



OFFICE OF THE SENATE

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TO: Kelli Trei, Chair
Senate Committee on University Statutes and Senate Procedures

CC: Mike Hirschi, Chair
Senate Committee on Faculty and Academic Staff Benefits

FROM: John Weible, Former Chair
Senate Committee on Faculty and Academic Staff Benefits

DATE: September 15, 2026

SUBJECT: FB.26.02, Proposed Revision to the *Statutes*, Article IX, Section 7a – Sabbatical Leaves and Unpaid Leaves of Absence for Members of the Faculty (ST-90)

REVISION NOTES: This memo to SP *replaces* the preliminary version of FB.26.02 that had been sent to SP Chair David Dalpiaz in November 2025.

The Senate Committee on Faculty and Academic Staff Benefits [FB] first discussed ST-90 briefly on October 14, 2025, and thoroughly at subsequent fall and spring meetings, through April 28, 2026. In our March 31, 2026, meeting, Bill Bernhard and Jessica Mette gave the same presentation and data to FB that was shared with the Senate Committee on General University Policy (GP) and the Senate Committee on University Statutes and Senate Procedures (SP). Sporadic attendance of some elected members complicated discussions and precluded a vote formalizing recommendations during the spring.

Overall, FB is supportive of the concept and purpose of ST-90, with qualifications. Concerns and differences of view that were discussed are primarily about implementation details and effects. Since ST-90 intentionally leaves most of that detail unspecified, a few members were comfortable with its proposed general language. However, it became clear mid-year that many senators and administrators would not favor approval until many non-statutory details had been discussed. Some alternatives to its current form may work as well or better and may receive wider support from the Senate at large.

In FB, we did not attempt to draft specific language for revisions of ST-90 but focused on identifying principles for an effective and beneficial result, regardless of which aspects become part of the Statutes.

Recommendations from FB are:

- The University needs a standardized, equitable process that allows full-time specialized faculty to periodically pursue approved mutually beneficial alternative work activities, particularly work of types or situations that are infeasible or inefficient during semesters of normally scheduled work responsibilities. The University now lags many peer institutions on this, reducing our recruitment and retention abilities.
- The status quo is insufficient – this requires a formal process, standardized eligibility, and documentation that is persistent and strongly supported. Ideally the institutional support and persistence will be included in the *Statutes*.
Reasoning: Discussion with Dr. Bernhard included the suggestion that perhaps the *Statutes* don't require modification to allow something like sabbaticals to specialized faculty. True in theory, but where else can it be codified for decade-spanning stability? It may take 6-8 years of service to begin one's eligibility, so the process can't rely only on administrative whims. The slippery slope became immediately clear in discussion: One person thought that since Deans can already approve course releases, nothing needs to change.
- Formally using the specific word "sabbatical" for this is not essential, but something roughly analogous is needed for specialized faculty. Concern was raised that some people, especially outside academia, often misunderstand the purposes and benefits of sabbaticals, and therefore expanding them may be viewed negatively. Consider using an alternative term.
- Employees in *all* specialized faculty title categories are eligible to apply after the required service duration. Use broad-based merit criteria instead of titles for prioritization. Especially when there are more applications than can be approved in a cycle, base determinations on the beneficial outcomes of the proposed sabbatical activities instead of titles. To further enhance this and incentivize voluntary deferment, an equitable system would use formula that combines merits of each proposal with a weighted factor of how many years of eligibility each applicant has.
Reasoning: Every argument that has been suggested for restricting eligibility by titles (e.g. "only Teaching Professors" or "only Teaching/Research Professors" or similar) can be rebutted with counter arguments just as rational and compelling.
- Form an *ad hoc* committee to work with the Office of the Provost on implementation planning. Elect a majority of its representative members from multiple specialized faculty titles.