

Special Studies Program Policy

Fact box

- **Policy owner:** Deputy Vice President Research and Standards
- **Policy category:** Academic: Research
- **Policy status:** Approved
- **Approval body:** Academic Board
- **Endorsement body:** Research Committee
- **Related policies:**
 - [Research and Scholarship Policy](#)
 - [Staff Conditions of Employment Policy](#)
- **Last amended:** 2nd May 2025
- **Relevant HESF:**

Purpose

This policy defines the purpose of the Alphacrucis University College (AC) Special Studies Program (SSP) for faculty and outlines the eligibility criteria and procedures for application.

Scope

All Faculty

Policy

The Special Studies Program (SSP) is highly valued for the benefit it provides to AC and its academic faculty. SSP releases a faculty member from regular teaching and administrative duties for a period for the purpose of producing high quality research publications. SSP is not intended to be used for the purposes of completing a Higher Degree Research (HDR) course.

Principles

SSP is a substantial strategic investment which is beneficial to AC and its academic faculty. Therefore, SSP leave is assessed and approved based on the following principles:

- aligns with the AC Strategic Plan;
- is a benefit not an entitlement; it is not automatic even when the applicant satisfies the eligibility requirements;
- results in high quality research publications;
- expands AC's industry, research and community linkages nationally and/or internationally;
- is subject to budgetary constraints;
- will usually only be granted where the academic activities of AC can continue without serious disruption;
- has not been granted within the previous three years;

- applications will be considered on the merit of the project proposed, the capacity of the faculty member to fulfil the aims of the project, their record of achievement (including outcomes from any previous SSP) and its relevance to AC's strategic priorities.

Eligibility

To be eligible the faculty member should:

- have usually been employed by AC continuously for at least three years of service in an academic appointment on a continuing or fixed term contract
- be research active with a strong track record of high quality research publications in the previous four years;
- have demonstrated potential to be producing high quality research publications.
- present a well-structured case for SSP including a detailed description of the proposed research and expected outcomes which will benefit the faculty member as well as AC;
- where relevant, the outcome of any previous period of SSP undertaken by the staff member must be satisfactory;
- have not been on probation due to unsatisfactory conduct, performance, or misconduct.

Length of Absence

No period of SSP may exceed six months, except in exceptional circumstances such as taking up a prestigious international fellowship.

Leave

Faculty members taking SSP must also take the minimum amounts of annual leave. All leave taken in conjunction with SSP must be approved at the time the SSP is approved. This includes annual leave, long service leave, paid parental leave, personal leave and leave without pay.

If the faculty member is ill for a period of at least 20 consecutive working days while on SSP, s/he may apply for an extension to the SSP as long as supporting medical evidence is provided.

Return of Service

A member of faculty to whom SSP has been granted shall agree to return to AC on the expiration of the leave and remain in its service for at least one year thereafter.

Additional Conditions

No one to whom SSP has been granted shall be permitted to accept simultaneous remunerative employment. This prohibition, however, shall not be construed to forbid a faculty member while on SSP from giving a limited number of lectures or doing a limited amount of work, provided it does not

impose on research. It also shall not be construed to disqualify a part-time academic staff member on SSP from obtaining normal part-time work separate to their responsibilities at AC. Nor shall this be interpreted to forbid the acceptance by a faculty member of a scholarship or fellowship carrying a stipend for the purpose of research or the acceptance of a grant of money made for such purposes

Alternatives to SSP

Before SSP is applied for, the faculty member should consider alternative arrangements, such as:

- travel funding for conferences or fieldwork;
- rearranging duties to allow uninterrupted time to complete research;
- leave without pay, where a faculty member visits an institution for a significant period and salary or reimbursement of costs are available;
- secondments, whereby the faculty member remains on AC's payroll and the institution being visited reimburses AC for the faculty member's services;
- faculty exchanges, which may be available if all affected parties agree. In such cases the individual remains on his/her home institution's payroll while fulfilling a full range of duties and responsibilities for, and defined by, the host institution.

Responsible for implementation

Chair, Research Committee

Key stakeholders

All Faculty

Related documents

[Special Studies Program Application Form](#)

Procedures

Special Studies Program Procedure

Application

The SSP application should be completed using the [SSP Application Form](#) and should:

- include an endorsement from the relevant supervisor;
- normally be submitted during the annual budget process of the preceding year;
- highlight both the benefits to the individual and to AC;
- be a substantive written case for SSP, providing sufficient detail to enable an assessment of its quality alongside the contribution of the proposed activities against AC's strategic priorities;

- include any additional internal or external funding that will be allocated. Faculty members are encouraged to seek additional external funding and a statement of earnings should be included in the final report.

Approval

- In line with the budgetary cycle, Research Committee will consider all SSP applications received for the following year;
- If recommended by Research Committee, the application is then tabled at Academic Board and Executive for approval. To be successful, the application must receive approval from Academic Board as well as Executive;
- Priority may be given to approved applications from the previous round which could not be granted because of AC requirements;
- The awarding of SSP is at the discretion of the Executive and Academic Board. No appeal will be considered.

Substantial Variation

No substantial variation to the approved program can be made while on SSP without approval by Research Committee. Applications for a substantial variation should be endorsed by the relevant supervisor, then tabled to Research Committee for approval.

Reporting

The faculty member is to provide a Mid-SSP Leave Report to his/her supervisor demonstrating that the objectives are on track for successful completion. If the objectives are not being met, the SSP may be revoked.

Within one month of completion of SSP, the faculty member shall file a written SSP Final Report of the research activities and outcomes, to be tabled to Research Committee.
