

Special Studies Program Procedures

Section 1 - Purpose / Objectives

(1) Nil.

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(2) Nil

Section 3 - Definitions

(3) Nil

Section 4 - Policy Statement

(4) Nil

Section 5 - Procedures

Part A - General

Background

(5) After a review in 2006 the Special Studies Program (SSP) replaced the previous Outside Studies Program and it has operated for applications from 2007. The review focussed on aligning the program with University strategic directions to contribute to the University's standing generally, its community service and engagement, its national/international scholarly reputation, and to an individual staff member's career development and performance.

Purpose

(6) The Special Studies Program releases a staff member from normal duties for periods of one month up to a maximum of twelve months in order to pursue planned activity on specific projects under one of the following categories:

- a. Teaching and Learning
- b. Scholarship of Teaching
- c. Research and Creativity
- d. Service to the University
- e. External Engagement

(7) These categories are consistent with the content of Position Descriptions for academic staff and the categories

which are used to assess applications for academic promotion. The primary purpose of SSP, the granting of which is merit based, is to contribute to the development of the University in the above categories. However, staff members may also be encouraged to apply for SSP where the proposed activity to be undertaken is consistent with their professional development needs.

(8) 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 and assist the University in achieving its strategic plans.

Eligibility

(9) Academic staff and professional staff at level HEW 9 or above are eligible to apply under the Special Studies Program where they are currently employed on .5 time fraction appointments (or greater).

- a. In exceptional circumstances, where a special case is made, applications from professional staff below the HEW 9 level may be considered.
- b. A staff member may not commence SSP prior to three years after commencing work at the University.
- c. A staff member will not normally be granted SSP if they are within two years of completing a fixed term contract at the time the proposed SSP is to commence.
- d. Staff on pre-retirement contracts are not eligible for SSP.
- e. Staff on formal performance management arrangements are ineligible to apply.
- f. SSP accrues at the rate of one month for each six months of service up to a maximum of twelve months after six years service.

(10) A subsequent period of SSP will not normally be approved to be commenced until twelve months after resuming normal duties after the previous SSP. Approval is dependent also on other factors including timely submission of a report and merit of the new application.

(11) Where a staff member who has an approved SSP requests a postponement for a period not exceeding one year and this postponement fits with the work plans of the organisational unit and is supported by the College Dean. The request will normally be approved. Approval will be given by the College Dean in the case of academic staff or the relevant Senior Leadership Team member in the case of professional staff.

Part B - Criteria

(12) Eligible members of staff may apply under any of the categories of the Special Studies Program listed in clauses 6 to 8 above.

(13) The primary criteria to be taken into account by the SSP Committee in considering the application of an eligible staff member are:

- a. assists achievement of VU strategic plans through benefits to the University's scholarly endeavours, community service and engagement and its national/international reputation in teaching and learning and/or research;
- b. the benefits to the staff member's work performance and career development and national/international reputation in teaching and learning and/or research;
- c. the applicant's plans and potential for ensuring that SSP outcomes are applied to the benefit of the University and to the individual on return to normal duties;
- d. the appropriateness of the place or places where the program is to be pursued;
- e. the staffing needs of the school/division, in consideration of the scheduling of the proposed activity in the teaching or work plans of the applicant's organisational unit; and

f. where relevant the successful achievement of previous SSP periods.

(14) Considerations of equal opportunity and social justice, and the needs of under-represented groups in the University community, will also be taken into account.

(15) The attachment to this document (Appendix 1) contains additional advice on the type of information/material that may improve applications in this regard.

Part C - Period and Location of SSP Leave

(16) Applications for periods of SSP of between one month and 12 months will be considered. Applicants are required to demonstrate the need for the length and timing of the proposed SSP, as mutually agreed with their manager.

(17) Periods of SSP are inclusive of public and University holidays occurring during the period. For their wellbeing, staff are expected to use any annual leave accrued during SSP within the SSP period. Applications should indicate where in the SSP such annual leave is to be taken.

(18) Applicants are required to demonstrate the appropriateness of the place/(s) where it is proposed that the Program be pursued. The University recognises that there may be significant advantages for an individual in basing themselves at another institution for a period of time.

(19) Confirmations from host institutions must be attached to an application. Normally written confirmation from the host is required; however, an email confirmation indicating the sender's authority to make an offer (with a formal letter to follow) will be considered where the author's name, title and institution are clearly evident. Where the appropriate confirmation is not provided, the application will not be considered.

(20) If the application includes a proposal to write a book, the applicant must provide evidence of a contract or advanced negotiations with a publisher. Where such evidence is not provided, the application will not be considered.

(21) An SSP application for accelerating the completion of a higher degree must specifically document the work to be undertaken and the outcomes to be achieved. At the conclusion of the SSP, the staff member's report must indicate the extent to which the work plan has been achieved and the contribution made to the completion of the higher degree. Any reason for not achieving the intent of the program must be clearly documented as such a failure of achievement may adversely affect future applications for promotion.

Part D - FINANCIAL SUPPORT

(22) Allowances, as outlined in clause 31 below, for approved programs will be met from the SSP fund in the case of academic staff and the General Staff Development Fund in the case of professional staff. The number of SSP programs approved in any year will be constrained by funds available from each of these two sources.

(23) No SSP or General Staff Development Fund funding will be made available to replace a staff member granted SSP. In respect of workload management it is incumbent on relevant manager/(s) to consider workloads before supporting an application and to manage any workload issues during the period of SSP.

(24) While normal base salary is usually paid if the approved program is adhered to, the University reserves the right to pay less than the normal base salary to a staff member, who while undertaking an SSP, will receive outside remuneration. A staff member will be eligible to earn up to 20% above their normal base salary in line with Part 4.6 below only if the extra income is used to cover the costs associated with taking the SSP, over and above costs that might reasonably be expected to be incurred while based in Melbourne. It is the responsibility of the applicant to disclose any possibility of such remuneration in their application and to declare such remuneration on their return.

(25) Ten percent of the salary which is payable to a staff member on overseas or interstate SSP may, at the staff

member's request, be paid in advance with the remainder being paid as salary at ninety percent of the normal fortnightly rate.

(26) When an SSP allowance has been granted it will be available, on request, thirty days in advance of departure, unless earlier payment is approved by the relevant College Dean or equivalent.

(27) In order to offset costs associated with SSP, an applicant may wish to undertake some teaching, contract research or consulting during the SSP based away in Melbourne and accept remuneration for that work. In such a case the applicant is expected to make a case for the SSP under the appropriate categories and to state explicitly in their application the proportion of the total working time to be taken up by the income generating duties. Remuneration received from teaching, contract research or consulting will be considered under the terms of Part 4.6 below.

(28) Paid work that is not approved as part of the applicant's SSP, other than that set out in clause 29 below, may not be undertaken.

(29) Estimates of the proposed extra income and costs must be included in the SSP application. Upon return the staff member will be required to certify the accuracy of the estimates of extra income and costs incurred and provide a full statement of extra income and costs. Adjustments may be made to the base salary on the basis of extra income earned that was not expended on extra costs associated with the program. Decisions on adjustments to base salary will be made by the Pro Vice Chancellors (Colleges and Distinctive Specialisations) on the recommendation of the Vice-President, People and Culture.

(30) The savings achieved by the University in withholding a proportion of a staff member's salary shall be credited to the staff member's organisational unit.

(31) In addition to their normal salary, members of staff granted SSP will receive an allowance as follows:

- a. SSP in Melbourne
 - i. Nil assistance
- b. SSP outside Melbourne
 - i. Contribution to economy return airfares for the staff member and accompanying dependents to the destination of their SSP to a maximum of \$1,000 in Australia and New Zealand and \$3,500 elsewhere. All airfares must be booked through approved travel agents in accordance with the University's travel policy. These travelling allowances will normally only be paid if more than 50% of the proposed SSP is spent at the location away from Melbourne.
 - ii. An allowance of up to \$1,400 towards living costs.
 - iii. An allowance of up to \$1,400 towards living costs will normally only be paid for a spouse/partner who is accompanying the staff member for at least 50% of the time spent at the out-of-Melbourne location
 - iv. An allowance of up to \$700 towards living expenses will normally only be paid for each dependent child who accompanies the staff member for at least 50% of the time spent at the out-of-Melbourne location.

(32) For staff members on fractional appointments, a proportion of the above allowances will apply in line with the fraction of their appointment.

(33) Staff members will be able to take shorter, more frequent SSPs when appropriate, but only the first two in each six year period will be supported by any travel or financial assistance.

Part E - SSP Application Procedures

SSP Applicant

Attendance at an SSP information session.

(34) Preparation of application in accordance with requirements, including use of formal application form; preparation of document addressing criteria; submission of full CV or other relevant information; copy of most recent SSP or OSP report; details of any proposed income-generating activities and costs; demonstration of record/achievements under relevant category headings; confirmation from host institutions and evidence of a book writing proposal, etc.

(35) Applicants are advised to have an informal consultation with their College Dean prior to applying for SSP for advice and guidelines.

(36) Submit your application to your College Dean for signature.

(37) Submit an electronic copy of your final application to ssp@vu.edu.au by the nominated closing date.

(38) Submit a written report on the SSP within 3 months of its completion.

College Dean

(39) Consider and approve the application. College Dean must sign the application prior to the submission. They must consider:

- a. The purpose for which the SSP is sought.
- b. Location and period of the SSP; and
- c. The timing of the SSP in the context of the organisational unit's work plans.

(40) Consider and approve any request for postponement of an approved SSP period. Consider and approve any request for earlier (than 30 days prior to departure) payment of an SSP allowance.

(41) Manage staff absences on SSP within the guideline of not more than 5-7% of eligible staff being on SSP in any one semester.

Vice President People and Culture (or nominee)

(42) Oversee the operation of the Special Studies Program.

(43) Organise the annual SSP information session and the development of supporting documentation.

(44) Ensure up-to-date information and application forms for the SSP are available on the People and Culture intranet site.

(45) Ensure the annual timetable for the SSP process is implemented.

(46) Receive applications from all professional staff.

(47) Convene an SSP Committee for professional staff applications.

(48) Arrange secretarial support for any SSP Appeals Committee that is established.

(49) Advise SSP outcomes to relevant senior line manager of applicants.

(50) Notification to professional staff applicants of SSP application outcome.

(51) Arrange payments of financial support to SSP recipients

(52) Receive SSP reports and promulgate as appropriate within the University.

(53) Receive appeals from unsuccessful applicants for SSP

(54) Monitor the annual operation of the SSP to ensure that principles of equity and fairness and consideration of applications on the basis of merit apply].

Pro Vice-Chancellors (Colleges and Distinctive Specialisations)

(55) The Pro Vice-Chancellors (Colleges and Distinctive Specialisations) will convene and co-chair a University SSP Committee appointed to consider applications from academic staff and will comprise:

- a. Both Pro Vice-Chancellors (Colleges and Distinctive Specialisations) as Co-Chairs.
- b. Pro Vice-Chancellor (Knowledge Exchange — Industry) or nominee.
- c. Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) or nominee.
- d. An elected professional staff representative who is a member of the Academic Board.
- e. Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) or nominee

Applications Procedures

(56) Applications must be signed by the College Dean prior to submission. Applicants must submit an electronic copy of their signed application to ssp@vu.edu.au by the nominated closing date.

(57) Applications should include:

- a. An application form (accessed via the People and Culture intranet site at <http://intranet.vu.edu.au/hr/SSP>).
- b. A document addressing the criteria in Part B - Criteria.
- c. A full curriculum vitae.
- d. A copy of the report of the most recent SSP (or OSP) for those who have undertaken a program previously. For professional staff, a statement about VU supported professional development and the use made of it.

(58) Intending applicants are strongly advised to consult with their College Dean regarding their submission and the timing of their SSP. The College Dean's comment, advice and recommendation will be provided to the applicant prior to submitting their application. It is the responsibility of the applicant to enhance or amend their application as a result of any advice they receive from their College Dean, peers or mentor.

Part F - Consideration of Applications

(59) Applications for SSP from academic staff will be considered by a University committee for academic staff and applications from professional staff will be considered by a University committee for professional staff. The role of the committees is to make decision on:

- a. Whether the application should be approved;
- b. The period of SSP that should be approved;
- c. Whether the application complies with the leave plan of the organisational unit;
- d. The appropriate level of financial assistance; and
- e. Any variation to the proposal recommended before approval should be given.

(60) During semesters, it is the responsibility of College Deans to manage staff absences on SSP but, as a general guide, not more than 5-7%, calculated over a three-year baseline, of eligible staff members of a faculty/school/department may be on SSP in any one semester.

(61) People and Culture may designate an officer to attend the deliberations of the Committees for both Academic staff and Professional Staff, as an equity observer, and to have access to all documentation.

(62) The Committee for Professional staff applications will be appointed by the Vice President (People and Culture) and will comprise:

- a. General Manager, People and Organisational Development (as Chair);
- b. a Director (or equivalent) responsible for the organisational unit of the applicant;
- c. an elected professional staff representative on the Academic Board; and
- d. the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) or nominee.

(63) It will be the responsibility of the chairs of the SSP committees to ensure that due consideration is given to discipline and gender balance in the committee.

(64) Except for the Chair/s, the terms of office of members of the SSP Committee for both academic and professional staff committees shall be two years. Except for the Chair/s, no member of the Committees shall serve for more than two consecutive terms.

(65) Upon request, the Chair/s of the appropriate committee will counsel unsuccessful applicants.

(66) The SSP committees' decisions must be supported in a report submitted to the relevant College Dean so they can advise their staff. The report must clearly state the committee's assessment of the merit of each of the applicant's proposed outcomes. The report to the College Dean should be presented within 10 working days of the meeting of the Committee.

Part G - Appeals

(67) A staff member whose application for SSP is unsuccessful may appeal in writing to the Vice-President, People and Culture, against the decision within 20 working days of the date of notification. Appeals will only be considered on the basis of procedure and not the judgment of the merit of the application. The case will be considered by an SSP Appeals Committee appointed by the Vice-Chancellor and comprising:

- a. A nominee of the Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
- b. A College Dean or equivalent as appropriate, who is not from the applicant's College
- c. A tenured, full-time member of the academic staff of the College or a member of the Professional staff of the division as appropriate, nominated by the Vice-Chancellor.

(68) The SSP Appeals Committee may consult with the chair - PVC (Colleges and Distinctive Specialisations) committee or University committee, or with any other person who may be able to provide information on the process followed by the Committee/(s).

(69) The decision to uphold or reject an appeal rests solely with the SSP Appeals Committee. In the case of an appeal that is upheld, the application will be referred back to the original Committee for reconsideration.

Part H - Conditions of SSP

(70) An SSP approval carries with it the conditions that the staff member undertakes to resume full normal duties in the University on completion of the period approved for SSP and to continue in those duties for a time not less than the period of the SSP. If the staff member does not comply with this requirement, repayment of salary, allowances and an amount equal to the employer superannuation contribution paid during the period, or a pro rata proportion of them, is to be made to the University by the end of the month in which the breach occurred.

(71) A staff member who has completed a period of SSP must submit a report on the SSP no later than three months after the completion of the period. The report must contain sufficient detail to enable the staff member's success in carrying out the SSP to be assessed. If the SSP as reported differs significantly from the approved program, reasons for the variation must be given. The College Dean will be required to comment on the report, especially on the extent to which the aims of the approved program have been achieved. The submission of such a report is a condition of SSP being granted and failure to lodge a report is regarded by the University as a serious breach. Failure to submit a satisfactory report within three months of return from SSP will preclude the staff member from consideration for further SSP.

(72) The report, with comments which must have been seen by the staff member, must be submitted by the College Dean to the Vice-President, People and Culture for inclusion on the staff member's personnel file. Reports may be placed on an appropriate intranet website or otherwise promulgated within the University.

(73) The University expects high quality outcomes from all periods of SSP and that the staff member will be developing their professional expertise during these periods. For this reason, outcomes from any periods of SSP may be taken into account when assessing an academic staff member's application for promotion or a professional staff member's application for an advertised position.

Part I - Training

(74) To assist University staff in planning an application for SSP, the relevant People and Culture Staff member will ensure that an appropriate information session is conducted. This is expected to include provision of supporting documentation and the holding of a session to assist staff on how to use SSP to support achievement of the University's mission and objectives and as part of their professional development pathway. In order to maximise their likelihood of being granted SSP, all staff who are intending to apply for SSP should attend this session.

Part J - Review Timetable for Procedures

(75) These procedures will be reviewed comprehensively after the 2013 SSP round. The Pro Vice-Chancellors (Colleges and Distinctive Specialisations) will be able to authorise minor administrative amendments without the need for consultation.

Part K - Procedures Advisor

(76) People and Culture in the first instance.

Part L - Forms

(77) The application form identified above is available from the People and Culture intranet site.

Part M - Appendices

(78) The information/material identified as being of advantage to applicants in their submission (refer above) is attached under the Associated Information tab.

Section 6 - Guidelines

(79) Nil

Status and Details

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Responsible Officer	Simone Wright Chief Human Resources Officer 9919 5447
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