

**Brown University Faculty Forum**  
**Subject: Leave and Sabbatical Policies**  
**February 14, 2006**

The Forum was called to order by the Chair, Professor Leonard Tennenhouse, at 4:06 PM in Salomon 001. After introducing himself and the Secretary (Professor Lewis Seifert), Prof. Tennenhouse explained that he would first solicit topics, which he would write on the blackboard, and then moderate a general discussion of each as desired.

The following topics were offered for discussion:

- 1) The principle of a one-semester sabbatical leave after every six semesters of teaching (also referred to as “1 in 7”)
- 2) A proposal made by the Dean of the Faculty for a competitive leave policy in addition to the current sabbatical system
- 3) The eligibility of lecturers and senior lecturers for any new sabbatical policy
- 4) The propriety of “special deals” made by the Administration with select faculty
- 5) The relationship of the new policy to “top-ups” of grants and fellowships
- 6) The status of research faculty under current and future sabbatical leave policies

Discussion proper began around the principle of “1 in 7” (a semester sabbatical after six semesters of teaching [topic 1]). Several faculty members expressed their disappointment that the administration seems to be backing away from this goal which, they said, President Simmons had presented as one of the benefits of the increased faculty size and as necessary for Brown’s competitiveness. Questions were raised about why the administration claims that the “1 in 7” policy is too costly when money is available for other purposes. Other faculty expressed their conviction that the current sabbatical policy is not conducive to research and scholarly output.

Professor Tennenhouse invited faculty to share their thoughts about the proposal for a competitive leave policy (topic 2). Numerous faculty noted the adverse effect such a policy would likely have on faculty morale and asserted the need for an equitable, non-competitive policy. Also mentioned were the packages sometimes given to new hires: faculty who have been at Brown for many years sometimes feel as if they do not have access to benefits afforded to newer faculty.

Professor Tennenhouse asked Dean Rajiv Vohra to respond to the comments made to this point and especially to address the rationale for the proposed competitive leave policy. Vohra explained that the proposal was originally made in response to a series of consultations with Humanities chairs, who had requested discussion of the possibility of more frequent leaves. The major problem posed by a “1 in 7” policy, according to Vohra, is that it would infringe upon the University’s obligations to students, with many departments being unable to staff required

courses. Such a policy would entail a real cost, over and beyond a financial cost, he stated. He also explained that “1 in 7” would involve 37 FTEs, which would not be a small change. Since the “1 in 7” policy would not be feasible in the short term, two approaches were identified: 1) to distribute more frequent leaves equally (not every seventh semester) and 2) to provide a significant number of leaves every 3 years on a competitive basis. The second policy was tentatively proposed, but retracted after the expression of valid concerns, Vohra explained. He then affirmed his belief that implementing the “1 in 7” policy would be difficult.

In response to a question, Vohra stated that 16 competitive leaves per year would have been available, in addition to the 8 Humanities Center fellowships currently offered. He also explained that the proposal had included funds for replacement instructors and that any proposal to increase the frequency of faculty leaves would not be financially neutral.

Several faculty then pointed out that the apparent reluctance to move forward with more frequent sabbatical leaves seems to contradict President Simmons’ rationale for increasing the overall faculty size by 100. Other faculty mentioned that there is a cost to students when faculty are unable to keep current with research in their fields and asked if this was considered by the administration.

Answering a different question, Vohra stated that 73 more sabbaticals per year would be necessary if the “1 in 7” policy were implemented immediately. Asked if data has been compiled about leave policies at peer institutions, he explained that some universities have more generous leave policies but others do not (see the comparative data from other universities attached to these minutes). He noted that Brown’s “top-up” policy for grants and fellowships is among the most generous of this group.

A question was asked about the sorts of problems departments might face with a policy of more frequent leaves. In response, Professor Peter Weber (Chair of the FAC, which is currently examining the leave and sabbatical policy) explained that the Department of Chemistry would face serious difficulties staffing all the required courses it offers. Unlike Harvard’s and Princeton’s departments, Brown’s has barely enough faculty to cover all these courses. The only way to institute a policy of more frequent leaves would be to increase the size of the department. Weber also added that the 100 new faculty positions are not being distributed equally across the university.

After discussion of the differing teaching loads for humanities and science professors and the variety of definitions of what constitutes a “course,” it was noted that an alternate system for calculating eligibility for sabbaticals might need to be devised.

Asked if it would be possible for individual departments to decide whether or not to implement a new leave policy, Weber stated that he would be opposed to such an idea because it would counter the previously stated desire for an equitable leave policy.

A suggestion was made that the university rethink the graduate students’ role in teaching so as to alleviate the need for hiring replacement instructors with more frequent leaves. Graduate students could be trained to teach specific courses that needed to be covered.

The case of individuals who are the only specialists in their fields was also mentioned. Increasing the size of the faculty will not automatically allow for every specialized field to be covered during sabbatical leaves. And, thus, there is a need to arrive at a specific monetary figure for hiring replacements of faculty in this category.

Some faculty spoke up to emphasize the ambitious nature of the Academic Enrichment campaign. Not all of its goals can be met at once, they argued, and Brown should not go the way of competitors who rely more heavily on adjunct faculty.

Dean Vohra was asked about how target of opportunity hires figure into the 100 new faculty positions. He answered that 25 positions are set aside for this purpose, but that this is a revolving "fund." He also explained that the total number of faculty has increased from 573 (2001) to 629 (2005), amounting to a net increase in regular faculty size. When asked if he could envision a concrete proposal for more frequent sabbatical leaves short of the "1 in 7" policy, he said that various options for improving our leave policy will be discussed by the FAC.

Vohra then asked Vincent Tompkins, Deputy Provost, to present his experience with implementing the new leave policy at Harvard. Tompkins stated that the policy, which allows for a paid semester after 3 years of teaching, had had a major effect on the curriculum. Department chairs reported that it was much more difficult to cover curricular and administrative responsibilities. The faculty had to work hard to develop 3-year curriculum plans, and there was extensive hiring of visiting faculty.

Several faculty members reiterated their frustration with the administration's perceived reluctance to implement more frequent leaves. A new policy seems to be low on its list of priorities, they claimed.

Concern was voiced that a competitive leave policy would be the least planned and thus have a detrimental effect on the curriculum. Vohra repeated that the proposal for competitive leaves has been withdrawn and that the FAC is currently reviewing the sabbatical policy. Any suggestions should be forwarded to the FAC.

A question was raised about the Humanities Center fellowships, which are competitive: should these be removed from the "pool" of supplemental leaves? Nicholas Townsend, member of the FAC, clarified that the Humanities Center fellowships are distinct from sabbatical leaves since faculty are released from teaching but not from other duties.

The status of research faculty was addressed next (topic 6). Research faculty present explained that they spend 20-35% of their time on non-research, unpaid activity and that they pay a sabbatical "tax" to Brown even though they are not eligible for such leaves. They spend a good deal of time writing grant proposals and have little time to write articles. Different approaches to remedying this perceived inequity were mentioned, and the University of Maryland's policy was cited as a model. Also noted were the facts that there are many different types of research faculty at Brown and that, as a group, research faculty outnumber regular faculty.

The Forum was adjourned at 5:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lewis C. Seifert  
Secretary of the Faculty Forum  
(French Studies)