



Faculty Research Leave Policy

Updated December 2023

Purpose

In the words of the Shils Report, “The tradition of The University of Chicago has defined it, primarily but not exclusively, as a research university of the highest international standing” (p. 3). In keeping with this mission, faculty members in the Division of the Humanities are given the opportunity to balance their institutional obligations with their own academic pursuits. Faculty members typically teach four courses per academic year, advise and mentor students, and perform departmental and other service, leaving the balance of the academic year to pursue their own research, writing, and publication.

The Faculty Research Leave Policy is designed to provide Humanities faculty members with additional time to focus on their scholarly interests, free from the usual responsibilities of teaching and service. It allows faculty members time to pursue their scholarship with greater intensity, to bring projects to fruition, and to embark upon new lines of inquiry. It is meant to provide greater predictability and more equal access, not limited by the availability and requirements of external funding, while still recognizing and rewarding initiative.

Policy

The standard Research Leave consists of two quarters out-of-residence and a reduction of two courses, based on a standard four-course teaching load. For faculty members teaching fewer or more courses than the standard four-course load, the course reduction will be determined on an individual basis but will not exceed 50% of the teaching load.

All tenure-track faculty members (Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, and full Professors) will be eligible for a Faculty Research Leave after three *consecutive* years of full in-residence service, meeting their full Departmental and Collegiate teaching responsibilities. Assistant Professors may be eligible to receive a first Research Leave in either the third or fourth year of the first term, depending on Departmental preference; however, no Assistant Professor may have more than one research leave prior to the faculty member’s tenure decision regardless of the number of years at rank or stop-the-clock actions.

Applications for Research Leave will be reviewed by the Dean and awarded based on the faculty member’s proposed plan of research, as well as on evidence of productive use of previous Research Leaves.

Faculty members are not eligible for Research Leave:

- 1) During the year in which their tenure decision is made,
- 2) During the year prior to retirement, or
- 3) During the half-time retirement period.

Faculty members may request to extend the Research Leave to a full academic year—full release from teaching and all three quarters out-of-residence, at full academic-year compensation—in one of three ways:

- 1) By securing external fellowship or grant support that provides either of the following:
 - a. at least 50% of annual salary (excluding benefits);
 - b. a minimum award amount of \$50,000¹;
- 2) By accepting a 50% reduction in base annual salary (excluding benefits); or
- 3) By accruing six consecutive years of full in-residence service as defined above.

Faculty members are strongly encouraged to apply for external support regardless of their Research Leave plans and should begin applying for external fellowships by September 1 in the year before their anticipated Research Leave. Please note that application for and/or receipt of fellowship funding does not ensure that a Research Leave request will be granted.

Faculty Research Leaves should not be unduly disruptive. **Faculty members are responsible for consulting with their Department Chair(s) to confirm that their plans will not negatively impact their Department(s). If a faculty member has teaching obligations in more than one Department, each Department Chair must be consulted.**

In turn, Chairs are responsible for consulting with the Dean and College Master to determine whether their faculty's proposed Research Leaves will fit the curricular and governance needs of the Department; in general, the Division does not provide funding for replacement teaching. If a faculty member's Research Leave is delayed at the explicit request of the Chair or Dean for administrative, teaching, or service reasons, the administration will do its best to avoid delaying future Research Leaves as a result (e.g., if a faculty member plans to take Research Leave in 2024–25 and 2028–29, but has to delay the first Leave to 2025–26 at the explicit request of the Chair or Dean, they may still be eligible for a Leave year in 2028–29).

Faculty members must return to full in-residence service, meeting the expected teaching and service responsibilities in their Departments, for at least one full academic year following a Faculty Research Leave and prior to departure from the University. Thus, the year of a tenure decision and the final pre-retirement year are excluded from Research Leave eligibility. Faculty members on the half-time retirement option are not eligible for Research Leave.

¹ This amount will be reviewed periodically against select external award benchmarks to which we intend our faculty to be eligible applicants.

Elaborations

External Funding: The Division does not “top off” external awards that provide less than 50% of a faculty member’s annual salary or minimum award of \$50,000. If a faculty member receives an award that provides less than the 50% salary or \$50,000 threshold, the faculty member may elect to take a reduction in pay in order to secure the third quarter off. Please contact the Associate Dean for Planning and Administration (Matt Hess, hessmb@uchicago.edu) in the Dean’s Office for assistance in determining how a salary reduction will affect your monthly wages.

All and any funding secured by a faculty member in support of a Research Leave must be paid to the Division even if it exceeds the threshold for securing the third quarter off. Fellowships that provide more than 50% of a faculty member’s annual salary or more than the minimum required award amount of \$50,000 shall not entitle that faculty member to additional salary, additional financial support for research, additional teaching relief, or additional time out-of-residence. The benefit the faculty member receives from external awards is an extension of the Faculty Research Leave. The benefit the Division derives is the ability to maintain a generous Faculty Research Leave policy.

Service toward Eligibility: Faculty members accrue service for each *consecutive academic year* spent in-residence meeting their full departmental and Collegiate teaching responsibilities. Upon return from a Faculty Research Leave, the accrual of service is reset to zero.

Eligibility does not accrue during leaves of absence under the Parental Leave/FMLA policy or for any other purpose, such as to visit or teach at another university; however, following a Parental/FMLA or other leave, the accrual of service picks up where it stopped prior to the leave (rather than resetting to zero). A fourth quarter in-residence (i.e., summer) for teaching or administration does not advance eligibility for a Faculty Research Leave.

Faculty members are expected to synchronize plans to accept external fellowships with their period of eligibility for Research Leave under this policy. If a special opportunity arises on short notice and outside of the standard schedule, the Department and Division will evaluate the faculty member’s request on a case-by-case basis. This is done solely at the discretion of the Chair and the Dean. A minimum of two years of in-residence service must accrue between Research Leaves, no matter how they are funded and regardless of special circumstances.

Return to Service: A faculty member must return to full, in-residence service for at least one year following a Faculty Research Leave and prior to departure from the University of Chicago. In the event that the faculty member does not return to the University following a Research Leave (e.g., for full or half-time retirement, or for employment elsewhere), the faculty member (or their new employer) must reimburse the University for all salary, benefits, and other funds the University expended toward the Research Leave. The only exception to this is an Assistant Professor who, after being on a Research Leave during the terminal year of their first appointment term, is not renewed; in such circumstances, the Assistant Professor is not expected to repay any funds expended toward their Research Leave.

Appointments at Other Institutions: Faculty may not accept paid employment at another university during a Faculty Research Leave. Faculty members may extend a Research Leave to a third quarter by taking a visiting position at another university if the Division is reimbursed at least 50% of their annual salary.

How to Apply

The Dean's Office issues the annual call for Research Leave applications late in the Autumn Quarter. Faculty members who wish to take a Research Leave in a given academic year should coordinate with their Department Chair so that materials can be reviewed by the Chair and then submitted to the Dean's Office by early Winter Quarter. For example, if a faculty member wants to take a research leave in AY 24-25 they should prepare their materials in the fall of 2023, and submit them to the Department Chair for approval and eventual submission to the Dean's Office in January 2024. **Faculty members with teaching responsibilities in multiple Departments will need to secure approval from all relevant and appropriate Chairs.** Each department or Chair may establish its own process and deadline to collect applications from faculty members, allowing enough time to meet the January deadline determined by the Dean's Office (**for 2024: January 12**). Discussion between the faculty member and the Chair(s) should address the following:

- (a) The faculty member's research plans during the Research Leave;
- (b) What external funding they hope to secure;
- (c) What impact their absence will have on the Department; and
- (d) What steps they will take to ensure that a Faculty Research Leave will not impede the progress of any student advisees.

At their discretion, Department Chairs may require in advance of the formal application a written elaboration of the faculty member's plans or any other supporting documentation they feel is appropriate.

Once a faculty member has discussed Research Leave plans with the relevant Chair(s), they should fill out the Application for Research Leave and submit it to the Chair(s) for approval. Each Chair should submit their Department's Research Leave requests, as well as a statement that details the Department's plans for operating with a reduced faculty body, to the Dean the January deadline determined by the Dean's Office. The Dean will inform Department Chairs as soon as possible after approval by the Provost.

Assistance with Funding Applications

Faculty members interested in seeking external funding to support a third quarter of Research Leave should contact the Senior Writer & Research Development Director (Courtney Guerra, courtney.guerra@uchicago.edu) in the Dean's Office for assistance in identifying opportunities. To ensure maximum eligibility, and in order to avoid missing the deadlines for major fellowships, this conversation should begin no later than September 1 in the year prior to the potential Research Leave, and it is advantageous to start the process even earlier if possible.

Research Leave Application Deadlines

Please note: these dates refer to the academic year *before* the desired Research Leave year; for example, faculty members requesting a Research Leave for Academic Year 2024–25 would need to apply in 2023 for approval in calendar year 2024. The Department Chairs will determine the departmental process and deadline for submitting applications to the Chair.

September 1: Deadline for contacting Research Development Director regarding funding
 January 12: Deadline for Department Chairs to submit Research Leave requests to Dean

Eligibility

The below grid provides an overview of who is and is not eligible for Research Leave under typical circumstances.

For additional details, or to confirm eligibility for a specific faculty member, please consult with the Research Development Director or Dean’s Office.

Am I eligible for a Faculty Research Leave?

I am a...	Eligible?	Caveats and Clarifications
First- or Second-Term Assistant Professor	Yes	...after two or more years of full residency and you are not up for tenure during your proposed Research Leave year.
Tenured Professor (Associate/full)	Yes	...provided three years have passed since your last Research Leave* and you are not retiring at the end of your proposed Research Leave year or currently on the half-time retirement plan.
Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Professors of Practice in the Arts, or any other academic appointee or employee.	No	The Faculty Research Leave policy is only applicable to tenure-track faculty members. Please refer to the Lecturer Professional Development Leave policy for details about other academic appointment leaves.

* In exceptional cases, it is possible for only two years to elapse between Research Leaves; however, under no circumstances may a faculty member be fully in-residence for fewer than two years between Research Leaves.