

EDITOR'S CORNER

Academic Sabbatical Leave

The university has just published a list of faculty members who received promotion, tenure and sabbatical leave – happy days for many professors. I have long completed the promotion and tenure processes in my career, but I have never taken a sabbatical leave. I wonder why?

Sabbatical leave is designed for a professor to pause after 6 years of day-to-day labor in teaching and research to go somewhere for a year or half a year to learn something new, interact with different people and cultures, enjoy new food and environments, develop new ideas, techniques, skills, procedures, discover different intellectual thinking patterns, and rejuvenate creative spirits or just have some fun and relaxation.

For some professors, a sabbatical leave is really a fantastic opportunity and experience. They take the family and go to far-off places where the children get to learn or practice a new language, make new friends, experience new cultures and educational systems, explore wonderful landscape, buildings, arts, etc. The couples get to rearrange routine activities and may rediscover each other's joy of being lifelong partners, etc. I heard many wonderful stories about successful sabbatical leaves from friends and colleagues. Why then have I not taken one?

To start with, taking a sabbatical leave needs a lot of planning. First, one must apply for the leave through the department and up the ladder to the president's office, find funds to match the existing salary and research programs, locate a suitable group to interact with and be accepted by the host institution. After the approval, one has to find a place to live, arrange for the children for schooling, make sure the spouse will be fruitfully occupied for the duration, arrange transportation of people and luggage to the host location, etc. Another big problem is what to do with one's own house in town; the welfare of the dogs, cats and fish; care of the vegetable garden, trash, snow removal; and most important, finding someone to live in your beloved home or to take care of it for a long period of time. Who will teach the classes, keep the research program active, mentor undergraduate and graduate students, and work on university committees? All these items, of course, can be ironed out if the sabbatical is a good one, worthy of the time and energy for the adventure. Still, why have I not done it?

To start with, I am fortunate enough to travel almost constantly within the U.S.A. and around the world since 1969 to give lectures, participate in workshops, seminars, symposia, etc. So I do not have a need to specifically go to a place just to meet new people, work on new concepts, look at new facilities, etc. I am always being stimulated intellectually and learning new things all the time, and contribute my expertise to the many people I come in contact with. For a long time, I had 15–20 graduate students in the laboratory and cannot imagine leaving them alone on research activities and essential discussions of their progress and job hunting, etc. Also, I cannot find someone to take care of my heavy teaching load and committee assignments. There is no way someone can come to live in my 100-year-old house because I have a great collection of things and need an unbelievable amount of time to clean up the place. Besides, I do not believe I will enjoy knowing some-

one slept in my bed!! The thought of sitting down and starting to apply for a sabbatical leave completely turns me off.

One day, in a national meeting, I ate dinner with a group of professors and touched upon the subject of sabbatical leave. Some told the group that they had fantastic experiences, and some had terrible experiences. When it came to me to tell my experience, I said, "I have never taken a sabbatical leave after teaching at the university for 35 years." One old professor said, "Dan, give me a break, you are always in a sabbatical leave!!"

Wow, that was a brilliant statement!

I am truly blessed to be constantly on sabbatical leave while staying at home. The best of both worlds indeed.

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