Applying for and undertaking a

SPECIAL STUDIES PROGRAM

A guide to be used in conjunction with the Academic Portfolio and Special Studies Program rules.

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Appendix - Special Studies Programs Rules

1. SUMMARY OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process can be summarised in the five following steps.

i) Details of the proposed special studies program are provided in Folio 6 (A-C) of the Academic Portfolio.

ii) Where a previous program has been undertaken, the applicant must ensure that a report on that program has been completed and is included under Folio 6 (D) of the Academic Portfolio.

iii) At the applicant’s Annual Review the portfolio is discussed generally, and Folio 6 in particular, with the Head of School or supervisor, who is provided with an explanation of the proposal and the anticipated outcomes and benefits.
After the review the Head will then complete the form *Head of School’s Recommendation: Special Studies Program* and provide it to the applicant for countersigning.

The applicant forwards either the complete or at least the essential sections of the *Academic Portfolio*, i.e. folios 1, 3 C (bibliographic record) and 6, to the SSP Officer, for the attention of the Executive Dean, with a covering note briefly indicating that the material is submitted as an application for SSP.

A staff member cannot apply for an SSP without having prepared an Academic Portfolio and completed an Annual Review with the supervisor/Head of School.

### 2. THE ROLES OF THE INTERESTED PARTIES

#### 2.1 Applicant

*Schedule for action*

Staff members wishing to apply for a special studies program commencing before the end of the following year should prepare their Academic Portfolio, have an annual review meeting with their supervisor and discuss the SSP application with the Head of School in time to meet the SSP deadline on 17 March. The SSP round covers programs commencing between 1st December in the current year and 31st December in the following year.

#### 2.2 Head of School

*Actions to complete*

The Head will consider each application with respect to the matters listed in Rule 7 (a–c, e and f), make a recommendation on the form *Head of School’s Recommendation: Special Studies Program*, and provide a ranking of the applications. As an outcome of the annual review, the Head may also recommend that an application for SSP be made, where the staff member has not already done so.

*Ranking: criteria and purpose*

The Head may not support an SSP application of questionable worth, or may be compelled to refuse an otherwise acceptable application when the School/Centre cannot cope with the absence of every staff member seeking a program, long service leave or other leave in the same semester or academic year.

In determining the ranking of applications, including those that should not or cannot be supported for approval in the forthcoming round, the Head may take into
consideration the period of service since a previous program and other matters which are considered relevant, in addition to those relating to academic merit.

The ranking of those applications which the Head supports will not only provide the Executive Dean with additional insight into the Head’s overall relative evaluation of the applications, but will also provide a basis for the further refusal of programs if the University-wide applications for the whole year exceed sustainable limits (7% of academic staff time, averaged over a triennium). However, this latter outcome has not occurred in recent years.

### 2.3 Executive Dean and the Faculty SSP Committee

*Role of the Executive Dean*

The Executive Dean will consider applications and other SSP matters for executive approval, and may also convene, chair and seek the advice of a Faculty SSP Committee.

Applications are considered with respect to the matters listed in Rule 7, and will either be approved, refused or held while the applicant is requested to provide further information. Approvals will often have attached conditions, such as being subject to the applicant gaining a reappointment or providing a final itinerary, and the Executive Dean may make suggestions or set down expectations regarding the outcomes of the present or future programs. The Executive Dean will re-evaluate the outcomes of programs when considering subsequent applications, by which time the emerging benefits should be manifest, and may reconsider the outcomes of more than one previous program where there is some doubt that the applicant is obtaining maximum benefit from SSP.

*Committee function*

The Faculty SSP Committee will advise the Executive Dean on matters referred to it by the Executive Dean, and will consider appeals against refusal of programs.

The Committee need not be one convened specifically to consider SSP matters and the Executive Dean may designate an existing committee such as a Committee of Heads of School or other suitable committee that meets fairly regularly, as the Faculty SSP Committee.

### 3. PREPARATION OF THE APPLICATION

To apply for a special studies program use folio 6 (A-C) of the Academic Portfolio.

#### 3.1 Duration

The commencement and completion date of the proposed program should be provided.
3.2 Itinerary

*Details provided with the application*

Available detail should be provided, even where the applicant has only a general idea of the itinerary. There will sometimes be a few locations that would serve equally well as a main base, and the applicant should indicate and justify the likely choices if these are known but still to be finalized. If the purposes and goals of the proposal are well defined, some uncertainty concerning the venue and travel dates should not deter a staff member from submitting in a particular round.

The end dates of a program should refer to the formal SSP, and not cover extensions beyond the SSP when the applicant is remaining overseas during the recesses with the Head’s approval. The itinerary should cover the entire period of the formal SSP, including periods in Brisbane.

*Updating the itinerary*

Where an application has been approved with an outline or tentative itinerary, the applicant should remember to provide a firm and detailed itinerary before commencing the program or attempting to claim the allowances. Approval must be sought for any alterations to the approved program.

3.3 Description of proposed activities

*Scope of the proposal*

The information provided must cover the proposed activities, the goals and the expected outcomes. The applicant must ensure that there is a clear underlying rationale for all aspects of the program, and must also explain the program’s contribution to their personal and professional development (However, the applicant does not have to provide a copy of the Academic Personal and Professional Development Plan, which remains confidential to the staff member, supervisor and Head).

*Quantity of information required*

Applicants frequently seek guidance on the volume of information required, but there is no simple guideline since proposals and the circumstances of applicants vary greatly. The onus is upon the applicant to “show that significant benefits will accrue to the University through the enhancement of the individual’s contributions to research, teaching or scholarship”, as stated in the preamble to the SSP rules, and sufficient information must be provided to achieve this end. There are several aspects of an application which will affect the amount of information required.

*A relatively straightforward case*
Where the applicant has an established record of achievement within the intended research field, can identify tangible benefits that will arise directly from the program, and has a proposed schedule of work involving sustained periods of intensive research activity that clearly could not be achieved without an SSP, then a proposal may be relatively straightforward to describe and explain in terms of the activities, goals and expected outcomes.

**A more complex example**

There may be considerably more explanation required to deal with a research area new to the applicant, with multiple venues, activities and goals, or with diffuse or indirect benefits. For example, an application may be received from a staff member who proposes to research a relatively new area, and who wishes to undertake a series of visits to institutions, attend workshops or conferences, and make field observations of scientific or cultural practices. The applicant may aim to gather information, seek ideas, learn techniques and explore overseas collaborations, all with a view to improving future academic performance but without specific and immediate tangible benefits arising from the program. In such a case, the applicant must take care to ensure that a description and rationale is provided for all parts of the program, including all visits undertaken and other activities pursued, that the proposal is explained in the context of future personal and professional development, and that the outcomes with which the Executive Dean can eventually evaluate the program’s success are identified. Where such a program is approved, the Executive Dean is likely to examine the staff member’s subsequent output and progress very carefully before a future application is approved.

**Periods to be spent in Brisbane**

Applicants must also ensure that the information in the proposal covers activities during periods of time spent in Brisbane.

**Alternative plans**

Where a proposal is dependent upon the cooperation of a host, attainment of a grant or other external factor, the applicant may have an alternative plan as a standby. If the applicant wishes to gain blanket approval for a program, covering all alternatives, then all those alternatives must be described and justified.

**Other information**

An applicant may also include any other material pertaining to a proposal which may strengthen the application. This may include such items as invitations from host institutions and contracts or expressions of interest from publishers.

4. **SUBMISSION OF THE APPLICATION**

4.1 **Minimum requirements**
The applicant must submit

- Folio 6 (A-C) – the proposal,
- Folio 3 (C) – which contains a list of publications covering at least the period since a previous program or, where no program has been undertaken, the period since appointment. The list should indicate which items resulted from the previous program,
- Folio 6 (D) – a report on the most recent program. In cases where the report was submitted some years earlier or where no copy is held by the applicant, a copy can be obtained from the SSP Officer and
- the completed *Head of School’s Recommendation: Special Studies Program* form, Part 1.

4.2 Submitting the Academic Portfolio

Applicants should submit at least the essential folios to the SSP Officer. The folios may be submitted in single hard copy, or may be submitted electronically. In the latter case, applicants will still need to submit hard copies of any documents that they consider relevant, but which have not been incorporated into the electronic version of the Academic Portfolio.

5. ALTERATIONS TO PROGRAMS

Requests to alter approved programs should be forwarded through the Head to the SSP Officer. The alteration should be fully explained and justified, and the form and purposes of the entire altered program should be clear. Where an itinerary includes multiple venues, it may be necessary to provide a fresh itinerary for the altered program.

6. APPEALS

Appeals against refusal of a program are in the first instance referred by the Executive Dean to the Faculty SSP Committee. If the application is again rejected, the applicant may appeal to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic), who will determine the matter.

7. FINANCIAL

7.1 General
Staff members undertaking SSP will normally receive their usual continuing salary payments and, if at least a specified minimum amount of travel is undertaken, a scheduled contribution towards travel costs. Loadings are usually retained, except for those relating to special duties discontinued during the program. Part-time staff members who have accrued sufficient credit towards SSP and have approval to undertake a full-time program will receive a salary allowance increasing it to the full-time equivalent.

Allowances are payable up to two months prior to the commencement of the program and should be requested with the Expenditure Section’s form. The allowances are paid by electronic fund transfer and will show as additional income for the fiscal year in which they are received. Staff members undertaking second semester programs who will incur major costs both prior to and during their programs may request a split payment.

The use of the allowances is not specified. If, for example, an overseas institution paid a staff member’s fare from Brisbane, then the staff member could use all the SSP allowances to meet accommodation costs.

Upon the completion of a program, a staff member is requested to provide a summary of the program (see section 8). A refund of any overpayment will be requested and where an approved itinerary adjustment has increased the amount payable the balance shall be paid to the staff member. Through the submission and processing of a signed statement which shows that an approved program has been duly completed, and the making of any necessary adjustment to the allowances received, the allowances are considered by the University to be duly requited.

7.2 Use of other funds

Staff members on SSP may still access any University funds over and above the normal specified allowances. Staff members would apply through the usual departmental procedures. Such funds would include:

i. Research grants financed by external agencies (e.g. ARC, NH&MRC);

Travel expenses from Brisbane to the SSP base, subsistence expenses while at the relocated workplace, or any other expenses associated with the main research activities of the program, cannot be claimed, unless the expenses have been specifically allowed in the conditions of the grant.

ii. Other University funds (e.g. URG, New Staff Research Grant, conference funds or any other Departmental consulting or testing account).

Any claim for additional funding while on SSP must be approved by the Head of School. However, travel expenses from Brisbane to the SSP base and subsistence expenses while at the relocated workplace cannot be claimed unless specifically approved by the Executive Dean.
7.3 **Tax**

It is the staff member’s responsibility to record all necessary information on activities and costs incurred during a program in order that the expenses be set against the staff member’s tax bill, and the University does not undertake to advise staff members on taxation matters.

8. **FOLLOW UP ON RETURN FROM SSP**

Within three months of return from a special studies program the staff member has an obligation to complete documentation relating to the program. Folio 6 (D) of the Academic Portfolio is completed, printed off, signed and forwarded to the Head of School who will then complete Part 2 of the form “Head of School’s Recommendation: Special Studies Program” and return the report and form back to the staff member.

The folio and the Head of School’s Recommendation are forwarded via the SSP Officer to the Executive Dean. The SSP Officer will periodically provide batches of reports and the related documentation for the Executive Dean’s consideration.

9. **SUNDARY MATTERS**

9.1 **Other leave**

Programs can be preceded or followed by periods of other forms of leave. Recreation leave is deemed to be taken during SSP at the rate of four weeks per annum, regardless of whether it is specified in an itinerary. Staff members wishing to take further recreation leave must do so outside of the formal SSP period.

9.2 **Insurance**

The Insurance Officer has provided the following information.

Corporate travel insurance provided automatically for salaried staff members includes the business component of SSP. There is no requirement for notification of travel arrangements to the Insurance Office and the premium is met from central funds. For the purpose of this insurance policy, intervening weekends and after-hour time are considered as incidental to the business travel and are not leisure time. It is recommended that any leisure period be insured privately. Information brochures are available from the Insurance Office for the automatic cover and the private travel insurance for staff, their families and students which is available through the same insurer.

University laptop computers are covered for theft, accidental loss or damage anywhere in the world provided cover is arranged through the School submitting a completed Overseas Transit Insurance Advice form to the Insurance Office at least
two weeks prior to departure. For insurance cover of other University property, please contact the Insurance Office.

The University's public liability insurance cover includes temporary overseas research and study carried out on behalf of or with the prior written consent of the University. Very limited professional indemnity cover is provided with respect to any activities within the USA or Canada. It is important to appreciate that whilst independent consultation may be undertaken by staff members, the University's public liability and professional indemnity insurance covers do not extend to such activities.

Personal accident insurance cover continues whilst overseas.

9.3 Visas
Staff members requiring evidence of their employment status at The University of Queensland and of their approved SSPs may obtain an appropriate letter from the SSP Officer.

10. APPENDIX

SPECIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS RULES
Approved by Senate on 27.8.98
Minor changes approved by Secretary and Registrar on 12.2.01

Purposes of a Special Studies Program

A special studies program provides a period of sustained scholarly activity or professional experience contributing to research or teaching or both. For approval to be given for a special studies program the applicant must show that significant benefits will accrue to the University through the enhancement of the individual’s contributions to research, teaching or scholarship.

The number of programs approved each year may be limited by staffing and budgetary constraints. Applications will be required to demonstrate, and will be considered on, the merit of the project proposed, the capacity of the individual to fulfil the aims of the project and its relevance to University needs.

Location of Special Studies Programs

Applicants will need to show that the proposed locations for their programs are those best suited to the work to be carried out.

RULES

1. Definitions
In these Rules –

“associate lecturer” means and is limited to:

a) staff appointed as associate lecturers; and

b) staff originally appointed as senior tutors or specialist tutors who now hold their appointments as associate lecturers.

“Committee” means the committee which may be convened to consider special studies program matters in each Faculty;

“credit” means service credited to a staff member used to determine eligibility;

“Executive Dean” means the Executive Dean of each Faculty;

“School” includes Centres and Units to which applicants belong;

“Head of School” includes the Directors of Faculty Centres, University Centres and Institutes to which applicants belong;

“program” means a special studies program under these Rules.

2. Approval of a program

Approval of an SSP program is vested in the Executive Dean who may convene a Committee within the Faculty to make recommendations on SSP applications. In this case, the Executive Dean will determine the application after receiving the Committee’s advice. The relevant Executive Dean chairs any Faculty committee convened to consider SSP issues.

3. Eligibility

1) The following staff are eligible to accrue credit towards a program –

   (a) teaching and research academics on appointments of at least associate lecturer requiring at least half-time service; or

   (b) research academics, generally those appointed at Level B or above, where:

       i) the Chief Investigator (or the Executive Dean if the staff member concerned is the Chief Investigator) is of the view that such a period study leave will benefit the research program; and

       ii) the necessary resources are available to support the program; or

   (c) those appointed under a contract that provides for a program, in which case the relevant conditions of that contract apply.

2) Those on less than full-time appointments accrue credit at a rate equivalent to their appointment fraction.

3) The maximum credit that may accrue is 6 years unless rule 9 applies.
4) A contract of employment may provide for up to 3 years credit in respect of service immediately before becoming eligible to accrue credit. Provision must only be made where the prior service –
   (a) was at another university, tertiary educational institution, or government financed institution; and
   (b) was rendered –
      i substantially in Australia; or
      ii elsewhere, if the Executive Dean specially approves provision for that service; and
   (c) entitled the staff member to undertake a program under provisions substantially similar to these Rules.

5) Credit is accrued over the period the staff member undertakes service at this University. No credit accrues during a program or a period of leave without pay.

6) A program cannot commence until the applicant has completed 3 years of continuous service at this University.

4. Length of program and credit
1) To take a program of the duration in the table below the applicant must have accrued at least the corresponding credit which will be extinguished in whole or in part according to the duration of the program taken.

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2) A program must not extend beyond one semester and the associated vacations unless the program is too long to avoid it, or the extension into a further semester is supported by the Head of School and Executive Dean.

5. Applications
(1) An applicant for a special studies program must –
   (a) complete the Academic Portfolio, including a proposal for the special studies program;
   (b) undertake an annual review; and
   (c) submit the prescribed sections of the Academic Portfolio and the completed Head of School’s Recommendation Form, when it has been signed, to the SSP Officer.

(2) An application for a program must be lodged by 15 April.
(3) Normally, a program must be due to commence between 1 December that year and 31 December of the next, but in special circumstances the Executive Dean may approve a program to commence at an earlier date.

6. Details to be provided

(1) An applicant must undertake to comply with these Rules and any conditions on which the program is approved and must furnish the following information:

   (a) details of the proposed program and the work (including work not connected with the program) to be carried out during the period of the program;

   (b) a description of

      (i) the significant benefits expected to accrue to the University through the enhancement of the individual’s contribution to research, teaching and scholarship, and

      (ii) the key outcomes of the program;

   (c) a statement of the outcomes from the previous program, particularly published works, assessed against the approved plan for that program; and

   (d) any other information required by the Executive Dean.

(2) The applicant’s Head of School must certify that the program will benefit the University, School and the applicant.

7. Consideration of applications

In considering applications, the Executive Dean takes the following matters into account –

   (a) the relevance of the proposed program to the interests of the University and the applicant, including any impact on research, teaching, and the relevant professional discipline;

   (b) the record of the applicant as an academic, including research and teaching;

   (c) where the applicant has previously undertaken a program, the period of service since the applicant’s return and evidence of achievement judged against the approved plan for that program;

   (d) the ranking given to the application by the Head of School;

   (e) staffing and budgetary considerations; and

   (f) any effects of rules 9 and 10.

8. Appeals

An applicant whose application has been refused by the Executive Dean may apply for reconsideration. The Executive Dean will refer the appeal to an appropriate Faculty Committee convened to deal with SSP matters. If the application is again rejected, the applicant may appeal to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) who will determine the matter.
9. School interests

A staff member with maximum credit will be allowed to accrue credit for up to 1 more year if the Head of School certifies that the work of the School cannot be carried out in a satisfactory manner in the member’s absence.

10. Curtailed programs

In the interests of the University, the Vice-Chancellor may curtail a staff member’s program with effect from a specified date and may grant appropriate financial compensation.

11. Recreation leave

During a program, the staff member will be deemed to have taken recreation leave at the rate of 4 weeks per annum.

12. Conditions on programs

A program is subject to the following terms and any special conditions determined by Senate or the Vice-Chancellor –

(a) The member of staff must pursue the approved program or any modified program approved by the Executive Dean. The permission of the Executive Dean must be obtained in writing before the approved program is modified.

(b) The University may require a staff member to repay –

   (i) salary in respect of absence from the University occurring immediately before or after the program and for which no written approval was obtained; and

   (ii) salary and financial assistance in respect of a period during which the member does not diligently pursue the program for any reason other than sickness or the written authority of the Executive Dean. The financial assistance to be repaid is the amount which bears to the total financial assistance for the program the same proportion as the relevant period bears to the total program.

(c) At the end of the program and any approved leave (other than sick leave) immediately following it, the staff member must continue in employment at the University for a period equal to the length of the program so as to requite the University’s expenditure on the program.

(d) A staff member who does not complete the service required in the preceding paragraph must pay to the University an amount equal to the sum of the salary received for the unrequited period of the program and a proportionate part of the financial assistance received.

(e) As well as any other rights it may have, to the extent permitted by law the University may deduct from any money otherwise payable to the staff member the amount payable under these provisions, unless the Vice-Chancellor permits an alternative method of payment.
13. Financial assistance

(1) Details of financial assistance available are published in a schedule of special studies program allowances.

(2) The amount of financial assistance calculated before the start of a program is a provisional grant which may be reviewed in the light of information provided in the report on the program and financial adjustments may then be made.

(3) Except with the approval of the Executive Dean, financial assistance will not be available until 2 months before the start of a program.

14. Reports

(1) Within three months of return to normal duty, the staff member must complete the relevant section of the Academic Portfolio and forward it to the Executive Dean. The information must include –
   
   (a) the date the staff member commenced the program;
   (b) the approved date of completion of the program;
   (c) where the staff member does not return to the School on the approved completion date, details of prior written permission by the Head of School for not returning to the School on that date;
   (d) in the case of an overseas program the dates on which the member left Australia and returned to Australia; and
   (e) a report of 750 – 1500 words describing the program and the work (including work not connected to the program) carried out during the program, with comments on the significance of the work done. In particular, the report should itemise the publications expected to result from the program, including draft title and the expected venue for publication.

(2) The Head of School must complete the relevant section of the form *Head’s Recommendation: Special Studies Program* and forward it to the Executive Dean.

(3) If a member of staff fails to submit a report within three months of return, no credit accrues until the report is received by the Head of School unless the Executive Dean determines otherwise.

(4) After considering the report and any further information he/she may have requested, the Executive Dean may accept the report or require the staff member to revise it. If the staff member does not revise the report or if the Executive Dean does not accept the revised report, the Executive Dean must determine the action to be taken (including the refusal or deferral of a future program).

The staff member must be advised of any critical comment the Executive Dean records on the report.

15. Power to suspend compliance
In consultation with the Executive Dean, the Vice-Chancellor may permit a departure from these Rules and may impose conditions when doing so.

16. Transitional provisions

Credit accrued before the commencement of these rules under:

a) previous Special Studies Programs Rules (existing before 1995) will be counted as if it had been accrued under these rules;

b) the Assisted Development Programs rules will be counted under these rules as if half that credit had been accrued.