updated copy of the CV to the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs via the [online portal](#) by the annual deadline posted, which is usually *no later than* the first Monday in March of the academic year preceding the requested year. The dean's office recognizes there are exceptional cases that may require out-of-cycle leave requests or cancellations. These are accommodated when justified and feasible.

Note that AL commitments to faculty create a presumption that leave requests following reappointment, tenure, and promotion as described above will be approved. However, the faculty member still is responsible for preparing a persuasive and doable proposal and working with the department to ensure that the nature and timing of the leave will work for the program. The school reserves the right to return proposals to faculty for revision if they do not meet these conditions. As emphasized above, leaves may not be taken without the explicit approval of the Provost and Board of Trustees.

2. The application is reviewed by the Associate Dean and Dean to ensure eligibility criteria are met and that there is sufficient evidence to justify the leave. In evaluating the request for an academic leave of absence, the dean, with the advice of the chair of the faculty member's department, will consider the faculty member's rationale and plan for the leave, the faculty member's prior performance and achievements; the faculty member's past leave history; the impact on the department and/or school in meeting its educational mission; and the financial impact on the department and/or school. In authorizing a leave, the University determines the length of the leave, whether any portion of the faculty member's salary and benefits will be provided during the leave, and the conditions of the leave with respect to the faculty retirement program, tenure, and other relevant matters.
3. If AL is recommended by the Dean, the Associate Dean advances the recommendation and supportive materials to the Provost office and Board of Trustees.
4. The Dean's office goal is to notify the faculty of the leave decision by April 15th.

As noted in Northwestern's Faculty Handbook, faculty members may be granted leaves of absence for reasons such as family emergencies, required military service, and illness, as well as faculty family leave for childbirth, adoption, and childrearing. Northwestern faculty are covered by the provisions of FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act).

Related Information

[Faculty Handbook](#)

Contacts

You may reach out to your department chair with questions related to this policy:

- [Henry Godinez](#), Chair, Theatre
- [Jeremy Birnholtz](#), Chair, Communication Studies
- [Jacob Smith](#), Interim Chair, Radio/Television/Film
- [Joshua Chambers-Letson](#), Chair, Performance Studies
- [Bharath Chandrasekaran](#), Chair, Communication Sciences and Disorders
- [Bonnie Martin-Harris](#), Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs
- [Katherine Steinbach](#), Director of Faculty Affairs

History

[2024 Academic Leave Policy](#)

Policy URL:

<https://faculty.soc.northwestern.edu/>