
GUIDELINES ON RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
Adopted by the Office of the Provost, June 28, 2005
Amended by the Provost, August 31, 2006

I. Purpose

In support of its stated mission and goals, The University is committed to the advancement of research and other creative scholarly activity. The Research Assignment program exists, in part, to reward tenured faculty members who have demonstrated longstanding and distinguished contributions to The University through the award of a one-semester or academic year period of time for 9-month faculty (or a 6-month or 12-month period of time for 12-month faculty) (on or off campus) in which the faculty member may focus (on or off campus) upon the advancement or completion of one or more scholarly activities. Tenured¹ faculty members are thus encouraged to take advantage of Research Assignments as an opportunity to promote and advance their scholarship². To ensure the equitable use of resources and maintain faculty continuity in instruction, a faculty member may not be awarded a Research Assignment more than once in a five-year period.

II. Procedure for Application and Approval

A Research Assignment is neither deferred compensation nor an entitlement based upon length of service, but is granted on the merits of the individual proposal upon recommendation of the appropriate reviewers. The Provost provides specific application deadlines to deans, department heads³, and the University Librarian in the fall, approximately four to six weeks before the application deadline. Applications for Research Assignments are made through the department chairs to the deans. The dean makes a recommendation to the Provost, who in turn provides a recommendation to the Chancellor.

In all instances when external salary support is being requested, pertinent agency/foundation policies should be forwarded with the application for a Research Assignment. Some faculty will only accept a Research Assignment if they receive external support for that project. In these cases, such a contingency should be made explicit in the initial application.

Department heads must assure the dean or Provost that teaching and advising in the department will be maintained during the faculty member's absence. Decisions about granting Research Assignments must be made with a clear understanding of the source of funds to maintain the instructional expectations of the department. Therefore, the source of funds for replacement faculty needs to be determined prior to approval of the Research Assignment.

It is especially important that each dean provide ratings of merit and a statement that a Research Assignment request can be accommodated within the department/ school/College budget. (See Addendum to this document for the Numerical Rating Table.) If such a statement cannot be

¹ Academic Deans have the authority to waive this tenure stipulation under special circumstances.

² Scholarship is characterized by creative intellectual work based on a high level of professional expertise, the significance of which can be validated by peers and which enhances the fulfillment of the mission of the University.

³ For the purpose of these guidelines, the terms *department head* and *department chair* are synonymous.

submitted because of limitations within the department/school/College budget, a statement showing the additional University reserve funds required to accommodate the request should be submitted. Although the merit review process will be conducted without reference to funding needs, it must be recognized that the limitations of University reserves will tend to weigh heavily against the final approval of an application submitted with a special reserve funding request, however meritorious the proposed project may be.

The merit review will not be conducted for faculty members applying for or awarded funded fellowships that involve external review, e.g., Fulbright Fellowships. In such cases, the Research Assignment Application must still be submitted to the department head, and the external fellowship proposal must also be submitted through the Office of Sponsored Programs with the usual green folder approval by chairs and deans.

Deans are responsible for providing the Provost with a list of applications and results of the process.

If circumstances require that a substantial change be made in the proposed project after it has been approved, the faculty member should obtain approval from the department head and dean for changes.

III. Requirements of Faculty on Research

Faculty members on Research Assignment are expected to devote full-time to the proposed project and should agree to resign from all campus obligations (department, college, and campus committees) during the time of the Research Assignment; however, they are encouraged to maintain contact with graduate advisees or to make other arrangements to ensure that a student's progress will not be disrupted. Faculty may also participate in the department faculty evaluation process (for annual reviews or hiring) if the department bylaws provide this opportunity.

Within six months of the end date of the Research Assignment, faculty members are required to submit to the department head a written report on their accomplishments during the period of the assignment. The report should describe in general terms how the Research Assignment aided the faculty member in advancing his or her research and should include a list of relevant scholarly activities and accomplishments (e.g., papers delivered, articles accepted for publications, etc.). It is anticipated that the report will be no more than two pages in length. The department head must review the report and must affix a signature and date certifying that the faculty member has met the reporting requirements within the six-month period. The report is then forwarded to the dean, who must also review, sign, and date the report, and then forward it to the Provost. Any faculty member who fails to submit the required report shall not be considered for subsequent Research Assignments.

Faculty members must return to UNCG for at least twice the period of the Research Assignment or will be required to repay the salary received during the period of the Research Assignment. (Additionally, TSERS requires that employees on approved Leaves of Absence (LOA) for educational purposes return to service as a contributing member for at least 3 years or service credit earned during the LOA will be cancelled.)

A faculty member who is on a Research Assignment and accepts a position at another postsecondary institution or any other paid employment that was not included in the proposal will be considered to have abandoned his or her contract and should be terminated.

IV. Funding

Faculty members are encouraged to seek extramural funding to support their salary during the period of the Research Assignment. The total of University and external support may not exceed 100% of the faculty member's approved salary. When external funds are obtained, the released portion of the faculty member's salary will be used to hire replacement instructors to assume the normal duties of the faculty member on Research Assignment.

A one-year Research Assignment is funded by the University at one-half salary and a one-semester Research Assignment is funded by the University at full salary. It is expected that faculty members requesting a one-year Research Assignment will procure at least one-half of their salary from external sources.⁴ When external funds are available to provide more than 50% of the salary, for both one-semester and one-year Research Assignments, these external funds should be used to cover the University-funded portion of the faculty member's salary.⁵ The additional state-funded salary reserves that are created revert to the dean. Options for the payment of external funds to the institution or directly to the faculty member are discussed in Section V due to the impact of the payment methods on the employee's benefits.

Faculty members may be approved for a Research Assignment of one full academic year, with or without external salary support. At the Provost's discretion, however, approval of a Research Assignment may be contingent upon the faculty member's receipt of significant external funding (at least one-half the annual salary). When this is the case, the contingency will be stated in the Provost's memorandum to the faculty member approving the Research Assignment.

V. Impact on Employment

The period of the Research Assignment will count toward promotion and post-tenure reviews. Faculty on Research Assignments are eligible for consideration for merit salary increases, promotion, one-time payments, or any other salary adjustments approved by the General Assembly, the Board of Governors, or UNCG.

⁴ When a faculty member receives a prestigious national or international award (such as a Fulbright or Guggenheim Fellowship) that does not cover at least half of the faculty member's salary, and based upon the merits of each individual case, the dean may determine to provide more than 50% of the salary (up to the amount needed to ensure 100% of the faculty member's salary from all sources). These funds constitute an award from the dean, but are not part of the Research Assignment program. If the dean declines to provide these funds but still endorses the Research Assignment opportunity, the faculty member may choose to either decline the Research Assignment or accept less than full salary for the period of the assignment.

⁵ There are instances when the period of a grant award includes a summer and the faculty member wishes to take summer salary from the grant. In such cases, if the Research Assignment is for one year at half salary, external funds should be used first to cover the academic year salary. If there are additional funds, the dean may approve use of the funds for summer salary.

VI. Impact on Fringe Benefits⁶

A. One Semester Research Assignment

Faculty members who are approved for a Research Assignment for one semester at full salary (no external funding) will remain on payroll at their regular salary. During this period, the University will continue to fully fund all state health plan benefits normally paid by the institution. Unless the employee specifically requests changes, all taxes, deductions, and benefits will remain unchanged. Faculty members who acquire external funding for partial salary support during a one-semester Research Assignment will typically receive University salary support sufficient to bring the total salary to the full level.

B. Academic Year Research Assignment

If permitted by the external funding entity, faculty who acquire external support may choose to have external funding paid directly to the University or to receive the external support directly from the awarding agency. The choice of payment method impacts the faculty member's benefits in the following ways:

1. External funding paid directly to the University

If a faculty member elects to have external funding paid directly to the University, the external funds generally must be sufficient to cover the equivalent of one-half of the affected faculty member's annual salary. The department is normally expected to cover half of the affected faculty member's salary. When this is the case, the faculty member will remain on payroll at full salary, and the University will continue to fund all state health plan benefits normally paid by the institution. Whenever possible, both salary and benefits will be paid from external funds. Premiums for elective benefits, such as health insurance coverage for dependents, life insurance, home insurance, dental insurance, AD&D Insurance or TIAA Wage Continuation, will continue to be payroll deducted. Faculty members are expected to work with the Office of Sponsored Programs, or with their unit Research Office, to ensure that funds from the external agency are transferred to the University as agreed upon. Those offices should be immediately informed about any delays expected in receipt of funding.

2. External support paid directly from the awarding agency to the faculty member

Faculty members who elect to receive the external support directly from the awarding agency will be able to maintain most benefits while on a Research Assignment by continuing contributions with a personal check to the Office of Human Resource Services (HRS). The University will continue to fund state health plan benefits

⁶ State law requires that state resources fund salary and benefits in equal proportions. Some external funding sources prohibit using their funds for the payment of some benefits costs. In these cases, non-state trust funds or overhead may be used to supplement the benefits on the salary supported by external funds. In such cases, the dean has the option of identifying the required funds/overhead or denying the Research Assignment request. The state health plan is excluded from this restriction and employee premiums will continue to be paid by the University as usual.

normally paid by the institution; however, if a faculty member wishes to continue health insurance coverage for dependents, life insurance, home insurance, dental insurance, AD&D Insurance or TIAA Wage Continuation, personal checks must be sent to HRS to cover premiums or the faculty member may choose to have premiums payroll deducted (assuming that sufficient funds are available). Faculty members must submit a written request to HRS to continue contributions to TSERS or the ORP and must submit monthly personal checks to HRS towards this contribution unless sufficient funds exist for payroll deduction. These payments are not tax-deferred. Receipt of the written request ensures that the University continues its matching contributions on the participant's behalf. The employee and employer contributions are based on the faculty member's base rate of pay in effect immediately preceding the Research Assignment.

In accordance with State law, if a faculty member is on an approved leave of absence for educational purposes with partial pay, service credit may be purchased if retirement contributions are paid by the 15th of the month following the month for which service credit is allowed. If contributions are not made by the 15th of the month, a penalty of 1% per month shall be assessed to the total costs. Regardless of when the educational program was completed, the maximum allowable credit for educational leave or interrupted service for education purposes for TSERS or the ORP is six years over the course of one's career. In addition, any faculty member participating in TSERS must return to service as a contributing member within 12 months after completion of his or her educational program and contribute to TSERS for at least three more years (except in the event of death or disability) or contributions will be refunded and the service credits cancelled.

In advance of the Research Assignment, a letter must be sent to TSERS or the ORP by HRS requesting permission for the faculty member to continue his or her retirement contributions while on Research Assignment. For members of TSERS, an "Application to Purchase Service Credits for Educational Leave or Interrupted Service for Educational Purposes" (Form 263), must accompany this letter. This form is available on the TSERS website at:

<http://www.treasurer.state.nc.us/dsthome/RetirementSystems/ApplicationsandForms?Title=ApplicationsandForms&OrderBy=byLastModifiedDate&showImage=true>

Coverage under the State's Disability Income Plan and the Death Benefit will continue for eligible members of TSERS or the ORP during the Research Assignment.

Faculty members who elect this option should check with HRS relative to the effect this option will have upon their benefits.

Faculty who do not acquire external support, but are approved for a Research Assignment at less than full salary (at least one-half salary) will be able to maintain most benefits while on a Research Assignment. The same provisions apply as those set out for faculty who choose to receive external funding directly from the awarding agency (see Section V.B.2. above). Faculty members who elect this option should check with HRS relative to the effect this option will have upon their benefits.