

SABBATICAL FAQs

Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs

1) I'd like to take a sabbatical next year. In a nutshell, what are my options?

Sabbaticals come in two basic forms, a semester at full salary or an academic year at half salary.

2) Where can I find general information, application guidelines, and forms?

General information, guidelines, and forms can be found on our website at <http://www.iub.edu/~vpfaa/> by clicking on the “Forms” link on the left. For more detailed information, click on the website’s “Academic Policies” link to the *Bloomington Academic Guide*:

https://www.indiana.edu/~vpfaa/academicguide/index.php/Policy_F-2

3) I've looked at the website and the *Academic Guide*, and I have some questions. Is there someone in your office I can talk to?

Yes. Contact one of our Associate Vice Provosts at 855-2809; vpfaa@indiana.edu.

4) When am I entitled to take a sabbatical?

Technically, never. Much of the confusion about sabbaticals results from the widely held but incorrect view of them as entitlements. IU sees a sabbatical not as an entitlement, but as an investment in a faculty member’s career that should benefit both the faculty member and the university. Think of a sabbatical as something you’re eligible for if you have an appropriate project, not something you’re entitled to.

5) Alright then, when am I eligible for a sabbatical?

You are eligible if you are tenured, once in every seven years of full-time service following your sixth year of full-time service as a faculty member. Pre-tenure and non-tenure-track faculty members are not eligible for sabbaticals.

Under some circumstances eligibility questions can be tricky. If you want to check your eligibility, contact the Office of Academic Personnel Policies and Services (855-2026; apps@indiana.edu).

6) What constitutes an appropriate sabbatical project?

A sabbatical project must be focused on research or creative activity. Projects that are primarily focused on teaching are not eligible. In fact, probably the single most common reason for denying an application is that it's a request for time off to write a textbook.

7) What should my application contain?

The Sabbatical Leave Application form, including directions and deadlines, can be found and downloaded at: <http://www.iub.edu/~vpfaa/welcome/forms.shtml>

The form asks six questions (not including the request for your signature and those of your chair and dean). You should answer those questions in enough detail for the Sabbatical Leaves Committee to evaluate your project accurately (see FAQ #8 below). There is no set limit on the length of applications, but as a rule of thumb a narrative of 2-4 pages is usually sufficient if it is well thought out. A narrative of two or three sentences or a list of topics is not sufficient.

The cover page requires the approval of your department (if your school has departments) and your school, as indicated by the signatures of your chair and dean (or appropriate associate dean). Our office checks your eligibility, but you can always ask ahead of time to be certain (see FAQ #5 above).

If you've had a previous sabbatical and haven't yet submitted the required report (see FAQ #17 below), now is the time to do that, since a new application will not be reviewed without the report on the previous sabbatical. Your report doesn't have to be routed through your chair and dean; submit it directly to our office.

8) How will my application be evaluated?

The Sabbatical Leaves Committee consists of four faculty members in the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs' office. The criteria used can be found under **Sabbatical Leave Application Reviews** in the *Academic Guide*.

If the committee agrees that your project is appropriate, your application will be approved provisionally. (Final approval comes from the Provost, but provisional approval from our office gives you enough assurance to proceed with your planning.) In some cases the committee may ask an Associate Vice Provost to talk with you about your project and suggest revisions before a decision is made.

If your application is turned down, you'll receive a letter of explanation. If you disagree with the explanation, you will have an opportunity to appeal to the committee; contact one of our Associate Vice Provosts for further information.

9) I want to take an academic-year sabbatical, but the August to May schedule doesn't work for my project. May I spread my sabbatical over two academic years?

Yes. Split sabbaticals are allowed, and the application form makes provisions for them.

10) I've been awarded a sabbatical, but my plans have changed, and I want to change the timing. May I do that?

Yes, but you must request the change before the start of your sabbatical as originally granted (see FAQ #13 below), and approval is not automatic. Your change of plans can have instructional and financial consequences for your department and/or school. Therefore, the change needs to be approved by your department chair (in schools that have departments) and your school dean, as well as our office.

If you just want to shift from one semester to another within the same academic year as your original plan, your request can usually be handled by e-mail. ***But if you're proposing to move all or part of your sabbatical to a different academic year, you have to submit a new application and go through the review process again.*** In either case, if the change is approved, your department will have to follow up by processing a new e-doc for you.

11) I want to take an academic-year sabbatical, which means IU will pay me only half my salary. May I supplement IU's contribution with funds from a fellowship or grant?

Yes, but your total compensation may not exceed your regular salary. See **External Support** in the section on sabbatical leaves in the *Academic Guide*.

12) If I take a full-year sabbatical (at half-pay), what will happen to my fringe benefits?

The University will continue full life and medical insurance coverage in the case of an academic year sabbatical leave at half pay, or a one-semester sabbatical at full pay. Deductions for the appointee's share of the medical insurance premiums from monthly payroll checks will be continued during the leave. During a semester or academic-year sabbatical leave, however, IU Retirement Plan contributions will be made based on the actual salary paid. Thus, if you take a sabbatical leave at half pay, contributions will be made based on the half salary. You may, with some restrictions, make additional voluntary contributions to your retirement plan. Consult the University Human Resource Services office for details.

13) I want to take an academic-year sabbatical. May I supplement IU's contribution by teaching at another institution?

Yes, but because the focus of your sabbatical is supposed to be research or creative activity, there are strict rules governing teaching. See the *Academic Guide's* section on **External Support** cited in FAQ #11. Again, your total compensation may not exceed your regular salary.

14) I'm in the middle of the first semester of an academic-year sabbatical and find I can't live on half my regular salary. May I switch to a one-semester sabbatical and recoup the other half of my salary?

Sorry, but no. The best we can do is to allow you to defer the second semester of your sabbatical until a time when half salary will be less of a financial hardship. Accordingly, if you're contemplating an academic-year sabbatical without supplementary external funds, think long and hard about whether you can really afford it.

This is one of the places where viewing a sabbatical as an entitlement can get you into trouble. Remember, IU sees your sabbatical not as an entitlement, but as a mutually beneficial investment in your career development. It's an agreement between you and the university, and IU expects you to live up to your end of the bargain. If instead you start thinking you're entitled to your sabbatical and there must be some way to get the other half of your money, you will inevitably end up proposing some scheme that could technically constitute ghost employment, which is illegal.

15) I have appointments in two units. Do both of them need to approve my sabbatical application?

It depends on how your salary is handled and where your teaching responsibilities lie. If you have appointments in two instructional units but all your salary comes through one of them and you regularly teach only in that one, it's the only one that has to sign off. (Notifying the other unit as a courtesy is a good idea, of course.) On the other hand, if both units pay some of your salary and you teach regularly in both of them, they both have to make financial and instructional adjustments to cover your sabbatical. Therefore, they both have to approve your application.

If one of your appointments is in a non-instructional unit (for example, a research center directorship), ask our Associate Vice Provost for advice.

16) In my field creative activity is the expectation. Creative activity doesn't always follow the same timetables as research, and my project requires me to take my sabbatical in multiple small increments, rather than a single block of time. May I do that?

The answer is a qualified "yes." This question is complicated. Normally the minimal sabbatical unit is one semester. While we recognize that faculty members in the performing and studio arts can have special needs, we also realize that small-increment sabbaticals can create major financial and instructional difficulties for departments and schools. Getting your teaching covered can be especially problematical.

If you, your department, and your school all agree and can show that unusual circumstances make a small-increment sabbatical the only feasible option, our office will certainly work with everyone to overcome the obstacles. You can help to maximize the chances of a successful resolution by giving all parties plenty of advance notice, and therefore ample time to identify and avert potential problems.

17) I've completed my sabbatical. Now what do I need to do?

You need to file a report with our office. You can find the form and instructions on our website at http://www.indiana.edu/~vpfaa/docs/faculty_leaves/report-completion-of-sabbatical-leave.doc. Technically you're supposed to file this report within three months of the completion of your sabbatical, but we know that faculty members lead busy lives, and many don't meet the deadline. Our office treats late reports leniently (see FAQ #7 above).

There is a limit to our tolerance, however. We won't allow you to take your next sabbatical until you've filed a report on your previous one. This rule is strictly enforced.

18) Don't tell anybody, but I want to take my sabbatical at another university because I'm considering a position there. Is there anything I should know?

Yes. If you don't return to IU for at least one year immediately following your sabbatical, you'll have to reimburse the university for the salary and fringe benefits it paid you during your sabbatical. The very last sentence of the application form, placed right above the signature line and italicized for emphasis, says: *"In the event I do not return for at least one year immediately following the sabbatical leave, I agree to reimburse Indiana University for any salary, retirement contributions, and insurance premiums paid during the sabbatical leave."* Your application won't be approved without your signature, which creates a legally binding contract to this effect.

"Immediately following the sabbatical leave" means that a promise to return someday as a visiting faculty member isn't good enough. Come back right away or be prepared to pay up.

19) I'm nearing retirement, but I'll also be eligible for one more sabbatical. May I take my final sabbatical in the last or next-to-last semester before I retire?

No. See FAQ #18 above. The same provision about returning for at least one year applies to retirement, and your signature creates a legally binding contract. You'll have to come back for two semesters, so the latest you can take a one-semester sabbatical is the third semester before you retire. The latest you can begin an academic-year sabbatical is in the fourth semester before retirement.

If you're eligible for both retirement and a sabbatical within the next five years, it wouldn't hurt to begin planning now.

20) I'm a department chair (or school dean). If I'm thinking about making an offer of an assistant professorship with credit toward tenure, or an offer of a tenured position to someone who has been in rank at another university for several years, may I also request credit toward sabbatical?

Yes, within limits. Normally our office doesn't approve more than two years' credit toward sabbatical (or tenure, for that matter), and the negotiations should be completed by the time of initial appointment. If you're contemplating an offer that might include credit toward sabbatical, be sure to talk to one of our Associate Vice Provosts about it.