

Special Studies Program Procedure

Section 1 - Purpose / Objectives

(1) This document outlines the application process and other requirements for eligibility of the Special Studies (SSP) Program, and must be read in conjunction with the [Special Studies Program Policy](#).

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(2) These procedures apply to all matters associated with the application and approval of SSP applications to eligible staff.

Section 3 - Definitions

(3) Nil

Section 4 - Policy Statement

(4) See [Special Studies Program Policy](#)

Section 5 - Procedures

Part A - General

Purpose

(5) The Special Studies Program releases a staff member from normal duties for periods of one month up to a maximum of six months in order to pursue planned activity on specific projects under one or more of the following themes which include:

- a. Learning and Teaching including scholarship of teaching,
- b. Research including creativity of research, and/or
- c. Academic Citizenship and Engagement including service to the University and engagement with industry or the community
- d. Productivity Enhancements (professional staff only)

(6) These themes are consistent with the content of Career Development and Promotions Guide 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 previous listed 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.

(7) 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

(8) Academic and professional staff at level HEW 9 or above, who are currently employed on 0.5 time fraction or greater, and who have completed their Staff Performance and Development Plan in the preceding year are eligible to submit an application for SSP and normally:

- a. have completed at least two years of service (or its equivalent in broken periods of service) at Victoria University.
- b. Staff with fixed-term appointments should hold a contract that extends at least one year from the date in which the application for SSP is being made.

(9) In exceptional circumstances, where a special case is made, applications from professional staff below the HEW 9 level may be considered.

(10) Staff members who satisfy one of the following are ineligible:

- a. Staff on pre-retirement contracts.
- b. Staff on formal performance management arrangements

(11) SSP leave is accrued at the rate of one month for half a year of service and up to six months after three years of service.

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

(13) A request to postpone an approved SSP application is subject to the College Dean's approval or the relevant Senior Executive member in the case of professional staff.

Part B - Conditions of SSP

(14) 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 the amount, is to be made to the University within one month from when the breach occurred.

(15) 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, using the SSP Report template located on the People and Culture intranet site.

(16) 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 and/or Manager will be required to sign off and comment on the report, especially on the extent to which the aims of the approved program have been achieved.

(17) Failure to submit a satisfactory report within three months of return from SSP will preclude the staff member from consideration for further SSP and will be considered a serious breach of duties.

(18) The report, including the College Dean or Managers comments, which must have been seen by the staff member,

must be submitted by the College Dean and/or Manager to the Vice-President, People and Culture for inclusion on the staff member's personnel file.

(19) 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 will normally 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 C - Criteria for Assessment

(20) Eligible staff may apply under any of the categories of the Special Studies Program listed in clause 4 above.

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

- a. contributes to the achievement of current VU strategic plan
- b. contributes to the achievement to the University's scholarly endeavours, community service and engagement and its national/international reputation in teaching and learning and/or research;
- c. the benefits to the staff member's work performance and career development;
- d. the benefits to the University's national/international reputation in teaching and learning and/or research;
- e. 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;
- f. the appropriateness of the place or places where the program is to be pursued;
- g. the staffing needs of the College/Department, in consideration of the scheduling of the proposed activity in the teaching or work plans of the applicant's organisational unit; and
- h. where relevant the successful achievement of previous SSP periods.

Part D - Period and Location of SSP Leave

(22) Applications for periods of SSP of between one month and 6 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 Supervisor and College Dean or Manager for professional staff.

(23) 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.

(24) 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.

(25) 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.

(26) 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.

(27) 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 E - Financial Support

(28) Allowances, as outlined in clause 36 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.

(29) 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 College Deans and/or manager/(s) to consider workloads before supporting an application and to manage any workload issues during the period of SSP.

(30) 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 clause (30) 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.

(31) 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.

(32) 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 manager/(s).

(33) In order to offset costs associated with SSP, an applicant may wish to undertake some teaching, contract research or consulting during the SSP based outside of 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 clause (34) below.

(34) Paid work that is not approved as part of the applicant's SSP, other than that set out in clause (34) below may not be undertaken.

(35) 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 Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost on the recommendation of the Vice-President, People and Culture.

(36) 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.

(37) 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.
- c. Per Diems will not be available for costs associated with SSP activities, in accordance with the University's [Travel Policy](#).

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

(39) 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 F - SSP Application Submission

The Application

(40) Applicants must submit an electronic copy of their signed application to ssp@vu.edu.au by the nominated closing date.

(41) Applications must be signed by the relevant College Dean/Manager.

(42) Applications must include:

- a. A completed application form (accessed via the People and Culture intranet site).
- b. A document addressing the criteria in Part B of the SSP Procedure including details of any proposed income-generating activities and costs, demonstration of record/achievements/outputs/impacts under relevant category headings.
- c. A full curriculum vitae.
- d. Supporting evidence, for example, confirmation from host institutions or evidence of a book writing proposal.
- e. A copy of the report of the most recent SSP for those who have undertaken a program previously. For professional staff, a statement of previous VU supported professional development and the use made of it.

(43) Intending applicants are strongly advised to consult with their College Dean and/or Manager regarding their submission and the timing of their SSP. The College Dean and/or Manager'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 and/or Manager, peers or mentor.

Part G - University Special Studies Program Committees

(44) 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 decisions on:

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

(45) 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.

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

- a. Vice-President, People and Culture or nominee 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 Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Students or nominee.

(47) The Committee for the Academic staff applications will be appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost and will comprise:

- a. Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost or nominee as Chair.
- b. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research or nominee.
- c. One internal staff member nominated by the Academic Board.
- d. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Students or nominee
- e. One nominee of the DVC and Provost

(48) An observer nominated by the President of the NTEU VU Branch will be invited to attend any meetings of an SSP committee as per the Enterprise Agreement.

(49) 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.

(50) Except for the Chair, the SSP Committee members for both academic and professional staff committees shall be for a duration of two years. Except for the Chair, no member of the committees shall serve for more than two consecutive terms.

(51) Upon request, the Chair of the appropriate committee will provide verbal feedback to unsuccessful applicant/s.

(52) The SSP committees' decisions must be supported in a report submitted to the relevant College Dean and/or Manager. 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 and /or Manager should be presented within 10 working days of the meeting of the Committee.

Part H - Appeals

(53) A staff member whose application for SSP is unsuccessful may appeal in writing to the Vice-President, People and Culture, against the decision within one month of the date of notification. Appeals will only be considered on the basis of procedure and not on the applicant's disagreement with the SSP Committee's decision or views regarding the merit of his/her application. The case will be considered by an SSP Appeals Committee appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost and comprising:

- a. A nominee of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost as Chair

- b. A College Dean or Director as appropriate, who is not from the applicant's organisational unit
- 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 Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost.

(54) The SSP Appeals Committee may consult with the Chair - Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost- of the University committee, or with any other person who may be able to provide information on the process followed by the initial SSP Committee meetings.

(55) 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 I - General Advice and Support

(56) The University will provide general information to prospective applicants to assist them with the preparation of their application for SSP.

(57) Information will be available on the relevant intranet page and information sessions will be conducted on dates specified on the [SSP intranet site](#).

(58) Applicants are strongly encouraged to speak to their supervisor/manager for general advice.

Part J - Forms

(59) The application form and other specified templates/materials identified above are available from the [SSP section of the People and Culture intranet site](#).

Part K - Guidelines

(60) Nil

Status and Details

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Accountable Officer	Lisa Line Deputy Vice-Chancellor Enterprise and Digital Lisa.Line@vu.edu.au
Responsible Officer	Simone Wright Chief Human Resources Officer 9919 5447
Enquiries Contact	Candi Luu P&C Co-ordinator +61 3 99198509 <hr/> Capability, Culture and Talent