

## SPECIAL STUDIES PROGRAM (SSP) PROCEDURE

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### 1. OVERVIEW

The University's Special Studies Program (SSP) is an enabler of academic, school and faculty success. Through SSP, academic staff enhance their contribution to their school and facilitate achievement of school, faculty, and University-wide strategic objectives.

SSP enables academic staff to be released from their everyday academic responsibilities to undertake a period of special studies to further their scholarship, research, teaching, professional practice, and development. The period of SSP facilitates academic and career development within the staff member's discipline and allows them to achieve excellence in their given field of research and/or education, engagement, and leadership.

SSP facilitates the formation of new networks and the development of existing networks where ideas may be shared and explored with industry, government, universities, and the community. Our academic staff can collaborate, research, and innovate with world-leading institutions and academics who are the best in their field. SSP may incorporate a period of interstate or overseas travel subject to funding. The University encourages SSP with established affiliated institutions, priority partners, or partnerships with highly ranked academics and institutions that promote appropriate industry collaboration.

SSP may be taken locally as an [internal release](#) to undertake research, learning, or a specified project. Where there are opportunities and benefits in doing so, a faculty may use SSP for the purpose of bringing collaborators together at one of the University of Adelaide campuses. These activities provide invaluable development opportunities for academic staff to explore, innovate, and create, and are an excellent platform to showcase the University.

This procedure prescribes the eligibility requirements, responsibilities, and process required to undertake a special studies program. It should be read in conjunction with clause 5.7 of the [University of Adelaide Enterprise Agreement 2017-2021 as amended or replaced from time to time \(Enterprise Agreement\)](#), the University's [Staff Development, Performance and Promotions Policy](#), and the [Practice of a Discipline Outside of the University by Academic Staff Procedure](#).

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## 2. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

### 2.1 Eligibility

This procedure applies to all continuing and fixed-term academic staff who have:

- a minimum of three (3) years of recognised service
- a contract of employment that extends beyond the period of special studies for at least a period equal to the duration of the special studies
- participated in the current annual Planning, Development and Review (PDR) with their supervisor

### 2.2 Exclusions

This procedure does not apply to:

- professional staff or casual staff
- any staff member who is suspended under clause 8.2.4 of the Enterprise Agreement
- staff against whom a finding of misconduct or serious misconduct has been made within the 12 months prior to the date of their application.

## 3. PRINCIPLES

These principles outline the University's approach to SSP and how it works:

- the University will conduct an annual SSP applications round which will be published to staff each year, inviting applications
- all eligible staff members may apply for SSP to be taken in the calendar year following the applications round, for example, applying in 2023 for SSP in 2024
- late applications will not be accepted
- eligibility for and accrual of SSP days is not an automatic entitlement to a period of special studies, and an application must be submitted
- SSP leave is accrued in calendar days, not hours, in accordance with clause 5.7.2 of the [Enterprise Agreement](#)
- the balance of accrued SSP days is visible to academic staff through [Staff Services Online \(SSO\)](#)
- the maximum period of SSP is six (6) months
- SSP applications will be considered by a faculty SSP committee convened by a nominee of the Executive Dean
- incomplete SSP applications will not be considered by the committee
- the University recognises that staff may be impacted by a wide range of circumstances and may request that their SSP application be considered on the basis of [Achievement Relative to Opportunity](#)
- any external funding received during the course of SSP may be subject to the University's [Practice of a Discipline Outside the University by Academic Staff Procedure](#)

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## 4. PROCEDURE

### 4.1 Application preparation

The annual application round will be conducted by Human Resources. The time for lodging an application will be published to staff through [Staff News](#) and the HR intranet page.

Prior to applying for SSP, the staff member must:

- check to ensure they have sufficient SSP days accrued for the proposed SSP via SSO
- record their accrued balance of SSP days for inclusion in their application
- ensure their PDR is up to date and correct
- explain how the SSP will support their academic and / or career development within their discipline and allows them to achieve excellence in research, teaching, engagement, and / or leadership
- prepare a detailed plan of how they intend to utilise their proposed period of SSP and include benefits to self, faculty, and to the university.
- read the [University business travel](#) process and the [Travel Policy](#) and be familiar with the requirements, including the implication of private travel whilst on travel funded by the University
- provide the approximate cost of any proposed travel and accommodation expenses
- discuss their proposed SSP application with their Head of School and request their support.

### 4.2 Recognition of prior service

To demonstrate the required amount of SSP accrual, a staff member may request to have their prior service at another higher education institution or equivalent which operates an equivalent program recognised.

A maximum period of up to 183 days may be requested.

Approval to proceed on special studies during the first three (3) years of employment will be given only where the staff member has been credited with SSP days in recognition of prior service and then only for a maximum of 61 days.

To have prior service recognised, the staff member must apply in writing to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice President (Academic) (DVC(A)) during the call for applications and provide relevant evidence of the prior service.

The DVC(A) will consider and determine all requests for recognition of prior service and notify the staff member in writing of their decision.

### 4.3 Exception for special circumstances

Where special circumstances exist, an eligible academic staff member may request the DVC(A) to consider their special circumstances. Under this clause, the staff member may be granted the right to apply for:

- SSP of a duration greater than six (6) months
- SSP after less than three (3) years of employment where prior service does not apply
- SSP for a duration of greater than 61 days where prior service has been recognised
- SSP more than the maximum 366 days, up to 427 days, but only where the staff member has completed a minimum of six (6) years of continuous service.

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The request must be submitted in writing to the DVC(A) for consideration during the call for applications before the SSP application round closes.

Approval of special circumstances does not guarantee approval of the SSP application.

The DVC(A) will notify the staff member of any approved special circumstances requests for committee reference during the assessment process.

#### 4.4 Applying for SSP

The staff member will complete the SSP application form and will:

- detail the proposed activities and objectives of the SSP
- attach details of their proposed travel expenses
- where appropriate select Achievement Relative to Opportunity and provide a detailed reason
- demonstrate that the proposed SSP is academically sound and will enhance the contribution of the staff member to research, scholarship, teaching, or to their profession
- attach a copy of the report lodged following their most recent period of special studies if they have previously been recipients of SSP or their application will be considered incomplete
- provide a copy of the application and attachments to the Head of School requesting they complete the Special Studies Program - Head of School Statement for return to them before the application' closing date.

#### 4.5 Head of School responsibilities

Upon receiving a staff member's application, the Head of School should consider:

- the benefit of the proposed SSP on the development of the staff member
- whether the proposed SSP is academically sound and will enhance the contribution of the staff member to research, scholarship, teaching, or to their profession
- the staff member's performance and conduct
- the school's capacity to release the staff member for the duration of the proposed special studies
- alignment of the SSP with the faculty / school strategic objectives.

The Head of School will complete the Head of School, form for return to the staff member prior to the closing date for applications.

#### 4.6 Application screening

HR Operations will ensure the application for special studies is complete and:

- includes a record of the staff member's previous SSP where appropriate
- is for a period not exceeding six (6) months unless a special circumstances exception has been granted
- the staff member has participated in the University's annual PDR discussions with their supervisor
- the staff member's Head of School has provided their report on the proposed special studies program.

Applications that do not meet the requirements of this section are considered incomplete. They will be provided to the convener of the SSP committee as per section 4.7 of this procedure for recommendation to the Executive Dean that the SSP application(s) be declined.

#### 4.7 SSP committee

The Executive Dean or delegate will nominate a convener for the SSP committee, who will convene a faculty committee to:

- manage the faculty's annual SSP round
- assess SSP applications against the relevant university and agreed faculty-specific criteria
- recommend applications and related allocation of funds for approval by the Executive Dean.

#### 4.8 Committee assessment

The faculty SSP committee will consider if the complete application:

- is consistent with the University's and faculty's strategic plan and budget
- is supported by the relevant Head of School
- is academically sound and will enhance the contribution of the staff member to research, scholarship, teaching, or to their profession
- will provide a measurable benefit to the University and the professional development of the staff member in their chosen academic field
- outlines the proposed location, environment, duration, and timing and that they are appropriate to the activities to be undertaken
- demonstrates the staff member has the capacity to make effective use of the opportunity by having:
  - a proven and sustained record of productivity in research, scholarship, teaching, or in the relevant profession
  - considerable potential for such achievement; or
  - considered the staff member's past achievements relative to opportunity
- shows the staff member has successfully completed any previously approved SSP
- includes no evidence the staff member has formally notified an intention to vacate their position
- sufficiently demonstrates that the staff member's behaviour and conduct are consistent with the [Code of Conduct](#) as well as against the [Staff Values and Behaviours Framework](#)
- confirms that the staff member is neither suspended nor has a finding of misconduct or serious misconduct made against them within the 12 months prior to the date of application.

Applications that meet these requirements will be:

- assessed against any faculty-specific criteria
- costed against the faculty SSP budget.

The SSP committee will agree on the applications for recommendation to the Executive Dean.

#### 4.9 Recommendation

The convenor of the faculty SSP committee will recommend to the Executive Dean by 31 July which applications should be approved or declined, including:

- whether financial support should be granted and what amount should be provided
- any significant external financial support available to the staff member
- the approximate all-inclusive costs of travel for the staff member
- whether the staff member should be required to pay for some part of the airfare
- the amount of any living allowance to be paid.

#### 4.10 Approval

Approval of SSP is at the discretion of the Executive Dean, who will:

- consider the recommendations of the convenor of the SSP committee
- email the names of those being considered for SSP approval to the Manager Workplace Relations at [workplacerelements@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:workplacerelements@adelaide.edu.au) to ensure there has been no finding of misconduct or serious misconduct made against them within 12 months prior to the date of their application
  - should it be identified that the applicant is the subject of a current and ongoing misconduct or serious misconduct process for which a finding has not been made:
    - their application may be considered and where successful, provisionally approved
    - the staff member would be obligated to participate in the investigation process as required by the University including attending interviews and/or preparing their response
    - the SSP may be revoked or deferred with immediate effect in accordance with section 4.16 of this procedure
- approve, amend, or decline applications including any recommended travel and / or financial support
- provide the final date for the staff member to submit their SSP report upon their return.

If at any time following application, approval, and SSP period, a finding of misconduct or serious misconduct is made against a successful SSP applicant they would immediately become ineligible to take SSP under section 4.16 of this procedure.

The decision of the Executive Dean is final.

#### 4.11 Notification

The Executive Dean will advise the convenor of the faculty SSP committee which applications are successful.

The convenor of the faculty SSP committee will then advise the SSP applicants of the outcome of their application in writing. If the application is declined, they will provide a reason for the decision. The convenor will forward copies of outcome letters to the HR Service Centre for saving to the staff member's electronic file.

The convenor of the faculty SSP committee will retain the approved application forms and will maintain a statistical record of the SSP for reporting purposes.

HR Operations will save a copy of the approved application forms to the staff member's electronic file.

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#### 4.12 Funding

Funds will be allocated for SSP by the faculty Executive Dean based on the faculty's strategy and annual budget, consistent with university strategy and direction.

#### 4.13 Variations after approval and prior to commencement

If an applicant would like to vary an approved SSP application, they will seek approval for any significant variation to their special studies by completing the [SSP Variation Form](#) and submitting the form to the Head of School.

The Head of School will consider the varied SSP proposal and recommend to the Executive Dean that the SSP variation be approved or declined.

The Executive Dean will consider and either approve or decline the variation and will notify the SSP committee convener of their decision.

The convener of the faculty SSP committee will advise the staff member of the decision and any changes to the funding, travel, or support that is approved.

If approved, the variation form will be retained by the convener, attached to the application, and a copy emailed to the HR Service Centre to be saved to the staff member's electronic file.

If declined, and if the SSP application is therefore declined in full, the form should be marked as declined and emailed to the HR Service Centre to be saved to the staff member's electronic file.

#### 4.14 Commencement, payment, and travel arrangements

The staff member will complete an [SSP Commencement Form six](#) (6) weeks prior to commencement and send to the convener of the faculty SSP committee.

On receipt of the [SSP Commencement Form](#), the convener of the faculty SSP committee will:

- ensure the commencement form and application form accurately reflect the agreed SSP
- raise any issues they identify with the staff member and their Head of School to determine an appropriate outcome
- either endorse the form or not and forward to the HR Service Centre and to the travel arranger (if there is one) for processing and saving on the staff member's electronic file.

The staff member will purchase airfares in accordance with the University's [travel website or contact the faculty travel arranger where relevant to do so](#).

#### 4.15 Deferral / cancellation

The University may direct the staff member to defer and / or cancel their planned SSP where:

- due to circumstances beyond the university's control, it is no longer considered appropriate, safe, or viable to undertake the SSP at the proposed time
- unforeseen circumstances prevent the staff member from taking SSP
- there are operational reasons provided at the direction of the Executive Dean.

The staff member will reimburse any unused funds paid to them under section 4.19 of this procedure.

Where travel is deferred, the school and staff member may propose alternative arrangements.

Where the deferred arrangements are unable to be rearranged, the SSP will be cancelled.

Staff whose SSP is cancelled at the discretion of the university and for no fault of their own will be encouraged to apply in the following round.

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#### 4.16 Revocation with immediate effect

SSP will be revoked at any time and with immediate effect where:

- the staff member is suspended from duties under clause 8.2.4 of the Enterprise Agreement pending further investigation
- a finding of misconduct or serious misconduct is made against the staff member.

If the staff member is required to participate in an investigation into misconduct or serious misconduct the SSP may be deferred or revoked at the discretion of the relevant Area Manager to allow the staff member to participate in the investigation as required.

#### 4.17 Variation during SSP

Staff members must notify their Head of School as soon as practicable of any significant change to their SSP once a period of SSP has commenced.

#### 4.18 Finalising SSP and SSP report

The staff member must submit an [SSP Report](#) to the Head of School for review within one month of returning from SSP.

An avoidable delay or failure to provide the SSP report may exclude the staff member from undertaking future periods of special studies.

The Head of School will review the staff member's report and consider any deviations from the approved SSP activities. They will add commentary before submitting to the convenor of the faculty SSP committee for consideration.

The faculty SSP committee will consider the staff member's report against the original application and any approved variation.

The convenor of the faculty SSP committee may:

- request further information from the staff member or their Head of School
- request that the staff member amend and resubmit the report
- recommend to the Executive Dean that they approve of the report.

If the convenor of the SSP committee considers the revised report unsatisfactory, believes that the SSP activity has not been carried out to a satisfactory standard, or considers there are other unexpected circumstances, they will consult with the staff member prior to making a recommendation to the Executive Dean.

The Executive Dean will consider the staff member's report and the recommendation of the convenor of the SSP committee and will either accept or reject the report.

The convenor of the faculty SSP committee will notify the staff member of acceptance or rejection of the report and will send the report to HR Service Centre for saving in the staff member's electronic file.

#### 4.19 Funds reimbursement

Where the actual SSP differs substantially from the approved SSP and as a result the staff member has been overpaid, the convenor of the faculty SSP committee will inform the staff member in writing of the overpayment amount and may take steps to recover the money under clause 3.12 of the Enterprise Agreement.



#### 4.20 Reporting to the Vice Chancellor

The Executive Dean will prepare a report on SSP for the Vice Chancellor or nominee in September each year in consultation with the convenor of the faculty SSP committee. The report will include:

- the number of applications received and approved
- of the successful applications:
  - the number of applications whose focus was research, teaching, professional practice, or general scholarship
  - the staff members' gender
  - the staff members' School
  - the financial support provided (minimum, maximum and average) and source of funding
  - the SSP days approved (minimum, maximum and average)
- of the unsuccessful applications:
  - the number of applications whose focus was research, teaching, professional practice, or general scholarship
  - the staff members' gender
  - the staff members' School
  - the reason they were unsuccessful
- learning goals set and met
- all applicants who requested Achievement Relative to Opportunity
- an overview of the incomplete and rejected reports
- any other general observations relevant to the effectiveness of the program.

## 5. DEFINITIONS

### Achievement Relative to Opportunity

The evaluation of a staff member's achievements based on the opportunities that have been available to them. In applying Achievement Relative to Opportunity the University may consider the level and type of appointment, quality and impact of the staff member's work, their contribution given the time and / or resources available, and the impacts of the staff member's circumstances on their achievement.

### Internal release

Internal release applies where a staff member is released from their normal duties to undertake a period of SSP whilst remaining in Adelaide and/or on-campus to undertake their approved SSP activities. Internal release may be applied while other academics from interstate or overseas institutions come to one of the University's campuses in Adelaide to collaborate.

### Prior service

For prior service to be recognised, it must be continuous service with the University of Adelaide or another higher education institution or equivalent where that institution operates a Special Studies Program or equivalent program.

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## 6. RELATED DOCUMENTS AND POLICIES

[Workforce Management Policy](#)

[Staff Development, Performance and Promotions Policy](#)

[Travel Policy](#)

[Enterprise Agreement](#)

[Health, Safety and Wellbeing Travel Information Sheet](#)

[Special Studies Program](#)

[University Travel Insurance website](#)

[University Business Travel website](#)

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