

AC 2009-1679: RECHARGE YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ACTIVITIES THROUGH AN INTERNATIONAL SABBATICAL

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Recharge your professional and personal activities through an International Sabbatical

Abstract

Faculty careers are very demanding. The first six years we focus on activities related to tenure and promotion. Faculty are busy developing course notes, getting research programs growing, supervising graduate students, writing papers and proposals, and many other activities. After tenure, faculty members set their goal on a new prize – full professor. This has its own set of activities that can take up 50 to 60 hours a week or more. Faculty are often so busy putting out short-term professional fires that they lack time or energy for long term activities, strategic planning, advanced goal setting or reflection. Sometimes along the way faculty start to feel burned out and need a change to help them regain their enthusiasm for their chosen career.

A sabbatical provides an excellent opportunity for a faculty member to re-evaluate their professional and personal goals around their career. This paper will provide overview of one faculty member's experience with an international sabbatical. The first part will discuss options related to planning for sabbatical, what do you need to do and when to make it happen. This part will discuss some of the questions you should ask at your university because each university has its own policies and procedures. The second part will discuss how to make arrangements for a sabbatical where you will be away from campus for a prolonged time. Suggestions on housing, transportation, must haves and other useful tips will be discussed. Hints on keeping your home research program going will be described. The last section will discuss making the most of your sabbatical and finding ways to leverage your sabbatical for future professional opportunities.

Introduction

The life as a faculty member has many benefits. Working within the constraints of a university, we are our own bosses. Besides teaching responsibilities, a faculty member can pick and choose many other activities in which to participate. You can choose a variety of teaching extensions, research and scholarship activities as well as service and outreach opportunities. Some activities are chosen out of a passion by the faculty member, others help forward your career and some may be required as part of your faculty responsibilities.

There are several opportunities for promotion and advancement within the faculty ranks. After approximately five to six years a faculty member can apply for tenure and a promotion to Associate Professor. Then the next step is to continue your academic pursuits and later apply for Full Professor. Some faculty may consider going into administration related to academic administration such as a department head, dean or associate dean, while others may be interested in research or teaching leadership such as the head of a Center for Teaching and Learning or research center.

A faculty member that goes straight through to get his/her PhD may start their faculty career as early as 28 years old. With a retirement ages in the 60s, this would mean a career of 35 to 40 years as a faculty member. Because the faculty position is a fairly open ended position, typically

with little regular feedback or organization based career planning, it is important for faculty members to take an active role to find opportunities for their professional and personal advancement beyond the traditional advancement opportunities.

Sabbatical is one of the under-utilized professional development opportunities that can be used in academic settings. According to Wikipedia, sabbatical comes from the word, “Sabbath” and relates to a rest from work. Many universities allow faculty to apply for a sabbatical every seven years.

Many faculty members shy away from sabbatical discussions for various reasons. Many schools pay 100% support for one semester and 50% for two semesters so they have to find additional income for a full year sabbatical. Others worry about the increased teaching and service load on their colleagues if they are away from campus for an extended amount of time. Researchers with large research programs worry how a leave might adversely affect their graduate students and research projects. Faculty members with working spouses have to consider the flexibility of the spouse’s job, especially if they cannot also take sabbatical. Faculty with families see all the issues related to taking the family with you or being separated for an extended amount of time. In tight budget times, some universities have reduced or eliminated sabbaticals.

While these are all valid concerns and issues, faculty also face challenges, particularly if they remain at the same institution. Some faculty get caught in a groove of teaching the same classes over and over again. Other faculty get assigned to various service and outreach activities without a way to get off the committees. The tenure and/or promotion process may be stressful and a faculty member feels burnt out or needs a change of scenery to gain perspective. The joy of teaching and being a faculty member is dwindling. It is very difficult to take a break to regain the energy and enthusiasm of a new faculty member. While some faculty may be given no classes to help write a book or manage an excessive research load, remaining on campus in your normal surroundings, interacting with regular colleagues and getting involved in departmental, college or university politics stays the same. For a more in-depth recharging, faculty should consider a sabbatical away from campus.

This paper provides an overview of the planning, implementing and reflection activities associated with a one semester international sabbatical taken by the author in the Fall of 2008. Much of the discussion will relate to all sabbaticals but more details will be provided related to considering an international sabbatical at a university.

Planning Your Sabbatical

The first question you have to ask yourself is why do you think you need a sabbatical? What types of things would help you recharge and regain perspective? Do you want to work in a new research area and learn new skills? Do you want to write a book? Do you want to visit several universities and learn about advanced pedagogical trends? Do you want to spend time in industry to help with classroom and research activities? The answer to some of these questions will be essential for planning your sabbatical.

There are lots of questions to ask and answer relating to a sabbatical:

- What time is best for my work and my family?
- One semester, two semesters or an entire year?
- Corporate sabbatical, another US university(ies) or international experience?

Most sabbaticals, especially international sabbaticals, require some advanced planning as much as 18 months to two years ahead of the planned sabbatical. Our university requires an application for sabbatical in January for the following academic year (fall or spring). There are a variety of programs within the US and other countries to help facilitate faculty exchanges. These funds may sponsor faculty salary, graduate student salary, travel, living expenses, and research resources at the host institution. Timeframe for these exchanges may be from one week or one year.

In this section, we will review several of the programs for international collaborations available within the U.S. and United Kingdom (UK). These programs can be used for sabbaticals or as tools for developing relationships that may lead to sabbatical. The U.S. Fulbright Scholars program (<http://www.cies.org/>)¹ is a prestigious program that has opportunities around the world. It is very competitive and has a very early deadline as applications need to be submitted in August a year ahead of the visit start date. In addition to programs to help U.S. faculty go abroad, the Fulbright also has funding for non-US researchers to come work with U.S. institutions.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) (www.nsf.gov) has an office that specializes in International Programs². For those investigators with active NSF grants, researchers may apply for an international supplement related to their funding work similar to other supplements such as Research Experiences for Undergraduates. NSF also has three other programs that help facilitate international exchanges. In most cases, the NSF funds are designed to help U.S. faculty, researchers and students travel abroad and cannot be used for international researchers to come to the U.S. NSF encourages cooperative grants where international colleagues submit proposals to their own funding agencies to allow exchanges and collaborations where international colleagues come to US institutions.

There are three programs that will be highlighted in this paper; they are:

- NSF 04-035 International Research and Education: Planning Visits and Workshops
- NSF 04-036 Developing Global Scientists and Engineering (International Research Experiences for Students (IRES) and Doctoral Dissertation Enhancement Projects (DDEP))
- NSF 09-505 Partnerships for International Research and Education (PIRE)

NSF 04-035 program funds two different types of activities: One type of activity is a workshop that promotes collaborations between international researchers and US researchers. The second program provides funds to allow for short planning visits to international institutions. These visits are designed to allow US researchers to assess the facilities of foreign partners as well as have detailed discussions about future collaborative efforts. These visits may last one to two weeks.

The NSF 04-306 program is similar to the Research Experience for Undergraduates but provides opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to spend an extended amount of time carrying out research activities at a foreign institution. The IRES program is designed for a

group of students to study abroad while the DDEP relates more to an individual doctoral student working closely with a foreign investigator.

The NSF Partnerships for International Research and Education program has solicited proposals every other year since 2005 and is a more comprehensive program that involves an integrated research and education plan between institution(s) within the US and foreign institution(s). This involves a five year plan that involves collaboration between faculty, researchers, graduate students and undergraduate students between the various institutions providing international perspectives in scholarship and education.

For exchanges with researchers within the UK, there are also several programs to bring in non-UK academics for collaborative activities. The UK EPSRC has a Visiting Researcher Program³ where a UK institution can invite a researcher from another UK institution or outside the UK to carry out research collaboration within its campus for up to one year. The program can provide salary funds, living expenses, travel expenses and research supplies and equipment for the joint research project.

A similar program to the NSF workshop program, the EPSRC has a workshop N+N program⁴ where faculty can develop a workshop or school and invite collaborators from within the UK to interact with researchers from outside the UK. This program funds travel expenses for the UK researchers and local meeting expenses if the joint workshop is held within the UK.

The UK Royal Academy of Engineering (www.raeng.org.uk) also has several international research support schemes⁵ to help facilitate collaboration between UK researchers and non-UK researchers. The Distinguished Visiting Fellowship Scheme⁶ allows distinguished visitors from outside the UK to visit a UK institution for up to a month and provides travel support, living expenses and a daily allowance to cover UK travel and other incidentals.

Global Research Awards allow UK engineers to travel aboard and do research for three to twelve months or in modules over three years. International Travel Grants from the Royal Academy allow graduate students, researchers and faculty to get partial funding for travel up to two months for research activities abroad with both universities and industry.

There are other programs available as well for collaborations with particular areas or countries. The above list is a sampling of possible programs that faculty within the US or UK might use when considering international collaborations.

Home and Away Arrangements for Your Sabbatical

Once you have settled on a place to go on sabbatical you need to check on many things related to insurance. At your university you need to check with your Human Resources Department about the impact of sabbatical on your retirement and health insurance benefits. If you are being paid less than 100% of your salary you may need to pay premiums to keep your health insurance. You also need to get a clear understanding of the coverage when you are away from campus, especially outside the U.S. It is also useful to find out up front what documentation will be necessary to get reimbursed for health care expenses. Some universities require a bill written in

English with the appropriate service codes. Also you may need to have the exchange rate for the date of service. There are short-term health care policies that are available if you would like to supplement your insurance coverage.

In addition to checking on your health insurance coverage, you should visit a local travel clinic to make sure you have up to date immunizations for the area(s) where you will be visiting. Some of these immunizations require a series of shots that may take several months to give you a full coverage. You should also consider any places you might travel from your sabbatical location. Also talk with your doctor about getting a prescription of medicine to help with any stomach issues that may occur due to changes in the water and food in your new environment.

Next you need to check with your homeowners and automobile insurance provider about coverage for a temporary location or driving outside the U.S. AAA offers an international drivers license (<http://www.ouraaa.com/travel/other/idp/index.html>) for \$15.00 that can be used to help with car rentals worldwide.

Another important stop relates to a tax accountant. Depending on the length of stay and type of sabbatical, some expenses are tax-deductible and some income is taxable. If you are paid out of the country, you will have to deal with the issue of international taxes and additional paperwork during tax season. Check with an accountant to make sure you know what paperwork you need to retain before your sabbatical.

Related to compensation, if you are being paid during your sabbatical in another country you will need to determine the proper paperwork, work permits and work visas necessary to make this happen. Like all paperwork, these forms take time so it is important to start looking into the requirements ahead of time. Some places only require a work permit if you are there less than six months. Others will require a visa. Work with your hosts to identify what paperwork is needed and start this process as soon as you can.

Temporary housing for your sabbatical is important. Some universities have apartments or houses that can be rented by visiting scholars. Others maintain lists of landlords that will rent out apartments or rooms. Your exact accommodations will depend some on your family situation. For a single person you may want to consider renting a room of an established house or apartment. This helps minimize the amount of household items that you need to purchase in the temporary location. Table 1 highlights some of items that are helpful to have in your temporary location.

Table 1: List of Household Items for Temporary Location during Sabbatical

Umbrella	External Hard Drive
Alarm Clock	Storage containers
Pocketknife	Rolling Bag or Cooler for Shipping
Small flashlight	

Another key related to housing is local transportation. If possible try to find housing either walking distance from your sabbatical work or along public transportation lines. The costs of renting a car and insurance can be a major expense. Additionally if you are on sabbatical in a

country with different traffic laws (driving on the left instead of the right), there is an issue with safety.

Back at home it is essential to develop a support structure to help colleagues and student while you are away. You want to be accessible but you do not want to be doing your job full time from another location. Set up a structure for regular reporting and surrogate advisors as needed. If funding allows it consider hiring a staff member, post-doc or research faculty member to help with the activities while you are away. A cost-effective way to keep in touch is to use SKYPE via your computer and have video and/or audio meetings with students or groups of students. Skype works better one-on-one but can also be used for a group as needed. It also works well for communication with colleagues, family and friends.

As far as keeping in touch, a relatively inexpensive way is to use a local phone call. Many mobile phone provides have inexpensive rates for international calls under certain plans. In the UK, you do not pay for incoming calls. Be aware that many of the U.S. phones will not work with sim cards from other countries. However phones are relatively inexpensive. It is also convenient to purchase two phones if you have friends or relatives visiting so that you can communicate locally.

Making the Most of Your Sabbatical

While the preparations may be a little crazy, the most important thing is to make the most of your sabbatical during the time, both professionally and personally. During my sabbatical I was able to travel to six different universities within the UK and share my research and learn about their research activities. I was also able to participate in two different European technical conferences. I learned about the UK system for undergraduate and graduate programs and how they are different from the US programs.

I also learned some new techniques in my research area that I can use within my current research and teaching activities.

Summary

This paper provides some hints, suggestions and tips related to taking an international sabbatical.

Bibliography

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³ UK Engineering and Physical Science Research Council (EPSRC) Visiting Researchers <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/ResearchFunding/Opportunities/Networking/VisitingResearchers.htm> accessed 12/05/08.

⁴ UK EPSRC Bilateral Research Workshops (N+N), <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/ResearchFunding/Opportunities/Networking/WorkshopsAndSchools.htm> accessed 12/05/08.

⁵ The Royal Academy of Engineering International Schemes, <http://www.raeng.org.uk/international/schemes.htm>

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