
An Active Sabbatical Leave Program Critical Changes Make All the Difference

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The current Western States Chiropractic College (WSCC) sabbatical leave program is described. A discussion of recent changes in the leave program is included with particular emphasis given to changes which have stimulated its greater utilization. Examples of recent sabbatical leaves are outlined, an overview of the current use of sabbaticals at WSCC is presented, and the perceived benefits of a more active sabbatical program are offered. (*The Journal of Chiropractic Education* 13(2): 110-113, 1999)

Key words: collegiality, faculty, faculty development, sabbatical, scholarship

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970s, chiropractic education has undergone dramatic growth and expansion (1,2). These changes include creation of new colleges, higher enrollments, new and improved facilities, development of new programs, and increased numbers of classroom and clinic faculty (2,3). Many of these faculty have now established a long history at their institutions and in chiropractic education. Most chiropractic colleges have faculty members with 15–25 years of experience in chiropractic education. These individuals typically have the ability to teach a wide range of classes and the experience to contribute to many operational areas at their institutions. Therefore, replacing these faculty members would be difficult, since they have become valuable resources for their respective colleges and chiropractic education as a whole.

The primary responsibility of faculty members at most chiropractic colleges is directed toward classroom and/or clinic instruction. Most have

substantial teaching loads that include two or more classes each term. This situation is compounded further by multiple entering classes each year which creates academic conditions with little opportunity for outside scholarship or release from repetitious teaching loads.

Western States Chiropractic College (WSCC) foresaw the combination of longevity, heavy teaching load, and repetitive course coverage as a formula for burnout. Furthermore, the College viewed this situation as creating an environment that leaves faculty with virtually no opportunity to produce any scholarly work outside of small projects linked directly to course assignments. An active, user-friendly sabbatical program was seen by WSCC faculty and administrators as one means to promote more scholarship and minimize the effects of a heavy teaching load.

WSCC has had a sabbatical leave program in place for 18 years. However, for most of that time, the WSCC program was inactive. From 1981 to 1994, only one faculty member took a sabbatical. This low activity resulted from a combination of limited faculty proposals and lack of administrative encouragement. In 1994, joint faculty-administrative discussions resulted in several critical changes in the

previously ineffective program. Since that time, nine faculty members have taken sabbaticals.

The current WSCC sabbatical leave program is outlined in the following paper, with special emphasis given to those changes which are credited with energizing the program, i.e., encouraging faculty participation and establishing administrative support. Also discussed are financial costs, completed faculty projects, and potential benefits to chiropractic education.

METHODS

Changes in the Sabbatical Leave Program

A four member ad hoc committee of the WSCC Faculty Association was formed to study the long-existing, rarely used sabbatical leave policy [Article 7, Section 8 of The Agreement between the Western States Chiropractic College Faculty Association and Western States Chiropractic College (4)]. The committee identified the following issues as important areas to include in the description of a sabbatical leave program:

1. Purpose for sabbatical leave
2. Length of leave
3. Compensation while on leave
4. Continuation of benefits and seniority (during and after the leave)
5. Repayment by way of service
6. Review process for application

Each of these areas was reviewed and the ad hoc committee proposed two major changes in the existing sabbatical leave program. One change dealt with both the length of leave and compensation. The previous sabbatical program provided for either leave of a full year at one-half pay or half a year at full pay. The committee proposed changes to include leave for as little as one quarter and up to as long as one year. This was done in an effort to encourage faculty who were reluctant to be gone for even a half-year to apply for a one quarter sabbatical. Furthermore, faculty with teaching loads lighter during at least one term could request a sabbatical for that quarter, minimizing the impact on the academic program and lessening the financial burden to the College. The other substantive change involved defining how sabbatical leaves might be used. It was proposed that taking time to renew one's enthusiasm and commitment to teaching might, in part, be envisioned by the College as meriting consideration for a sabbatical leave. New

language defining appropriate purposes for sabbatical leave was largely adopted from the sabbatical leave policy of a nearby community college (Mount Hood Community College, Gresham, Oregon).

Further input from the Faculty Association requesting that a set number of sabbatical leaves be funded during each academic year provided another critical section to the new sabbatical leave program. The College administration agreed to attempt to support four sabbatical leaves per year. This number was considered to be financially feasible and sufficient to maintain a rotation of all eligible faculty through the program.

The final phase of adopting a new sabbatical program involved discussions between Faculty Association members, the College President, and the Chief Academic Officer. These discussions consisted of individual conversations between faculty and administrators as well as joint faculty/administrative discussions during the annual negotiations for renewal of the WSCC collective bargaining agreement. That collaborative effort was collegial in nature and resulted in the current WSCC sabbatical program described below.

RESULTS

Outline of WSCC Sabbatical Leave

To qualify for sabbatical leave, faculty must be full-time, tenure-track employees with instructor rank or above (4). A sabbatical leave may be requested for as little as one quarter and up to four quarters after completion of five years of full-time continuous service. Any subsequent application may be made five years after the start of the previous sabbatical.

Compensation for faculty taking sabbatical leave was determined according to the following schedule:

- One-quarter leave—100% salary and full benefits
- Two-quarter leave—100% salary and full benefits
- Three-quarter leave—75% salary and full benefits
- Four-quarter leave—50% salary and full benefits

Employment benefits, including medical and dental plans, retirement contributions, salary increments, and seniority remained in force during sabbatical leave. During a year that faculty members are on sabbatical, their annual teaching load is pro-rated for the balance of the academic year, i.e., they are not loaded up with extra courses while on campus to compensate for their absence during the sabbatical. Before beginning an approved sabbatical leave, the

faculty member must sign an agreement which requires that the individual return to regular employment at WSCC for one year upon their completion of the sabbatical or repay any compensation received from WSCC during the sabbatical.

Faculty request sabbatical leave by submitting a descriptive narrative proposal to the Promotion and Evaluation Committee. After evaluation, this committee forwards its recommendations to the Chief Academic Officer for final administrative approval. Merit of a sabbatical request is judged by its usefulness to the growth of an individual faculty member, contribution to the College, and the length of time which has elapsed since the faculty member's last sabbatical.

At WSCC, the purpose of sabbatical leaves is described as an opportunity for faculty to engage in any appropriate activity that is designed to improve a faculty member's effectiveness and future contributions to WSCC. The following items are identified as worthwhile activities:

1. To learn new methodologies related to the faculty member's instructional area, program, or discipline.
2. To engage in planned travel directly related to improvement of professional abilities in the faculty member's area, program, or discipline.
3. To undertake a specific creative activity, research, or other project related to the faculty member's area, program, or discipline.
4. To prepare a new course for the college, revise an existing course, or develop new course materials.
5. To enroll in studies or training programs and/or to complete the requirements for a degree or certificate.
6. To provide a period for rest from normal activities and to permit rejuvenation of a faculty member's commitment and enthusiasm for institutional service.

Sabbatical Activities

To date, faculty requests for sabbatical leave generally have consisted of combinations of items #3, #4, and #6 from the aforementioned list of acceptable activities; common sabbatical activities included rebuilding a course, writing new notes for a course, writing a book, conducting collaborative research, engaging in a special project, and rest/rejuvenation. The typical leave request was for 2 quarters for the purpose of course renovation and rest/rejuvenation.

Table 1 represents a short summary of the actual activities of the nine faculty who have completed or are currently engaged in their sabbaticals. WSCC approved an average of two sabbaticals per year at an approximate cost of \$10,000/year. The average duration of WSCC sabbaticals was one and one-half quarters. Several requests were for two quarters but were scaled back to one or one and one-half quarters, and a few requests were not approved. Some faculty had sabbaticals approved that spread the scholarly activity over different quarters (effectively creating a part-time teaching position combined with a part-time sabbatical); for example, leave #4 was for one full quarter and two half-quarters of leave (with the half-quarters involving part-time instructional work). It is also important to recognize that the cost of a given sabbatical is very much a function of the kind of work that a given faculty member normally performs (e.g., faculty members with light teaching loads in one quarter are generally much less costly to replace than faculty with evenly balanced teaching loads and no particularly light term in which to take a sabbatical).

DISCUSSION

Improvements in the WSCC Sabbatical Program

The clear description of acceptable sabbatical activities was helpful in formulating faculty proposals. Descriptions in the revised sabbatical leave program are generally thought to be responsible, in part, for the greater utilization of sabbaticals at WSCC.

The other critical feature of the sabbatical program, which stimulated activity, is a contractual agreement that "the college will attempt to provide the support necessary to fund a minimum of four sabbaticals per year." Obviously, this financial commitment by the WSCC administration was instrumental to the program's newfound success. Also important was the fact that faculty sabbatical requests were realistic and sensitive to financial ramifications to the overall institution. For example, the typical faculty request was made for a part of the academic year when replacing their course load had the least financial impact.

Financial Impact of an Active Sabbatical Program

The cost of the WSCC sabbatical leave program proved very manageable for the institution. Since the

Table 1. WSCC Sabbatical Summary

	Year	Duration	Use	Cost ^a
1)	1995–96	1.5 qtrs	Course revision and rest/rejuvenation	\$6000
2)	1995–96	1 qtr	Travel, study (collaborative research)	\$9000
3)	1995–96	1.5 qtrs	Course revision and rest/rejuvenation	\$8000
4)	1996–97	2 qtrs	Book revision and rest/rejuvenation	\$3500
5)	1996–97	1.5 qtrs	Course revision and rest/rejuvenation	\$1000
6)	1996–97	2 qtrs	Course revision, special project	\$4000
7)	1997–98	1.5 qtrs	Course revision, study, special -project	\$8000
8)	1998–99	1 qtr	Rest/rejuvenation	\$1000
9)	1998–99	2 qtrs	Course revision, scholarly projects	\$6500

^aThese costs represent approximate expenses to the College in addition to ongoing salary and benefits of the faculty member on sabbatical, i.e., hiring of replacement faculty or payment of overtime to existing faculty.

typical sabbatical replacement involved the hiring of adjunct or part-time personnel to replace only the direct contact instructional hours, the costs were nowhere near a faculty member's pro-rated annual salary for the term(s) in question. This was because the normal ancillary responsibilities for the faculty member on leave (e.g., committee work, ongoing scholarly activities, administrative duties) remain unfilled or absorbed by other personnel. In fact, the average cost of a WSCC sabbatical replacement has been approximately 10% of that person's annual salary.

Exact costs can be difficult to predict. Some faculty have loads that are evenly distributed throughout the academic year, and replacement in any given term may well cost several thousand dollars. However, there may be terms where an individual's teaching load is relatively light, and the responsibilities can be absorbed by other faculty (without putting those faculty on overload). In some cases, a minor alteration in the timing of a course may allow a faculty member to be absent and not require any replacement personnel at all.

CONCLUSION

All faculty returning from sabbatical were evaluated by way of informal personal interview. It was universally reported that the leave was extremely valuable. Those who included "rest and rejuvenation" strongly felt that "getting away" for a prolonged period was very important for their continued energy and productivity.

Those who engaged in some form of scholarship produced substantial works. Some courses were completely overhauled (in a way that would otherwise

have been impossible given the restrictions on available time). These changes consistently resulted in courses that were generally more relevant to the curriculum as well as more interesting to students (and instructors). Some produced new editions to textbooks that clearly benefit the chiropractic profession.

There is no question that the program has produced a substantial increase in faculty commitment and enthusiasm. The program has resulted in the creation of many important works that benefit the college, chiropractic education, and the entire profession.

DISCLAIMER

Material from this article was presented at the 1999 Conference for the Association of Chiropractic Colleges in Orlando, Florida as part of a round table discussion.

Received, February 19, 1999

Revised, June 7, 1999

Accepted, June 20, 1999

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