Task Force for Research and Investigation Time Policy Final Report

August 2021

Background

In January 2021, the Executive Committee accepted the Task Force for Research Support Final Report. Among the findings of the report were a need for "[b]etter equity, access, and shared understandings about research time availability and flexibility that also respects need for unit activities and commitments" for faculty and a need to "Clarify what is meant by 'investigation time' for APs." These findings led to a key recommendation to "[d]evelop research time policies." The EC discussion of this item led to a recommendation to form a new task force looking specifically at research and investigation time policies, including a review of existing policies, identification of gaps, and creating new policies.

Task Force Charge

The task force will follow up on the recommendations of the Task Force for Research Support Final Report related to development of research time policies. Specifically, the task force will:

1) Inventory existing policies or other library documentation related to research time and investigation time;
2) Identify gaps in information needed but not represented in the data of the previous task force and gather further feedback from stakeholder groups to address those gaps;
3) Identify gaps in and revisions to existing policy based on the inventory, information gathered by the Task Force for Research Support, and further feedback gathered from stakeholder groups;
4) Recommend updated or new policy language to the Executive Committee for approval.

Task Force Membership

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Timeline and Process

- The task force met as a group monthly from March-August, with subgroups working on particular tasks between meetings.

- The task force distributed a survey to unit heads and other supervisors of faculty, academic professionals (APs), and civil service professionals (CS-Pros), which remained open for submission from April 15-April 30.
- The task force made draft policy revisions available for feedback from June 11-July 9. Feedback was solicited via email to a task force member, an anonymous form, a public office hours forum on June 23, or any combination of those three.
- The task force updated the policy revisions based on feedback and finalized the proposals on August 3, 2021.

Information Gathering

The first two tasks of the committee were preparatory to gather information needed to revise the two policy documents. These included creating an inventory of existing polices and related documentation, followed by identifying and filling gaps in the data already gathered by the prior task force.

Inventory

To identify gaps, the task force retrieved and compared the two existing policy documents: the research time policy for faculty and the investigation time policy for APs. By reviewing like categories of the policies as a framework in a table format, the task force was able to determine similarities and differences between the policies, as well as areas where additional information and linking to related resources may be necessary for clarity across units and/or use cases in either or both policies. In addition, areas where language could improve for consistency or clarity were also proposed. This preliminary step, in addition to reviewing the two existing documents created by the prior task force and a previous survey of APs on investigation time use, allowed the current task force to identify gaps in data to home in on the type of additional information needed from stakeholders in the University Library community to finalize draft policy revisions. The inventory of existing policies and related documents is shown in Appendix A.

Gaps in the Data

Notable gaps in data that required additional investigation following the preliminary review of the existing inventory included gathering specific feedback from unit heads via survey on their roles, unit structure, and opportunities and related challenges in allowing for research and investigation time both for unit employees and the unit heads themselves. Other gaps included identifying AP information and perspectives on investigation time, which was remedied in part by the LCAP investigation time survey, as well as determining if and how APs who have, or will be, reclassified as Civil Services Professionals can be accounted for in the revised investigation time policy.

Policy Revisions

Areas Identified in Need of Revision or Elaboration

The *Guidelines for Investigation Time* for the Library's Academic Professional staff was a reasonably thorough guideline document but had various points of apparent contradiction which led to confusion. It also did not address how the guidelines might be applied to the new civil service professionals classification, which the Task Force felt was an important clarification since many positions which were formally classified as Academic Professionals were transitioned to CS-Professionals. In the meantime,

the Library Committee on Academic Professionals (LCAP) also completed a set of recommendations to the Dean related to Civil Service Professionals that also suggested this direction. The existing *Statement Regarding Research Time for Library Faculty* was composed in 2007 and focused only on extended research leave requests and did not mirror the existing investigation time policy in breadth or depth of guidance. There was concern about a perceived lack of equity and inconsistency in how research time was interpreted by faculty and supported by unit heads that was not addressed in the 2007 policy. Overall, the Task Force sought to bring the two policies into closer alignment to provide similar scope and breadth of guidance and to better highlight both the similarities and differences between the two policies.

Feedback on Draft Revisions

Draft revisions were shared for broad feedback from June 11 to July 9, with an open public forum on June 23rd. Feedback on the draft revisions were collected via anonymous webform, during the open forum, and via email. The Task Force reviewed the feedback at their meeting on July 14th and incorporated many of the suggested changes and clarifications. Overall the feedback on the revised policies was supportive of the proposed documents and commended the Task Force for their work in creating an informative yet flexible set of documents. Feedback generally included many suggestions for small grammatical changes or minor corrections; requests that the policy provide detailed examples (these were decided against as circumstances for individuals are too varied); procedural concerns about the process of requesting an extended research leave and who should be involved in those requests; clarifications about the current differences in campus support for CS-professionals versus APs; and concerns about distribution of the policies and increased unit head awareness and support once they are adopted.

Proposed Policy Updates

The final proposed policies are provided in Appendix B (Proposed Research Time Policy) and Appendix C (Proposed Investigation Time Policy).

Other Necessary Revisions to Documentation

The standard HR language for Investigation Time should be updated to reflect the policy name and include Civil Service Professionals, as follows:

> Academic Professional and Civil Service Professional employees are encouraged to use "investigation time" to pursue areas of interest, not directly in support of an immediate program need, in accordance with the University Library's Investigation Time Policy https://www.library.illinois.edu/staff/humanresources/human/resources/guidelines-for-investigation-time/. Some investigations originating in this manner may evolve into regular work assignments or production activities.

Additional Feedback and Recommendations

As a result of extensive gathering of feedback on the policy revisions, several issues came up that exceeded the remit of the task force. Some of these are echoes of issues identified in the report of the previous Task Force for Research, but others are new. It should be acknowledged that some requests for specific guidelines, processes and examples are not possible given the unavoidable inequities in job duties, unit responsibilities, and unit-specific research support mechanisms. There is a precarious

balance between the need for clarity, transparency and equity, and the demand for flexibility and adaptation.

One overarching need that emerged both in the previous Task Force for Research Support and again repeatedly during this process, is the need for more overall support for library researchers. Specific needs include:

- Better dissemination about funding support – travel, training, etc.
- Better mechanisms for sharing of ongoing research
- Mentoring opportunities
- More opportunities for research collaboration
- FAQ for policies and procedures related to research and investigation

There is a need for a centralized repository to house research support policies, documentation, funding opportunities, development opportunities, research dissemination mechanism, and more is clearly needed. This would go a long way to support either an informal or formal research Community of Practice and would provide a comprehensive collection point for all things research.

There were also multiple requests for examples from various circumstances, such as "extended leave" and research/investigation time negotiation strategies. The committee felt this was not appropriate for inclusion in the respective policies, however such examples might be suitable content for a Research Clearinghouse repository as suggested above.

Other broad areas to address include:

1) Challenges for unit heads and other supervisors.

   Unit heads and supervisors must continually juggle the needs of respective units or areas of responsibility with the obligation to support faculty and staff in all areas, including research and investigation. Efforts to provide maximum services to users can create sometimes interfere with complete freedom in scheduling research or investigation time. Every effort should be made to negotiate mutually agreeable solutions in such circumstances. It may be necessary to develop more explicit processes when such negotiations fail to resolve the issue.

   Unit heads and supervisors should have the needed support for professional activities associated with the unit from all faculty and staff associated with that unit. Faculty and AP and Civil Service Professionals deserve reasonable accommodation for research and investigation time that meets the needs of individuals and fulfills obligations to the unit.

2) Challenges of extended leave/sabbatical situations.

   A fair amount of ambiguity emerged from feedback and open discussions related to short and longer term leave. For sabbatical, it is unclear to what extent the burden to arrange coverage falls to the faculty member requesting leave versus the unit head. In cases where the faculty member does highly specialized work, it may not be reasonable to identify someone else to take on that work. Suggestions for mitigating some of these challenges include the provision of additional student and graduate student or other temporary personnel to help fill gaps. It would be useful for the library to clarify and simplify processes for identifying sabbatical coverage,

both in terms of responsibility for identifying individuals to cover responsibilities and funding to fill gaps.

More explicit processes and request forms for research leave would be welcome additions to the proposed research clearinghouse. There are many questions about request and approval processes, and the extent and parameters of both short and long-term research leave.

3) Other

Given the transition of many APs to the Civil Service Professional category, it would be helpful for RPC to consider expanding the availability of funding and other forms of research support to these employees.

The availability of unit resources for research, such as grad hourlies and/or GA project time, is de rigueur in some units but not an option for other faculty. This discrepancy has implications for individual research progress, particularly for pre-tenure faculty.

It was also suggested that having set research and work schedules for librarians could level the playing field and ensure accountability and consistency. In lieu of this however, a memorandum of understanding of some sort about research time might alleviate some of the perceived inconsistencies and inequities in access to research time.

Another repeated area of confusion centered around Library organizational structure and reporting lines. A document that outlines roles and relationships of AULs, Directors, Unit Heads, and Division Coordinators in regard to supporting research and investigation time activities would be welcome. It is imperative that unit heads and other supervisors include information about the research and investigation time policies to new employees when they begin work.

Appendices
Inventory
Proposed Research Time Policy Update
Proposed Investigation Time Policy Update

Appendix A: Inventory of Existing Policies and Related Documentation

Statement Regarding Research Time for Library Faculty

December 10, 2007

This document articulates University and University Library policy regarding the granting of extended research time to Library faculty.

Research is an integral part of every Library faculty position at the University of Illinois; it is a major area of responsibility upon which each faculty member is judged throughout his/her career at UIUC.

Neither the University nor the University Library normally provides paid research leave outside of sabbatical leave. All Library faculty are expected to dedicate adequate time to research projects throughout their careers. If someone feels that he or she is not getting adequate time for research, this should be brought directly to the attention of the University Librarian for resolution. Nevertheless, it *is* possible to arrange periods of research time of up to 3 weeks to complete specific projects. In such cases, a specific work plan must be agreed with an applicant's Unit Head (or equivalent supervisor) before the extended research period begins.

Requests for more extended periods of research time are granted only under exceptional circumstances and must be approved by the University Librarian.

Guidelines for Investigation Time

The University Library seeks to support and actively encourage the continued development of skills and knowledge in our Academic Professional (AP) employees in a fashion that recognizes their specialized backgrounds and is also cognizant of the realities of budget pressures. Full-time APs regardless of their official title should be investigating areas of interest to them, even if those investigations are not directly in support of an immediate programmatic need. This type of employee-driven research is to be distinguished from that which is done as part of the employee's regular work responsibilities or at the direction of a supervisor; this distinction includes training activities and conferences. These activities should not count towards the "investigation time" described in this guideline.

The amount of time for this should be negotiated between the AP and the supervisor. It is expected that many of the areas employees choose to investigate will have some direct benefit to the Library even near-term. When this is true (as determined by the supervisor or the unit head if necessary) the investigation time can be increased. Obviously really beneficial investigations may evolve into a "regular" work assignment or production activities at which point it is no longer subject to this categorization. For example, an AP and supervisor may agree that the AP can spend around 5% of their time on investigations, which equates to 2 hours per week during weeks the employee works a full 40 hours. This could be increased up to 10% if it seems the area may have a more immediate direct benefit to the Library.

The employee and supervisor can negotiate minor shifts of this time (e.g. half a day bi-weekly or one day per month), but this "investigation time" does not accumulate and accrue over time. Even though the topic of investigation is up to the employee, they must inform their supervisor what they are investigating and when. Employees will not be forced to investigate if they opt out for a time, so long as this is not due to implied or explicit pressure from the supervisor or peers.

A few examples of the things APs might pursue are:

- taking online courses, tutorials, webinars, on a relevant topic
- analyzing information in different ways
- learning a (new) programming language, or more advanced techniques
- learning about or practicing different research methods
- creating a new software application
- finding a career mentor (within the library or elsewhere on campus)
- learning about project management or other aspects of management
- writing a paper intended for publication

Other Documentation

This section includes any documents that include information about research time or investigation time that is not formal officially approved policy but interpret that policy for official purposes or provide advice from different committees that reflects existing practice.

1. Documents referring to "Research Time"
   a. [Statement on the Relationship between Tenure Track Faculty and Peer Review Committees](#)
      i. Recommendation to Candidate: "Research output is essential for your promotion! Incorporate research time into your workflow on a regular basis. Work with your Unit Head to determine the scheduling of research times that complement your work style and the needs of the unit. If you feel you are not allotted the research time you need to be productive, seek advice from your PRC."
      ii. Recommendation to PRC: "Strongly encourage the candidate to schedule and use research time in the manner that best suits the individual's research style. Problems in scheduling research time should be discussed with the Unit Head and with the University Librarian if necessary."
2. Documents referring to "Investigation Time"
   a. Standardized HR language in AP position postings: "Academic Professional employees are encouraged to use "investigation time" to pursue areas of interest, not directly in support of an immediate program need, in accordance with the University Library's policy on Investigation Time for Academic Professional Employees https://www.library.illinois.edu/staff/humanresources/human/resources/guidelines-for-investigation-time/ . Some investigations originating in this manner may evolve into regular work assignments or production activities."

Appendix B: Research Time Policy

Introduction

Library Faculty members both investigate and create best practices in the field through a combination of their librarianship, research, and service activities. Research is an integral part of every Library faculty position at the University of Illinois; it is a major area of responsibility upon which each faculty member is evaluated throughout their career at UIUC.

This document articulates the Library's policy regarding use of research time by library faculty, including requests for extended research time.

Definition

Research Time, for the purposes of this policy, consists of time faculty use to pursue research activities as defined by the library's [promotion and tenure guidelines](#). Faculty for this policy includes tenure-line faculty as well as visiting faculty.

Scope & Context

Library faculty function autonomously and independently within their positions while at the same time they work collegially and cooperatively to fulfill the mission of their unit, the Library, and campus.

The Library provides basic support, including research time and a travel budget, to enable the development of a research agenda and faculty members are encouraged to seek additional support from University and external sources to fulfill their research responsibilities, when necessary.

Guidelines for Use

Library faculty members define their own research agenda, including both theoretical and applied research, within the parameters set by the library's promotion and tenure guidelines.

Time Allotment

All Library faculty are expected to dedicate adequate time to research projects throughout their careers sufficient to meet the requirements of their academic appointment distribution, which gives 30% weight towards research productivity for evaluation purposes.

Schedule Negotiation and Flexibility

Some individuals may benefit from spending smaller amounts of time each day on research while others may need to block off a day each week to focus on research for an extended period. Individuals with a regular research time may need to adjust its timing in a specific week due to unavoidable conflicts such as library instruction for courses at specific times, or other unit or supervisory obligations. Ultimately, faculty members are responsible for determining how to best schedule this time in a way that works for them and does not conflict with their regular responsibilities. Faculty members should keep their unit head or reporting supervisor appraised of when they are taking research time, and unit heads should typically respect these decisions and not constrain them. However, occasional need for negotiation when scheduling research time may be necessary to ensure sufficient unit staffing or supervision, or to allow for full attendance in unit-wide or Library-wide meetings, for instance. These needs are likely to

vary widely by unit and position. In cases where position requirements create significant barriers, the unit head or other supervisor should explore options to ensure sufficient research time is possible.

Extended Leave

Neither the University nor the University Library normally provides paid research leave outside of sabbatical leave and select fellowship or release time programs, all of which typically require college approval. However, it is possible to arrange periods of research time of up to three weeks to complete specific projects. In such cases, the faculty member should initiate a discussion with their Unit Head (or equivalent supervisor), and these individuals must agree to a specific work plan suitable to the proposed period of time before the extended research period begins.

Requests for more extended periods of research time are granted only under exceptional circumstances, and must be approved by the University Librarian.

Relationship to Other Work Responsibilities

The scope of what counts as research is determined by the library's "Statement on Promotion and Tenure to the Library Faculty at UIUC" established by the faculty of the library. The library guidelines also determine the weight of research, librarianship, and service in the overall tenure and promotion portfolio.

Grievances

If someone feels that they are not getting adequate time for research, the individual should first discuss this with their unit head/supervisor and try to work out a way to ensure they have the time necessary, as well as discuss the matter with their Peer Review Committee (if the faculty member is untenured) for guidance. If a solution is not reached, the issue should be brought directly to the attention of the University Librarian for resolution.

Related Resources

Promotion and Tenure Advisory Committee Website
Research and Publication Committee Website

Original policy created December 10, 2007. Revised and approved by the Library Executive Committee October 4, 2021.

Appendix C: Investigation Time Policy

Introduction

Academic Professionals and Civil Service Professionals (Professionals) in the University Library engage in professional work that directly supports library activity and services. This involves varying mixtures of focus in librarianship and a related specialized domain, such as a technology or subject. In the course of that professional work, and in collaboration with faculty, Professionals may investigate and innovate best practices in librarianship and in their related specialized domain through a combination of their librarianship, research, and service activities. Both librarianship and related specialized domains require continued professional development to support ongoing contributions to the activities and services of their units.

The University Library seeks to support and actively encourage the continued development of skills and knowledge in Professionals in a fashion that recognizes their specialized backgrounds and contributions to the field of librarianship and to their related specialized domains.

This document articulates the University Library's policy regarding use of Investigation Time as well as guidelines for utilizing this optional resource available to all full-time Academic Professionals and Civil Service Professionals. Civil Service Professionals, for the purposes of this policy, include over-time exempt Civil Service employees who are not represented by unions.

Definition

Investigation Time, for the purposes of this policy, consists of time Professionals use to pursue the development of skills and knowledge of librarianship and related specialized domains. This can, but does not necessarily, include research activities.

Scope & Context

The Professional's primary role is to engage in professional work that directly supports Library activities and services. They work collegially and cooperatively to fulfill the mission of their unit, the University Library, and campus. The shape of the position and the range of responsibilities are determined by the needs of the unit as defined by the supervisor. The University Library provides basic support, including investigation time and a professional development budget, to support professional development. In addition, Professionals are empowered to seek additional support dependent on eligibility from the University Library's Research and Publication Committee as well as the campus-wide Academic Professional Development Fund, in addition to external sources to fulfill their professional development interests.

Guidelines for Use

Full-time Professionals regardless of their official title may investigate areas of interest to them as they pursue the development of skills and knowledge of librarianship and related specialized domains, even if those investigations are not directly in support of an immediate programmatic need. Those supervising Professionals are expected to create an environment that nurtures creativity, independent thinking, and innovation by flexibly structuring opportunities for autonomous professional development activities.

Professionals are expected to communicate and coordinate with their supervisors regarding the timing, topics, and other particulars of using investigation time.

Examples:

- Continuing Education, such as courses, tutorials, webinars, and independent projects (librarianship, related specialization, project management, management)
- Working with a career mentor within the library or elsewhere on campus
- Data analytics focused on an area of librarianship or related specialized domain
- Conducting research
- Articulating and sharing information about practices
- Authoring scholarly work intended for publication, such as a paper or multimedia publication

Time Allotment

A Professional can typically spend around 5% of their time on investigations, which equates to 2 hours per week during weeks the Professional works 40 hours. This could be increased up to 10% if the Professional and supervisor determine the investigation may have a more immediate direct benefit to the University Library.

Schedule Negotiation and Flexibility

The Professional and supervisor can negotiate minor shifts of this time (e.g., half a day, bi-weekly, or one day per month), but Investigation Time does not accumulate and accrue over time. A Professional and supervisor can determine that an activity that could be considered within the guidelines of use of Investigation Time is part of regular work responsibilities.

Professionals are encouraged but not required to utilize investigation time. A Professional's decision whether to utilize investigation time must remain free from implied or explicit pressure from supervisors or peers. However, supervisors should ensure Professionals are aware of investigation time when they begin their work in the library, and it is good practice for the supervisor to check in at least annually (for example, during the annual performance review process) to make sure employees feel welcome to make use of investigation time if they desire.

Relationship to Regular Work Responsibilities

Professional-driven research or other professional development is to be distinguished from that which is done as part of the Professional's regular work responsibilities or at the direction of a supervisor. This distinction includes training activities, conferences, data gathering, and production of scholarly work assigned as a work task. These activities should not count towards the Investigation Time described in this document. Beneficial investigations may evolve into a regular work assignment or production activities at which point it is no longer subject to this categorization.

Grievances

In the case where a Professional feels they are not getting adequate investigation time or flexibility, they should first work with their direct supervisor to resolve the issue. If necessary, the next steps would be to contact the unit head; if no agreed upon resolution is reached, then the issue should be brought to the attention of the University Library administration for resolution.

Related Resources

[Research and Publication Committee website](#)

[Academic Professional Development Fund website](#)

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