Special Study Program Procedure

Section 1 - Introduction

(1) The University is committed to providing targeted, continuing, professional development opportunities for all staff members. During a Special Studies Program a staff member is not expected to undertake normal University duties and is paid their normal salary, wages or entitlements while completing a Program of approved activities. Special Studies Programs are available to eligible staff members who propose a Program of sufficient merit to:

a. undertake a period of sustained research or scholarship;
b. make substantial progress towards obtaining additional qualifications, relevant to their current role, through the University or other recognised institutions;
c. acquire additional technical or vocational skills, or gain industry experience;
d. acquire or develop particular skills or capabilities which are of a high level value to Learning and Teaching, research, scholarship, Indigenous related activities, business development, professional consultancy, industry links, and/or community engagement.;
e. undertake managerial or leadership development which has the potential to add high levels of value to the university;
f. establish or renew first-hand contact with networks in appropriate fields; or
g. consult publications impossible to obtain readily in Darwin or by normal interlibrary loan.

Section 2 - Compliance

(2) This is a compliance requirement under the Charles Darwin University Act 2003 part 3, section 15.

Section 3 - Intent

(3) This document describes the criteria for eligibility, application procedures and selection criteria for a Special Studies Program.

Section 4 - Relevant Definitions

(4) In the context of this document:

a. District Allowance means the arrangements applicable to individual staff members as described in the Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025;
b. External funding means any salary, grant, fee, gratuity, allowance, or fellowship paid to the staff member by another institution or granting body in connection with the Program;
c. Faculty/Division Restricted Accounts means accounts which should only be used to account for acquittable projects. Such projects may include specific Commonwealth funds (such as equity support, Indigenous support and disability support), research funds, scholarship funds and external contracted funds;

d. Financial assistance means any money paid by the University to the staff member (excluding salary, wages and entitlements) in support of the Program;
e. Procedural Fairness (also called “natural justice”) means the basic principles considered central to fair decision making and which can be summarised as follows:
    i. The opportunity for all parties to be heard;
    ii. the respondent having full knowledge of the nature and substance of the grievance;
    iii. the right to an independent, unbiased decision maker;
    iv. a decision based solely on evidence provided.
f. Program means a Special Studies Program, which is an agreed plan of professional development activities where a staff member will be excused from normal University related duties but will continue to receive their usual wages, salary and entitlements;
g. Organisational Unit means a school, centre or other academic unit, a department, or other administrative unit;
h. Special Studies Program means an agreed plan of professional development activities;
i. Special Studies Program Outcomes Report means a written summary of the objectives, outcomes and variations of a Professional Development Program;
j. Senior Management Group means the senior management group of the relevant Senior Executive portfolio.
k. Senior Executive means a staff member of the University holding the position of Vice-Chancellor, Provost, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor or Vice-President Corporate and Chief Financial Officer or equivalent;
l. Senior Manager means a staff member of the University holding the position of Director or Head of School or equivalent; and
m. Supervisor means the immediate day to day manager of an individual or group of staff, honours and postgraduate students, and/or someone who is overseeing students in practical classes and on field trips.

Section 5 - PROCEDURES

General Information

(5) A Special Studies Program is granted as a privilege and not as a right to an eligible staff member. Applications are made through the relevant Senior Manager to the Senior Management Group. A Program is an agreed plan of professional development activities and will normally last not less than one (1) month and not more than six (6) months. During this period, a staff member will be excused from the normal University related duties but will continue to receive their usual wages, salary and entitlements. The planned activities and outcomes of a Program are expected to relate closely to the goals of the University’s Strategic Plan, to the needs of the applicant’s organisational unit, and to the objectives of the applicant’s Professional Development Review System (PDRS).

(6) A Program extending for more than six (6) months may be approved or a staff member may undertake their Special Studies Program over a twelve (12) month period on a 50% basis if there is clear evidence that this is necessary or advantageous to achieving the goals of the Program.

(7) In applying for a Special Studies Program a staff member undertakes to remain in the employment of the University for a period not less than twice that of the Program to a maximum duration of twelve (12) months.

(8) Normally no more than one (1) Program will be granted for the purposes of obtaining a particular qualification unless significant progress towards the award can be demonstrated or where the staff member can demonstrate that progress towards completing the award has been hampered by heavy teaching and/or administrative commitments.

(9) A conference or conferences may be included as part of a Program with other approved activities. Conference attendance alone is not classed as a Program.

Leave

(10) The following provisions apply to leave and other employment conditions during a Program:

a. Long-service Leave, Annual Recreation Leave and/or Leave Without Pay (LWOP) may be taken immediately before or immediately after a Program. However, applications for Long Service Leave and Leave Without Pay must be planned and declared at the time of lodging a Special Studies Program application;
b. academic staff members will normally be required to return from a Special Studies Program and any additional planned leave, in sufficient time for them to be able to carry out the normal teaching and course planning requirements of the Faculty. A later return must be negotiated with the Senior Manager; and
c. district Allowance will not be paid to a staff member for the period of their Special Studies Program spent outside the Northern Territory, except where the staff member's eligible dependants remain in the Territory.

Eligibility

(11) A prerequisite for applications for a Special Studies Program is a current Performance Development Review System (PDRS) which identifies the value to be delivered through a Program experience.

(12) A staff member may apply to undertake a Program for a period of up to six (6) months if, at the commencement date of the Program, he or she has:

a. been continuously employed at the University, full time, for three (3) years or more immediately prior to the commencement of the Program;
b. served three (3) years or more since returning from a previous Program; and
c. not been subject to penalty provisions for late submission of reports following the most recent Program.

(13) An academic staff member who is on probation may apply for a Special Studies Program, however, under normal circumstances they will not be granted final approval to commence a Program until the staff member's appointment has been confirmed.

(14) A staff member on a fixed-term contract is eligible to apply for a Special Studies Program. However, before commencing a Program they must hold a contract of sufficient duration to cover both the period of the Program and the required period of service on the staff member's return to duty.

(15) Neither periods of absence on leave without pay, nor periods of a Program, shall accrue as part of the qualifying period for a Program.

Application

(16) Applications are made through the relevant Senior Manager to the Senior Management Group. Applicants are expected to have consulted with relevant members of their area regarding their intention to apply for a Special Studies Program prior to lodging an application and should have reached agreement with the Senior Manager regarding the details of the application before it is submitted to the Senior Management Group.

(17) For an academic staff member the timing of an absence during the teaching year shall be such that, in the opinion of the Senior Manager, it will cause the least disruption to the University's academic needs.

(18) For a general staff member the timing of an absence shall be such that, in the opinion of the Senior Manager, it will cause the least disruption to the University's operational needs.

(19) Applications for a Special Studies Program are to be made to the relevant Senior Management Group not less than six (6) months prior to the commencement date of the Program. Applications for a Program must include a

statement from the Senior Manager supporting the Program and clearly stating:

a. the way in which the proposed Program meets the strategic/operational needs of the area;
b. the arrangements undertaken to cover the area's academic and/or operational activities during the staff member's absence;
c. the anticipated replacement costs of staff on a Special Studies Program; and
d. a clear statement that the cost will be covered by the existing budget.

(20) Where more than one (1) member of an area is applying for a Special Studies Program agreement should be reached with the Senior Manager regarding the order in which Programs are taken. Applications should, where necessary, include:

a. An indication of arrangements regarding the order in which members apply for/undertake Programs in order to ensure minimum disruption to academic and/or operational activities.

(21) Approval of a Special Studies Program for an academic staff member is absolutely conditional on confirmation from the relevant Senior Manager, prior to a staff member commencing a Special Studies Program, that satisfactory arrangements have been made to cover all of the staff member's teaching commitments, including post-graduate supervision where applicable, during the period of the Program.

(22) An applicant shall provide a comprehensive description of the proposed Special Studies Program including:

a. the benefit of the proposed Special Studies Program to the applicant's teaching or research interests and/or professional discipline or to the leadership and managerial capability of the University;
b. the benefit of the Special Studies Program to the activities of the Organisational Unit and the relationship to the strategic goals of the University;
c. the reasons for the period of the Special Studies Program, and in the case of an application for an extended Program, justification for the prolonged length of the Program;
d. the dates of arrival and departure from each site to be visited;
e. the reasons for choice of venue if interstate or overseas;
f. additional leave: details of long service leave, recreation leave, or leave without pay to be requested in conjunction with the Program;
g. advise of any income (other than salary from the University) expected to be earned during the Program;
h. a clear indication of the expected outcomes of the Special Studies Program, such as anticipated publications; completion of units; or acquisition of specific skills;
i. arrangements to ensure all teaching and/or operational activities are covered;
j. an outline of arrangements initiated to reduce replacement staff costs; and
k. such other information as may be required by those reviewing the case.

(23) The following information will also be required before final approval of the Program is granted.

a. Where the Program involves award course study, written confirmation of acceptance into the proposed Program.
b. Where the Program involves study toward a PhD, confirmation from the Principle Supervisor that the proposed outcomes of the Program are achievable.
c. Where the Program involves visits to other institutions or organisations, provision of written letters of invitation from the host institution/organisation.

(24) A program whose sole or main purpose is to enable the applicant to visit a number of tertiary institutions for

briefings about the applicant's specialisation should clearly demonstrate this purpose and show the relevance of the visit to the applicant's specialisation, as well as the benefits to the University.

Consideration of Applications

(25) The number of Special Studies Programs approved in any year may be limited by the University's budgetary considerations. Applications will be judged on the merit of the proposed Program judged against the criteria outlined in this document and the capacity of the individual to fulfil the aims of the project.

(26) The Senior Management Group shall take into consideration the following points, as appropriate, when considering applications:

a. The benefit of the proposal to the applicant's Organisational Unit of the University;
b. the benefit of the proposed Program to the teaching/research/scholarship or managerial interests of the applicant;
c. the benefit of the Program to the applicant's professional/industrial discipline or the leadership and managerial needs of the university;
d. the research record of the applicant, or the potential of an applicant to develop research skills;
e. evidence of achievement in previous Programs, judged against the approved plans for those Programs and satisfactory reporting ;
f. evidence of the applicant's interests as shown by activities such as attending internal staff development courses, participation in job related conferences and involvement in professional bodies;
g. comments on the application from the applicant's supervisor; and/or
h. whether the applicant has been denied a Special Studies Program on previous occasions as a result of University commitments.

(27) Where there is a need to 'rank' applications of equal merit, consideration will be given to:

a. the number and duration of previous Programs taken by individual staff members;
b. the duration between Programs, or since the previous Program;
c. the number or times a staff member's Program has been deferred at the University's request; and
d. the needs of the University.

(28) In considering an overseas Program the Senior Executive shall consider:

a. the need to access resources not available in Australia;
b. the need to keep abreast of recent developments; and
c. whether the Program could be equally well achieved within Australia.

Appeals

(29) An appeal may be lodged by an unsuccessful applicant where the assessment of the application is considered to be unfair due to bias or a lack of procedural fairness. The appeal is to be lodged with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

Financial Support and Administration

(30) A staff member on a Program will be paid their normal salary, wages and entitlements. The costs and the replacement staff salary costs associated with a Special Studies Program are borne by the applicant's area.

(31) The area is not required to cover all or additional expenses associated with a Program.

(32) The area may choose to make a contribution to airfares for travel or for enrolment fees for courses or conferences approved under the Special Studies Program. Such a contribution is subject to the approval of the Senior Management Group. The area may agree to provide physical and technical support such as office space and computer access if required and if available. Such support is subject to the approval of the relevant Senior Manager.

(33) A staff member on a Special Studies Program is not eligible to receive travel allowance. The area will not contribute to accommodation and other general travel expenses for staff on a Program.

(34) Funding is normally not provided towards the cost of airfares for eligible dependants, however, in cases of special need a staff member may submit a case for such funding as part of the application.

(35) Organisational Unit Restricted Accounts may only be used to subsidise insufficient funding of airfare costs within the staff member's approved Special Studies Program.

(36) A staff member granted approval for a Special Studies Program, must provide the dates of the Program period and the dates and location of planned travel to the Salaries team of People and Culture.

(37) A member of staff shall repay to the University any amount paid as salary in respect of:

a. any period of absence from the University immediately preceding or following the Program, for which no written approval was obtained; and/or
b. any period during which the staff member did not diligently pursue the Program for any reason other than illness, compassionate grounds or diversion to other business at the request of the University.

(38) The University may deduct from any salary, gratuities, or monies payable in respect of long service leave, superannuation or otherwise to which the member is or may become entitled, any amount payable by the staff member to the University under the provisions of this document, unless the member undertakes an alternative method of payment satisfactory to the Vice-Chancellor. Amounts exceeding the termination pay shall be repaid on terms agreed between the staff member and the Senior Executive and approved by the Vice-Chancellor.

(39) External funding may be used to cover reasonable expenses incurred during a Special Studies Program. Any remaining external funding should be paid to the University at the end of the Program. Such use of external funding is subject to stipulations of the funding bodies.

Pursuing a Program/Varying a Program

(40) A Special Studies Program is subject to the following conditions with the addition of, or as varied by, any special conditions imposed by the Vice-Chancellor from time to time.

(41) The staff member shall pursue the approved Program according to the schedule provided in the application. A staff member must advise if they propose to vary the location of their Program, or the activities to be carried out. Failure to do so may result in not being covered by the University's Workers Compensation Insurance for any injuries or illnesses sustained during any unauthorised part of their Program.

(42) Advice of a variation, or an intended variation, to a Program must be provided to the relevant Senior Manager and to the Senior Management Group at the earliest possible moment. Planned variations shall not proceed until approved. Minor variations may be approved by the relevant Senior Executive.

(43) Examples of minor variations would be changes to the start or end dates of a Program of less than two (2) months or visits to additional institutions or conferences totalling less than two (2) weeks.

(44) Major variations are approved by the Senior Management Group.

(45) Examples of major variations would be changes to the start or end dates of a Program of more than two (2) months or substitution of an institution or project.

(46) Where a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade bulletin has been issued restricting travel to a country where the staff member's Special Studies Program is due to be undertaken, the Program is generally unable to proceed whilst the travel restrictions are in force.

Reports

(47) The staff member shall, as soon as is practicable, provide evidence to People and Culture of any qualifications awarded as a result of a Special Studies Program.

(48) The staff member shall, within one (1) month of return to normal duty following a Program, submit a Special Studies Program Administration Report to the relevant Senior Manager and the OHRS, Salaries Team, itemising all payments and benefits received or expected to be received, other than normal wages, salary and entitlements and detailing:

a. the dates of departure on the Program, and of return to normal duty;
b. the dates on which the staff member left for a Program spent wholly or partly overseas and returned to Australia;
c. the dates of departure from and return to the Northern Territory, if applicable; and
d. the dates of dependant's departure from and return to the Northern Territory, if applicable.

(49) The staff member shall, within three (3) months of return to normal duty following a Program, submit to the Senior Manager a Special Studies Program Outcomes Report. The report should be 750 to 1500 words describing:

a. an overview of the Program and its expected objectives;
b. a description of the activities carried out on the Program including, if applicable, the dates on which places and institutions were visited;
c. comments on the significance of the work done, including an evaluation of the Program against the expected outcomes, and the benefits of the Program to the staff member and the University;
d. notation of any variation made to the Program during the course of the Special Studies Program.

(50) The Senior Manager will submit the reports to the Senior Management Group for noting.

(51) If a staff member fails to submit a Special Studies Program Outcomes Report within three (3) months of the completion of a Special Studies Program, the count of the period of service which creates eligibility for a future Program will begin from the date on which the report is received by the Senior Manager. This penalty may be waived by the Senior Management Group if practical or extenuating circumstances make it reasonable for the report to be provided at a later date.

(52) After considering the report and any further information which it may require, The Senior Management Group may accept the report or require that it be revised by the staff member. If the staff member does not revise the report within one (1) month or, the Senior Management Group is unwilling to accept the revised report, the Senior Executive shall direct such action (including the refusal or deferment of a future Program and referral to the staff member's next Performance and Development Review) as is considered appropriate in the circumstances. The staff member concerned shall be advised of any action which may be taken by the Senior Executive.

(53) If a staff member has failed, after six (6) months of return to duty, to submit their reports, the issue is to be addressed as part of the staff member's next Performance and Development Review.

Post Program Obligation

(54) At the end of a Program the staff member shall either:

a. continue in employment with the University for a period which is twice the duration of the Program, to a maximum of twelve (12) months (unless termination occurs according to the specifications of the current Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025); or
b. pay to the University an amount equal to the salary received, pro rata, for the period of the Special Studies Program; and
c. Pay to the University an amount equal to the value of the airfares, course fees or other financial assistance received for the Special Studies Program.

(55) Where a staff member does not fulfil the obligation of ongoing employment the Vice-Chancellor and relevant Senior Executive will consider, on a case by case basis, the appropriate level of repayment to be sought. The Senior Management Group will be advised of such decisions as they are made.

Statistics

(56) Areas whose staff members undertake Programs will provide an annual report to the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Group, including:

a. the number of staff members undertaking Programs;
b. their gender;
c. whether academic or general staff, position/level of appointment, and duration of Program.

Curtailing a Program

(57) If, in the Vice-Chancellor's opinion, the best interests of the University require it, a staff member may be required to curtail a Program with effect from a specified date.

Power to Suspend or Vary the procedures

(58) The Vice-Chancellor may, in exceptional circumstances, choose to vary or suspend any or all of these procedures from time to time, as the Vice-Chancellor deems appropriate.

Section 6 - Non-Compliance

(59) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the Code of Conduct - Employees or the Code of Conduct - Students, as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025 and the Code of Conduct - Students.

(60) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the Code of Conduct - Students and Code of Conduct - Students.

(61) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Whistleblower Reporting (Improper Conduct) Procedure.

Status and Details

Status	Historic
Effective Date	15th January 2022
Review Date	15th January 2022
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	20th December 2021
Expiry Date	1st July 2025
Responsible Executive	Fiona Coulson Vice-Chancellor
Implementation Officer	Peta Preo Director People and Culture
Enquiries Contact	Peta Preo Director People and Culture

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Senior Manager" - A staff member of the University holding the position of Director, College Dean or equivalent.