

# Proposed Changes to Professional Leave Policy

March 2026

**PURPOSE** The purpose of professional leave is to refresh and reinvigorate tenured faculty members; to improve, through appropriate activity, the academic qualifications and teaching competence of the faculty; to encourage productive scholarly research; and to stimulate contributions of high caliber in the future that will enhance the stature of both the individual and the University.

**POLICY** Georgia College policy on faculty development requires that a program of ongoing faculty development opportunities be implemented and monitored by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. In addition to more traditional professional development, such as funding to support the dissemination of research/creative activities, or workshops to enhance abilities and skills associated with the work of faculty, a program of faculty development should include opportunities for professional leave. A Faculty Professional Leave Program recognizes that continuing faculty excellence, supportive of the profession and the reputation of the University, requires periodic opportunities for respite from normal academic responsibilities so that faculty may be refreshed through suitable enterprises they may choose to pursue during the leave.

The Faculty Professional Leave Program allows faculty to take periodic leaves of up to one academic year for purposes related to scholarship, creative endeavors, and to their professional development as teachers and scholars. This is necessary to maintain faculty excellence and morale.

The acceptance of a professional leave automatically commits the faculty member to return for a minimum of one academic year of teaching or other appropriate functions at Georgia College. Should the faculty member decide to leave the university within that one-year period, he or she shall reimburse the University for the pro-rata share of his or her obligation.

The acceptance of a professional leave automatically commits the faculty member to return to teaching or other appropriate functions at Georgia College for, respectively, one year in the case of a one-half academic year leave, and two years in the case of a full academic year leave. Should the faculty member decide to leave the university within that period, he or she shall reimburse the University for the pro-rata share of his or her obligation.

## BOR Policy:

### 08.02.07.04 Educational and Professional Leave

...[s]uch leave shall be granted only for the purposes of promoting scholarly work and encouraging professional development

...

Any employee who has been granted a leave of absence with pay shall be required, before beginning the leave, to sign an agreement indicating that:

1. For a leave with pay of less than one year, the employee will return to the institution at the termination of the leave for a period of at least one (1) year;
2. For a one-year leave with pay, the employee will return to the institution at the termination of the leave for a period of at least two (2) years

# “Seniority”

The committee was asked to discuss the interpretation of “seniority”, which is one of the considerations on which applicants for professional leave are evaluated.

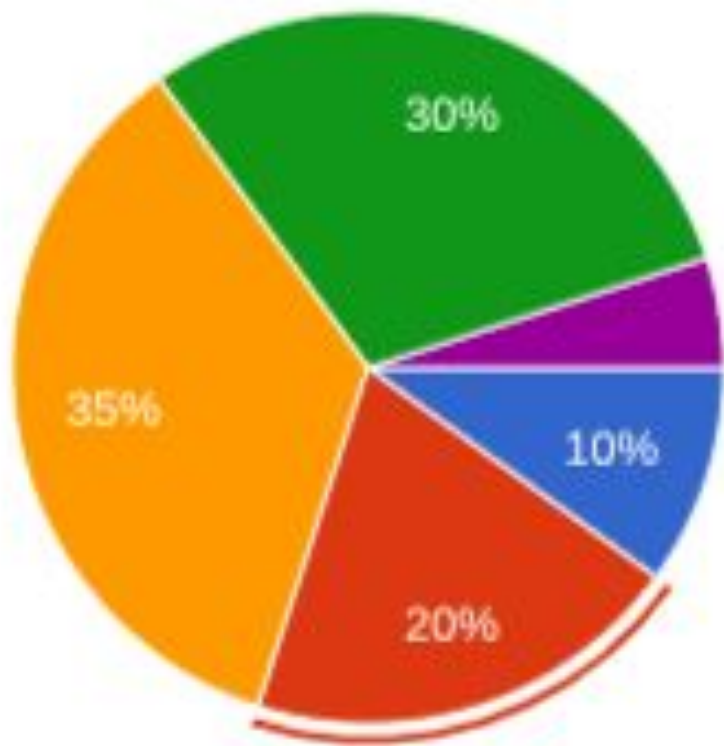
At the moment, CoAS interprets this language to mean that, *ceteris paribus*, associate professors will be prioritized over full professors.

Academic Affairs and the other colleges have interpreted it in the opposite way, to prioritize more senior candidates (Full professors) over Associates.

# “Seniority”

At the moment, GC policy says that

“In reaching his or her conclusions, the dean/director should be guided by considerations of **seniority**, demonstrated academic superiority of the applicants and potential for growth, adequate distribution of leaves among the various disciplines, and the needs of the college. In the awarding of any faculty leave, both the welfare of the academic unit and individual faculty opportunities will be preserved. Approved applications will be forwarded to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs with a cover letter from the dean indicating support.”



Data based on a poll of 20 faculty from across the University.

1) Highest priority should be given to Associate Professors who have never had a professional leave

2) Highest priority should be given to Full Professors who have never had a professional leave

3) Rank should not be taken into account; faculty who have had no professional leaves should be prioritized over those who have had one or more.

4) Rank and past leaves should not be taken into account; make the decision on the merits of the leave proposals.

# Recommendation: remove “seniority” from policy and from assessment of Professional Leave applications

- Our research indicated that this did not originate in a Senate-approved policy; it appears as part of a list of “procedures” appended to the 2006 professional leave policy at an unknown date.
- This language did not appear in policies at comp or aspirant institutions
- Different divisions disagree about how to interpret this standard and apply it in contradictory ways
- A poll of faculty showed no consensus over how to interpret “seniority” but...
- The majority of faculty polled felt that rank should not be a factor in the decision.
- Academic Affairs supports the removal of “seniority” as well.