

IFS STATEMENT OF SABBATICAL LEAVE OARs – JANUARY 9, 2014

Chair Middleton and members of the Committee,

As the elected voice of the faculty Oregon’s public higher education institutions, IFS believes all faculty members—regardless of institution and regardless of workload—should have the opportunity to avail themselves as fully as possible in creative and self-renewing scholarly activities. We enjoin OUS and all public higher education institutions throughout Oregon to commit a suitable share of resources to encourage faculty to engage in the scholarship appropriate to their careers and to each institution’s mission.

Higher education works best when faculty members teach with enthusiasm, engage in scholarly activities and research, and are deeply committed to collegial, community, and professional service. All of these are vital components of the work of faculty. Ideally they reinforce each other, to the benefit of students and institutions and as major motives and sources of satisfaction in the life and career of each faculty member. Sabbatical leaves provide faculty members to seamlessly reinforce these three critical elements of the academic enterprise.

Altering the timeline for faculty to apply for sabbatical leave to the third year of service would provide an enhanced opportunity for developing a successful research record before tenure review. Modifying the compensation scheme during sabbaticals would address the fiscal reality that many faculty members, especially those with family obligations, are unable to afford to take time off from their teaching duties at a reduced rate of pay to focus solely on scholarship, while providing a salient recruitment and retention strategy for institutions. While IFS recognizes our dire current fiscal status, an investment in junior faculty pursuit of scholarship via timely and needed adjustments to the relevant OARs will provide long term benefits to students, faculty, public higher education institutions, and all Oregon citizens.

A perusal of national ‘best practices’ reveals a range of schemes that could potentially be utilized to enhance sabbatical funding for junior faculty members. “Load Credit Leave” or “Banked Load, linked to teaching overload courses prior to applying for and/or upon the return from sabbatical leave, could provide a fiscal buffer for institutions to grant fully funded sabbaticals for junior faculty members. Moreover, IFS suggest that the new governance structure of higher education in Oregon may provide enhanced opportunities for collaboration between institutions

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to isolate funding sources for junior faculty sabbatical applications. For example, a common ‘shared service’ between the TRUs could conceivable focus on research and grant opportunities, providing economies of scale and enhanced efficiencies, a stark necessity during these fiscally challenged times for higher education in the state of Oregon.

The American Association of University Professors contend Sabbaticals may be appealing targets for business officers trying to balance their institutional budgets because, like deferred maintenance on a university’s physical plant, the harm done by cuts to these line items is not immediately apparent. However, the faculty is the human capital of an academic institution, and deferred maintenance of human capital resources is even more dangerous to an institution’s long-term health than deferred building maintenance. A building that is not being properly maintained will not pack up and move to another university. Even in the current recession, faculty members are much more mobile than is the college’s physical plant. Institutions that choose to defer maintenance of their faculties will see their best faculty members departing, while those institutions that continue to invest in their faculty members will reap both short- and long-term rewards from their ability to recruit and retain committed individuals. IFS concurs with this sage appraisal.

IFS recommends, as part of the process of higher education governance restructuring that consideration be placed on how to best utilize shared services to enhance junior faculty sabbatical leave funding for all public higher education institutions in Oregon. Moreover, we urge the Academic Strategies Committee to consider ‘best practices’ in sabbatical funding, including “Load Credit Leave”, as part of the evaluation process of Oregon Administrative Rules related to Sabbatical Leave as initiated by Director Plec.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration in this important matter.