

Special Studies Program Policy

Section 1 - Purpose / Objectives

(1) The Special Studies Program (SSP) releases Higher Education academic or senior professional staff from normal duties in order to pursue planned activity on specific projects under one or more of the categories of: Teaching and Learning; Scholarship of Teaching; Creativity and Research; Service to the University; External Engagement. An SSP activity must clearly benefit both the University's national/international scholarly reputation and/or community service and engagement, and the individual's career development and work performance. This Policy, together with the attached Procedures sets out the application process and conditions of SSP.

BACKGROUND

(2) A review of the University's Outside Studies Program (OSP) was undertaken in early 2006. The review was directed at focussing the strategic development of the program as an important activity contributing to the University's standing generally, its community service and engagement, its national/international scholarly reputation, and to an individual staff member's professional development and performance. The revised, extended and renamed Special Studies Program better reflects the University's endeavours in maximising the diversity of staff abilities and career development opportunities in pursuit of its strategic mission.

(3) This Policy applies to Higher Education academic and professional staff HEW 9 and above. Further eligibility criteria are outlined in the Procedures.

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(4) Nil

Section 3 - Definitions

(5) Teaching and Learning — encompasses the scope and quality of teaching performance together with the staff member's strengths and accomplishments in engendering student learning.

(6) Scholarship of Teaching — reflects an evidence-based approach to improving student learning based on teacher inquiry into learning and teaching and the sharing of the results of this inquiry.

(7) Creativity and Research — covers the continuing and sustained undertaking of creative and research activity and the achievement of individual strengths and accomplishments in these areas.

(8) Service to the University — covers the broad range of administration, coordination, management and leadership activities undertaken on behalf of the University.

(9) External Engagement — includes working in partnership with industry, government, community and professional bodies locally, nationally and internationally.

(10) College Deans — are the senior appointees providing academic, management and supervisory leadership in the

colleges. In the corporate areas of the University, the equivalent is a Director or other senior person immediately below the level of Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

Section 4 - Policy Statement

Part A - SSP and University Strategy

(11) The application should demonstrate ways in which the Special Studies Program is aligned with 'Victoria University Strategic Plan 2012 — 2016: Excellent, Engaged and Accessible'

(12) Principles to which the University is committed and which underpin the Special Studies Program are:

- a. alignment with the University's mission and values
- b. consistency with University plans and policies
- c. merit-based granting of SSP
- d. the continuing professional development of staff
- e. equality of opportunity
- f. affirmative action
- g. natural justice (procedural fairness)

Part B - SSP and Professional Development

(13) It is VU's aim to continually professionally develop its staff to enable them to fulfil the University's directions and goals and, where possible, meet staff members' professional and career development needs. SSP is one developmental opportunity which staff members can discuss with their managers/supervisors as part of the Staff Performance and Development Plan process.

(14) Successful undertaking of an SSP may assist academic staff seeking promotion or professional staff applying for internal positions. When considering an application for promotion, or an application for a new position in the case of professional staff, the outcomes of all SSP undertaken will normally be taken into account.

Part C - Program Function

(15) As indicated above the primary purpose of SSP, is to contribute to the development of the University in one or more of: teaching and learning; scholarship of teaching; creativity and research; service to the university; or external engagement with industry or the community.

(16) SSP releases a staff member from normal duties for periods of one month up to a maximum of twelve months in order to pursue approved activities in one or more of the categories listed above. An SSP activity must clearly benefit both the University's national/ international scholarly reputation and/ or community service or engagement, and the individual's career development and work performance.

(17) Staff members may be encouraged to apply for SSP where the proposed activity is consistent with their career development and work performance.

(18) During semester time, it is the responsibility of College Deans to manage staff absences on SSP but generally not more than 5-7%, calculated over a three-year baseline, of eligible staff members of a college/area/department may be on SSP in any one semester.

Part D - Projects/Activities

(19) Applications for SSP should be submitted under one or more of the categories set out [in the procedures](#). These categories are consistent with those in position descriptions for academic staff and the categories under which applications for promotion of academic staff are assessed.

(20) Examples of the type of project/activity for which SSP might be granted include, but are not limited to:

- a. A sustained period of research and/or creative activity.
- b. The development of new and innovative teaching tools/ curriculum/ courses/ methodology.
- c. To practice or gain experience in the workplace for which the staff member is preparing students.
- d. Secondment to or exchange with an educational institution, business or professional or community organisation to undertake teaching, research, scholarly activity or other professional development or skills enhancement relevant to the primary purpose of the SSP.
- e. Maintaining or improving professional, industrial and vocational links, skills and knowledge.
- f. Accelerating the completion of a higher degree.
- g. Gaining academic and/ or management experience.
- h. To undertake programs/activities relevant to Victoria University's strategic directions.

(21) Short-term projects could include fieldwork, preparation for an exhibition or performance, undertaking skill acquisition activities, renewing or establishing contact with academic, industry, professional or community leaders to keep abreast of discipline developments, preparation of a major grant application, or final writing up of a research project, article(s) for publication, series of review articles, or conference paper(s).

Part E - Equal Opportunity

(22) The Special Studies Program is informed by Victoria University's commitment to equity and social justice as expressed by the [Equity and Diversity policy](#) for staff.

Confidentiality

(23) All materials, discussions and deliberations in relation to SSP applications will be treated in the strictest confidence by all participants in the process. SSP committee members, executive support, observers and supervisors should not discuss applications or committee discussions and deliberations outside of the committee meetings.

(24) A breach of confidentiality is considered a serious matter by the University as it undermines the credibility and integrity of a fair, open and transparent process, and in serious cases may be subject to disciplinary action.

Section 5 - Procedures

(25) This policy shall be read in conjunction with the [Special Studies Program Procedures](#) document.

Section 6 - Guidelines

(26) Nil

Status and Details

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