

Annual Sabbatical Leave Process Improvement [UIC]

Business Case

The annual Sabbatical Leave process involves all three universities and is administered by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. There is an application that faculty members must complete, which is either currently filled out via a fillable PDF form or via Microsoft Word, printed, and routed via duplicate paper copy packets through several levels, including the Chancellor and/or designee, the President, and Board of Trustees. There are often problems with the form completion (i.e., questions not answered, issues with the form versions provided) and the process can be cumbersome with the several levels of review/approval and the routing of paper forms. In addition, there can be changes mid-stream or post-approval (e.g., faculty member needs to change the term that was previously approved or new funding and/or reimbursements) that require resubmission and re-approval. Finally, at the conclusion of the sabbatical, a report is required to be filed by the faculty member summarizing sabbatical activities. The multiple approval points and multiple types of information required in the processing makes the use of paper forms, even scanned paper copies, inefficient by today's standards. Our peers converted to electronic systems in order to save time, reduce errors, streamline processes, and promote efficiency, generally. In this regard, we are behind these institutions in allowing for electronic signature/authorizations of these transactions.

Goal

Streamline the Annual Sabbatical Leave Process across the universities and University System Offices to reduce lead time and provide quicker transmission, easier access, and more expedient reporting and tracking.

Approach

Mapped the Annual Sabbatical Application Process for each university and University Systems with processing time to establish baseline. Analyzed all four processes and identified common steps and approval levels. Worked with team to identify issues with the Sabbatical application. Discussed issues and causes with the Sabbatical Application team. Viewed demonstration of FormBuilder, Adobe Sign, and DocuSign digital workflow options. Identified opportunities for improvement and brainstormed potential solutions. Developed transition action plan to prioritize potential solutions, assign owners to tasks, and establish a timeline.

Outcome

Identified two short-term recommendations, resulting in standardization, improved clarification and ease using the Sabbatical application, as well as the selection of one digital workflow solution (FormBuilder) to transform the manual paper process to a digital process. Identified one long-term recommendation that will create a standard submission process for the three universities. Analysis of implemented solutions is expected to result in a 24% time savings and a cost reduction of \$30,410.26.

Key Findings

- **Multiple levels of approvals vary from university to university.**
- **Time waste from the need to manually and repeatedly check on sabbatical submissions.**
- **No definitive warehouse location for rejected applications.**

Key Findings

- **Multiple and repeated approval loops throughout the entire process.**
- **Three universities verify the number of sabbatical applications at different times.**
- **Three universities submit their applications to VPAA three different ways.**
- **Three universities notify different entities across the system.**
- **All universities notify a financial entity to ensure there is an awareness of how the sabbatical will be funded, but the entity is different on each university.**
- **UIC & UIUC do follow up for sabbatical reports same year, after faculty returns; UIS follows up a year later.**
- **UIC & UIUC accept out of cycle applications; UIS does not.**
- **No visibility to applications while they are being processed.**
- **Paper waste due to the need to make copies of the application, documentation, and final report to multiple university entities.**
- **No way to discern when updates the application have been made.**

Short-term Improvement Recommendations

- 1. Create a standard sabbatical application submission process for the University of Illinois System.**
The team recommends the creation of a standardized process for sabbatical application submissions across the University of Illinois system. While each university will have some differences, the overall process and communication language should be consistent. The standardized process flow will drive the development of the electronic workflow system.
- 2. Review and upgrade content and functionality of sabbatical application.**
The team recommends working sessions be scheduled to review the sabbatical application. The review should identify required fields, list options for fields that have limited responses, identify linked questions (i.e., questions that are only required or not needed based on answers to previous questions) and remove any unnecessary questions. The resulting application will be used as a starting point for the electronic workflow solution.

Long-term Improvement Recommendations

- 1. Develop electronic workflow solution for coordination of the sabbatical request process.**
The team recommends an electronic workflow solution be developed to better coordinate and streamline the sabbatical request process. The team recommends working with representatives from AITS, HRIS, and RIMS to review the process and recommend a workflow technology that could be used to develop the solution.

Implementation of Recommended Improvements

Short-term recommendations were implemented by September 2016 with the long-term recommendation of the customized FormBuilder build-out scheduled for completion in August 2017.