The Academic Sabbatical

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The Academic Sabbatical: A Voyage of Discovery.

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In considering sabbaticals, we reviewed the research others have shared in education and in other disciplines. The historical background, and how sabbaticals are conceptualized across the international context, was a priority throughout. This chapter presents a review of the knowledge base as it pertains to the purposes, benefits, problems, and conundrums associated with academic sabbaticals and administrative leaves. This provided us with insights into others’ experiences and institutional expectations, as well as founded our narratives in our other chapter in this book (ch. 12).

Scoping the Literature

Even though we have experienced research and scholarship leaves, and given our research interests pertain to leadership and leadership development, sabbatical and research leaves were not a topic we had explored. So, we dutifully delved into the research databases to uncover what others knew and had shared about the mysterious field of sabbaticals. We limited this review to university and industry sabbaticals, and excluded the K–12 sector because of the differences in expectations and outcomes. Keywords such as “sabbatical,” “research leave,” “scholarship leave,” “administrative leave,” “higher education,” and “university” were used as the entry-level position to investigate research relevant to this topic. What we found intrigued
and amazed us. We were intrigued by how much of the literature was more than twenty years old, giving us a glimpse into academe of times gone by. It amazed us just how little was written on this topic, particularly of an empirical nature, although there were several advocatory or personal-experience narratives. For example, the earliest paper we accessed was the Industrial Relations News in 1963, which was heavily gender biased, anachronistic, and outlined the pros and cons of executive sabbaticals. The latest papers, published between 2018 and 2020, detailed the constraints experienced in an academic’s sabbatical due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Smith, 2020) and others expressed concerns about work-life balance, the intensification of academic work, and job satisfaction (Lakkoju, 2020; Sabagh et al., 2018).

We structured our analysis to explore demographic features, such as the stakeholder group in the paper (e.g., medical clinicians, pharmacists, engineers, etc.), date of publication, and methodology (e.g., empirical, autoethnography, etc.). The thematic analysis included the historical background, stated purposes (both personal and professional), benefits/advantages, problems and conundrums encountered, advice in terms of what to avoid and what to do, and any interesting or unusual notes. Our search included a range of academic databases (e.g., ERIC, ABI/Business Premium Collection, ProQuest, SAGE, and Wiley) and Google Scholar.

It was rather surprising how few empirical studies were found on this topic. There is a definite gap in the academic literature. Indeed, many papers stated that more research was needed, particularly when considering some of the problems and contentions related to sabbaticals. Overall, we were able to access fifty sources (see the appendix) which directly discussed sabbaticals and included themes related to staff and faculty recruitment and/or retention strategies, career advice, faculty-development approaches, stress and burnout, and tax issues surrounding sabbatical expenses. There were several papers where the central focus was on work-life balance, job satisfaction, and well-being that mentioned “leaves” as strategies for amelioration. Additionally, eleven papers discussed aspects of academic teaching or graduate supervision regarding the intensity of academic responsibilities, which highlights the importance of sabbaticals, but these do not explicitly reference sabbaticals.

A range of methodologies were found in the papers on sabbaticals (see the appendix) including surveys, autoethnographies, opinion or advice papers, literature reviews, narratives, case studies,
mixed methodologies, policy analyses, methodological and instrument design, legal analysis, and a few that were unclear. Various academic disciplines were represented, including business, counselling, educational leadership, legal fields, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and science. The appendix summarizes the range of methodologies encountered.

We also read six papers related to administrative leaves or sabbaticals for administrators. Miller and his colleagues appeared to be the most consistent authors who systematically researched sabbaticals, and Miller’s administrative roles (as faculty associate dean and dean) offer interesting insights into administrative, institutional, and accountability considerations (refer to: Bai & Miller, 1998, 1999; Miller, 2002; Miller & Bai, 2006; Miller, Bai, & Newman, 2012; Miller & Pikowsky, 2010).

**Historical Background**

It was fascinating to learn the term “sabbatical” had its roots in Jewish tradition (i.e., Mosaic Law) and derived from the word “sabbath”—a day of rest instituted for contemplation of spiritual matters:

Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed. (Exodus 23:12; emphasis added)

Not only did the Mosaic Law specify rest on a sabbath day each week, but also a sabbath year every seven years. Indeed, in the sabbath year the Israelites were prohibited from working the land, which enabled the rejuvenation of the soil by it lying fallow for the year:

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It
shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food. . . .” (Leviticus 25:1–7; emphasis added)

Therefore, the Sabbath represented rest for all—the Israelites, their servants, livestock, and the land. Therefore, modelled from the Jewish Sabbath, an academic sabbatical is a period of rest from teaching and service responsibilities. Sabbaticals were initiated at Harvard University in 1880 by its president, Charles Eliot, as a strategy to lure a pre-eminent scholar to Harvard, and as Sima (2000) stated, “sabbatical leaves have continued as a cherished part of academic life” (p. 67).

Qualification Periods and Nomenclature

Research-intensive and some comprehensive universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada offer a sabbatical or research and scholarship leave as part of their workplace agreement (Bai & Miller, 1999; Else, 2015; Gilbert et al., 2007; Spencer et al., 2012). However, the qualification periods, who can access a sabbatical, terms, and accountability for outcomes vary significantly from institution to institution. Gilbert and his colleagues (2007), Bai and Miller (1999), Smith et al. (2016), and Sima (2000) all identified a range of qualification periods of three and/or six years of service, with the period of the sabbatical varying from a semester to a full year on varied pay (e.g., half, full, or 87.5 percent salary, etc.). With the difficulties of “getting away” for an extended period, Wilson (2016) and Pillinger et al. (2019) discussed “mini-sabbaticals” of two- or three-week periods, which they proposed as sufficient to complete a writing project. Originally, only senior research professors were eligible. Over time, more in the professoriate (at lower levels, such as assistant and associate professors) and contract faculty (those with a defined contractual term with different conditions) have become eligible, although many exclude sessional faculty or those in teaching-specialist streams (Gilbert et al., 2007; Bai & Miller, 1999; Miller & Bai, 2006).

Interestingly, Else (2015) noted there has been a change in nomenclature from “sabbatical” to “research and scholarship leave” or “study leave,” where the intent, expectations, and outcomes have changed:
Although the sabbatical is an “integral” part of academic life, it no longer exists in its true form. In the UK, an increasing number of universities, Warwick among them, now refer to it as “study leave,” which in practice does not give people the time and freedom to rest, relax and re-engage with their discipline, he argues . . . that sabbaticals should be viewed as unstructured time in which an academic cannot predict the outcome of his or her research. (p. 44)

This nomenclature change is an important distinction as there has clearly been a shift in the purpose of sabbaticals to ensure faculty members are productive rather than simply taking a break (Else, 2015). Else identified that this change was due to budget concerns, competition in the form of league tables, and notions of efficiency measured through productivity (p. 44). In this chapter, we use the term “sabbatical” in preference to “research and scholarship leave” given its succinctness and commonality in the literature. We recognize there are important political and ideological differences between the two terms, but for the sake of brevity we use sabbatical.

**Purposes and Benefits of Sabbaticals**

The purposes and benefits of sabbaticals vary considerably, most likely in alignment with universities’ and colleges’ priorities. Wyman (1973) indicated that, unlike the Sabbath, academic sabbaticals represented important time for increased productivity, yet in this case away from the intense work undertaken on campus. The purposes (see figure 1.1) cited in the literature were categorized as intellectual and academic rejuvenation, reduce or prevent burnout, increase research productivity, teaching and curriculum development, collaborative engagement, skill development and sharing, complete graduate studies, and/or as political rewards and recognition.

*Intellectual and academic rejuvenation* through engagement with others, research and writing, updating knowledge, and identifying innovations in a discipline and as a visiting fellow were identified as important purposes within academic renewal (Bai & Miller, 1999; Gilbert et al., 2007; Harley, 2005; Hedges, 1999; Leung et al., 2020; Marker, 1983; Sima, 2000). Within the intellectual dimension was reflection time. Reflection time allowed academics to engage with new knowledge (Maranville, 2014), take stock of their research agenda, and decide on new directions.
Figure 1.1. Academic purposes and benefits of sabbaticals.

Increase research productivity encompassed conducting research, undertaking analysis, establishing individual and collaborative projects, and writing. Research activities have become more important in contemporary research-intensive universities focused on competition, high research metrics, and rankings (Bai & Miller, 1999; Benshoff & Spruill, 2002; Carraher et al., 2014; Eisenberg, 2010; Else, 2015; Gallagher, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2007; June, 2018; Maranville, 2014; Marshall, 2014; Miller & Bai, 2006; Sima, 2000; Smith et al., 2016; Spencer & Kent, 2007; Spencer et al., 2012; Yarmohammadian et al., 2018).

Reduce or prevent burnout directly related to a recognition of the intensity in academic work (Benshoff & Spruill, 2002; Carraher et al., 2014). This concept encompassed preventing burnout, reducing stress (Altmann & Kröll, 2017; Blum, 2007; Leung et al., 2020; Straus
& Sackett, 2015), and retaining faculty (Bai & Miller 1999; Swent et al., 2011).

**Teaching and curriculum development** was a very broad category. For example, teaching activities were described in both vague and specific terms. Vague references included “developing teaching” (Benshoff & Spruill, 2002, p. 133); renewed “teaching methods” and becoming “better teachers” (Bai & Miller, 1999, p. 10); “the improvement of teaching” (Bai & Miller, 1998; Marker, 1983, p. 38; Miller & Bai, 2006); “to promote course and curriculum development” (Marker, 1983; Miller & Bai, 2006; Sima, 2000, p. 69); and “engaging in the preparation of teaching materials or other work related to teaching” (Spencer & Kent, 2007, p. 660). More specific references included “teaching workshops,” learning “how to teach online,” and investigating “other doctoral programs to determine their best practices regarding online teaching” (Marshall, 2012, n.p.).

**Collaborative engagement and networking** were generally in relation to working with colleagues in other institutions and sometimes in other countries. This included moving to another research site to work with others (Easteal & Westmarland, 2010; Friedman, 2018; Sima, 2000) and to expand professional and research networks (Yarmohammadian et al., 2018).

**Skill development and sharing** were frequently mentioned in more applied disciplines like science, medicine, nursing, and pharmacy. Skill development included new techniques and discipline-specific processes, as well as technological, administrative, business, academic, and other skills. One aspect of skill development was the understanding that the sabbaticant would share newly acquired skills with colleagues at the home institution (Bai & Miller, 1998; Benshoff & Spruill, 2002; Carraher et al., 2014; Eisenberg, 2010; Friedman, 2018; Hedges, 1999; Kraus, 2018; Leung et al., 2020; Maranville, 2014; Sale, 2013).

**Graduate studies completion** was mentioned infrequently as this potentially conflicted with an academic being “qualified” for a sabbatical (Sima, 2000). This was leave granted for a faculty member who was struggling or needed dedicated time to complete their doctorate, or engage in a “recognized course of study” (Spencer & Kent, 2007, p. 660). This was more likely to occur in the college context than in university as a doctorate is a prerequisite for most university faculty.

**Political rewards and recognition** were discussed in relation to academics who had provided superior service and/or leadership
(Blum, 2007; Else, 2015; Harley, 2005; June, 2018; Sale, 2013; Wildman, 2012), which may include service to students (Gilbert et al., 2007) and loyal and long service to the institution (Miller & Bai, 2006; Wildman, 2012). It also included a performance-management dimension wherein it served as an incentive for performance improvement (Bia & Miller, 1999). Conversely, it was to reward research prowess or retain high flyers (Industrial Relations News, 1963; Spencer et al., 2012). A disturbing tone within this dimension was that these sabbaticals were approved through leader discretion, which could potentially be discriminatory or nepotistic.

Overall, everyone espoused the benefits of sabbatical leaves. In fact, the personal-narrative accounts waxed lyrical about the academic benefits of sabbaticals and advocated for their continuation in the face of political pressure to remove such opportunity. Many of the benefits directly aligned with the purposes (see figure 1.1). These included increased research productivity, which is important to all academic institutions; the enhancement of teaching and learning; innovation of curriculum, assessment tasks, and course materials; increases in faculty knowledge and skill development; and partnerships and collaborative research projects that can increase visiting-scholar opportunities and attract graduate students to a faculty. Some were more esoteric or individualized. For example, Friedman (2018) described his sabbatical as “the gift that keeps on giving” (p. 656), wherein the academic networks and collaborations continued for decades post his sabbatical. Gallagher (2018) reflected on general academic development: “[T]he time away enables exposure to new ideas, to new contexts and to new people. Some of the relationships made on my journey developed into friendships that will endure and new collaborations that will reap rewards for the international field of ethics and care [Gallagher’s discipline]” (p. 953).

Some articulated specific benefits to the institution and to students. Friedman (2018) indicated there was an institutional advantage, where returning sabbaticant clinicians would “bring back new skills to enrich those [working with them]” (p. 658). Bai and Miller (1999) observed that, upon return, sabbaticants felt intellectually renewed and more enthusiastic about working with their students. They stated “faculty ‘felt a sense of rejuvenation and reward,’” felt “up-to-date,” and felt as though “their professional life had been substantially enriched.” Curiously, the “lowest rated benefit” was that faculty felt “caught up on their research and writing schedule” (p. 1).
This section highlighted the academic purposes and benefits of sabbaticals or research and scholarship leaves as pertains to the day-to-day life of an academic. The following section distinguishes administrative leaves from academic sabbaticals.

Administrative Leave Versus Sabbaticals

Some literature included references to administrative leaves, and these were frequently conflated with sabbaticals. As we explored this subsection of sabbaticals, we found some administrative leaves had purposes quite different from academic sabbaticals. There were references to administrative leaves being employed for academic misconduct or suspected malfeasance (Spectrum News 1, 2017; Upshaw, 2019; WAAY-TV 31 News, 2019). In these cases, the administrator was placed on paid or unpaid leave while an investigation would be conducted. If the administrator was exonerated, then the leave was lifted and the individual returned to their duties. In cases where the charges were upheld, legal action ensued and the individual was either disciplined or had their employment terminated.

Other references to administrative leave related to leaders who were returning to the professoriate ranks upon completion of a leadership term (Blum, 2007; Else, 2015; Harley, 2005; June, 2018; Sale, 2013; Wildman, 2012). The purpose for these administrative leaves was described as a period to re-engage with teaching, and to provide the requisite time to “jump-start” a leader’s research agenda “after a lengthy hiatus” (June, 2018, p. 2; Sale, 2013). Sale indicated that administration was frequently “‘the kiss of death’ for scholarship” (Sale, 2013, n.p.). Therefore, this transition time was important for leaders to ponder if a change in research direction was needed, to identify a research agenda, and to link up with their colleagues through conferences and professional meetings. He also suggested time to reconnect with new research methodologies and technologies, and to explore what funding opportunities were available.

For some re-engaging with their research agenda was a reality check, especially related to how difficult it was to obtain research grants within the contemporary research landscape (June, 2018). Both Sale (2013) and June (2018) iterated the need for leaders to reacquaint themselves with “teaching and grading.” June recommended leaders observe expert peers’ teaching and step-up to take the harder classes, such as large undergraduate classes, to gain credibility among their
colleagues. Sale recommended leaders engage with colleagues during their leaves to discuss teaching innovations, course design, become familiar with the new teaching technologies, and gain insights about how to handle contemporary issues in the classroom (e.g., students’ mobile-phone use and accessibility services, etc.).

A common perspective was the need to decompress and overcome burnout (Else, 2015). Blum (2007) discussed the benefits of the release from constant emails. She also noted the associated health benefits from uninterrupted sleep and felt more relaxed while on administrative leave. Harley (2005) mused that administrative leaves were an important pause for reflecting on what was important in the leader’s life and “the organization’s culture, to think creatively about growth opportunities and innovation” (p. 78). Reflection was also mentioned by June (2018), “Former administrators . . . must adjust to a work life with fewer perks, less power, and different expectations from colleagues” (p. 2). Sale (2013) went further and expressed that reflection time afforded a refocusing on “returning now to the light side: that role we envisioned as we exited graduate training and took our first position” (n.p.).

Overall, administrative leaves were discussed in terms of time for reorientation to academic life, reintegration into teaching and service, and to rekindle a research agenda. More subtle themes emerged regarding the psychological adjustment from a leader mindset to a collegial one, which entailed adjusting to the shift from “power and authority” to that of “collegiality, collaboration, service, and student-centredness.”

Psychosocial Benefits of Sabbaticals

The most important and interesting point for us was the overt acknowledgement of the legitimacy of psychosocial outcomes of sabbaticals, even though these may only have a secondary benefit to the institution and on productivity outcomes.

These psychosocial influences (see figure 1.2) hold benefits to the individual and potentially to the culture of the institution. For example, authors described the gift of time to spend with loved ones, say elderly parents or children (Friedman, 2018; Marshall, 2014; Smith, 2020; Smith et al., 2016), thereby enriching family relationships. Others cited the importance of time to care for one’s mental and physical well-being, which included more restful sleep and more exercise
Figure 1.2. Psychosocial benefits of sabbaticals.

(Benshoff & Spruill, 2002; Blum, 2007; Davidson et al., 2010; Gilbert et al., 2007; Parkes & Langford, 2008; Smith, 2020; Swenty et al., 2011). Lakkoju (2020) cited sabbaticals as a strategy to address issues with family relationships and work-life balance. Within this psychosocial aspect, authors discussed reducing stress and burnout recovery (Benshoff & Spruill, 2002; Blum, 2007; Gilbert et al., 2007). Gallagher (2018), Kraus (2018), Marshall (2014), and Smith (2020) highlighted the value of personal self-reflection, stock-taking, and resetting priorities, both professional and private. Many also cited advantages in terms of enriching cultural experiences and the broadening of perspectives as a result of travel and living elsewhere (Friedman, 2018; Gallagher, 2018). Else (2015) and Lakkoju (2020) discussed greater professional
enthusiasm and renewed resilience as benefits of sabbaticals. Benshoff and Spruill (2002) noted that sabbaticals can improve faculty morale. All these non-academic benefits were overtly linked to taking a break from the hectic pace of academic life and seemingly never-ending responsibilities. The advantages of taking time out from frenetic academic routines was hardly surprising given the research about the negative impacts of faculty workloads (Davidson et al., 2010; Sabagh et al., 2018). What was encouraging was the overt acknowledgement of the legitimacy of these non-academic or performance outcomes and the recognition of the importance of individual well-being and its impact on an institution’s culture.

**Problems and Conundrums**

There were several problems and conundrums surrounding sabbaticals that emerged from the literature (see figure 1.3). These included political issues, concerns with a lack of policy transparency and/or academic empowerment, gender issues and/or service responsibilities, financial implications, and graduate supervision.

**Political**

One key problem with sabbaticals is the political dimension. Miller and colleagues (Bai & Miller, 1999; Miller & Bai, 2006; Miller et al., 2012) noted that sabbaticals were not without controversy. As early
as the 1960s, the sentiment that “when a man gets paid, he ought to work” (Industrial Relations News, 1963, p. 50) was presented with an underlying notion that sabbaticals were paid vacations which damaged productivity. Gilbert et al. (2007) identified that in the early 2000s the US government wanted to eradicate or dramatically modify academic sabbaticals. Happily, these moves did not result in wholesale change. Others noted that in business and government the opinion has been proffered that sabbaticals are a “perk” of academia, with the subtext that it is undeserved and simply extended paid vacation. For example, Spencer and Kent (2007) reported that

the picture given of university sabbaticals is somewhat hedonistic. Perhaps as a result of such exposure, one American commentator argued that academics found themselves in the position of countering the belief that sabbaticals are extended vacation, “perks” available only to a group that also benefits from job security and pleasant working conditions unavailable to professionals outside the academy. (pp. 651–652)

Sima (2000) encountered negative arguments about sabbaticals, though she suggested that sabbaticals were crucial in academe because the press of work was such that time to remain current in a field is rare. Therefore, released time is essential to ensure currency, new networks, and to develop new programs, curriculum, or be exposed to different approaches to teaching. Given that Sima’s report was published twenty years ago, her argument related to workload has become more poignant due to the intensification of workload as noted by Parkes and Langford (2008), and most recently by Lakkoju (2020), who examined issues of work-life balance and the pressures of expanding workloads in engineering faculties.

Miller and his colleagues (Miller & Bai, 2006; Miller et al., 2012) warned that many institutions have loose accountability mechanisms for reporting sabbatical outcomes and/or sharing with others the knowledge and skills acquired. They cautioned that university leaders should tighten accountability to ensure that outside stakeholders cannot use lackadaisical reporting as evidence to remove sabbaticals.

Smith et al. (2016) posited a direct linkage between political views of sabbaticals and the entrenchment of the “neoliberal” or corporatization of universities in the New Zealand higher-education sector. They identified that with the importance of university
competitiveness, which is frequently linked to research performance, the importance of sabbaticals—and who is able to access them—has become an important issue.

An interesting aspect to this political dimension was that in later literature we encountered a resurgence of interest in the desirability of sabbaticals across other sectors. For example, Altmann and Kröll’s (2017) research examined linkages between recent work-life balance policies across Germany aligned with sabbaticals in private and public companies. They explored the relationship between supportive leadership and employees’ desire to take a sabbatical. It should be noted though that the sabbaticals in their study were leave time designed to overcome burnout and to increase time spent with families, unlike academic sabbaticals, which have different accountabilities and purposes. Similarly, Long (1973) addressed the importance of sabbaticals for lawyers practising law. Leung et al. (2020) discussed the value of sabbaticals for health-system pharmacists. Therefore, the original purpose of sabbaticals as a leave for rest and rejuvenation or work-life rebalancing has surged across sectors other than higher education.

**Lack of Policy Transparency and/or Academic Empowerment**

One important conundrum was that many faculty members are unaware of their institution’s policies and, thus, do not avail themselves of sabbatical leaves (Friedman, 2018). Else (2015) noted that some universities lacked transparency surrounding their policy framework on sabbaticals, which may explain why some academics may be unaware of the provisions. Smith et al. (2016) identified problems where “the application process was too bureaucratic or lacked transparency; gate-keepers behaved unfairly or were nepotistic and the criteria were unrealistic or corrupt” (p. 599). Drawing upon Mamiseishvili and Miller’s (2010) research, Smith et al. indicated another transparency concern—that is, the dynamics of privilege and inequality, wherein sabbaticals were granted as a reward for attracting external research funds rather than as academic development.

A common theme among the science and medical papers read was that some feared taking a sabbatical as they perceived time away would “jeopardize” their career, would slow the grant writing and publishing momentum, and would result in a relative loss of power given their absence from faculty (Straus & Sackett, 2015). Another
problematic view was that academics who took a sabbatical were “unsuccessful academics who were looking for a new job,” “goofing-off,” or “burnt-out” (p. 174), stigmas which discouraged some from taking sabbaticals.

Another contention about the timing of a sabbatical was whether to take it prior to, or after attaining, tenure. Pre-tenure faculty are frequently nervous about taking a sabbatical prior to attaining tenure; however, others advised that sabbatical time for writing and publication would only enhance a candidate’s tenure portfolio (Hedges, 1999; Straus & Sackett, 2015).

Gender Issues and/or Service Responsibilities

Smith et al. (2016) reported gender issues related to sabbatical leaves. They highlighted that the proportion of males who achieved tenure, who were then qualified for a sabbatical, was disproportionately higher to that of their female counterparts. Consequently, many more female academics were unable to access the sabbatical benefits due to their contractual terms: “Women tended to take fewer, shorter sabbaticals” (p. 600). However, there were a number of key factors that influenced female academics’ sabbatical behaviours and perceptions.

Some female academics in New Zealand reported unfair treatment when seeking approval for sabbaticals in comparison to their male colleagues. Smith et al. found “more women (28%, n=41) than men (12%, n=23) attributed negative influences to the HoD [head of department]” (p. 595). Participants reported capriciousness by department heads, a lack of transparency for non-approval of the sabbatical application, or indicated insufficient “Performance-Based Research Fund” outcomes—a reference to a higher-education funding process in New Zealand—specified in their leave applications (p. 595). Another tension women reported was inaccurate information related to the application process. For example, one respondent reported her colleague had been allowed to take a sabbatical to complete a PhD. She was not granted leave when forwarding a similar request. This promoted the view that sabbaticals were “administered unfairly,” with some granted leave while others were denied under “equivalent circumstances” (p. 599).

Spencer and Kent (2007) indicated academic women take on more pastoral work in the faculties, which “may ‘mark’ them as not serious about research or scholarship.” These pastoral-care activities
leave them with no time for research, even if they are “patently” committed to their research activities (p. 662). Indeed, Smith et al. (2016) stated:

Sabbaticals are . . . widely considered to facilitate career progression. It has the potential to act as a pathway to get the academic underclass into better-paid, secure positions with rewards and esteem. So, the very system that relies on an underclass to perform instrumental, but less prestigious academic labour, also ensures that those who undertake it (significantly, mostly women) remain second-class citizens of the university. (p. 600)

Considering these gender issues, it is surprising and disturbing that in our contemporary university settings, where gender should no longer be a negative factor, it remains a discriminatory influence.

**Sabbaticals and Financial Implications**

There have been concerns reported regarding the financial implications of sabbaticals. Carraher et al. (2014) noted that “with reductions in government funding, many universities are reducing the number and compensation rates of sabbaticals . . . thus limiting faculty members’ opportunities to engage in a sabbatical” (p. 296). This explains why the qualification periods and compensation rates varied significantly across different institutions (Gilbert et al., 2007). The linkage between sabbaticals and expense in the literature encompassed several different dimensions. For example, there were costs to the institution in covering released faculty members, as well as for the academic, depending on what type of sabbatical experience they organize. Many authors noted the additional financial cost of travel or engaging in overseas collaborations, particularly if they travelled with their family (Smith, 2020; Smith et al., 2016; Stelfox et al., 2015). The desirability of travel and experiencing other cultures were highlighted for many, but some felt time spent at home in a “stay-batical” (Smith, 2020, p. 1; Marshall, 2014) or a “mini-sabbatical” of shorter duration (Gibb, 2011; Pillinger et al., 2019; Wilson, 2016) was more desirable and/or viable. This was particularly pertinent when academics had to organize the redistribution of their workload to colleagues, and in some areas of extreme specialization, finding replacement faculty may not have been possible (Smith et al., 2016). Smith
et al. (2016) also noted the increased logistical complications when travelling and moving to an overseas research site, which involved finding accommodation, settling children into different schools, accessing childcare, and so on. The other key factor in choosing mini sabbaticals was linked to reducing costs in time away from their department, accommodation costs, and the loss of income for partners to leave their work to accompany the sabbaticant (Smith, 2020).

Another financial dimension was addressed in Miller and Pikowsky’s (2010) paper on the tax implications of sabbaticals. Their extensive paper outlined some of the allowable and non-allowable expenses within the US tax code and advised accountants (and interested sabbaticants) of potential pitfalls within the law. This is less of an issue for Canadian academics, but for academics in countries where work-related expenses are considered legitimate deductions on their income tax, this paper highlighted the importance of drawing upon the expertise of an accountant who understands the tax implications for sabbatical expenses to ensure strict compliance with the law, as no one wants trouble with tax authorities.

Graduate Supervision

The commitments of teaching were frequently identified as a key aspect of academic life and, in some references, a contribution to pressure, high workloads, and burnout (Carraher et al., 2014; Gilbert et al., 2007; Lakkoju, 2020). Eisenberg (2010), Burton (2010), Carraher et al. (2014), and Sima (2000) all noted that academics may encounter difficulties in being released from the ties of graduate-student supervision. This was particularly difficult for those in the sciences who held responsibilities for supervising laboratories (Eisenberg, 2010). Carraher et al. (2014) linked the press of students to the reduction of funding to universities and the increasing demand to service full-fee programs, which help to financially sustain universities (Marginson, 2013). Alongside this advantage to the university is a disadvantage to academics who have large student-related workloads (Hornibrook, 2012). It should be noted that in discussions about quality teaching and learning in the literature, large undergraduate classes are frequently noted as problematic (Prosser, 2010; Prosser et al., 2008). This is chiefly due to the difficulties in establishing positive and close relationships with so many students, the pressure of establishing and grading authentic assessment tasks, and, in some institutions, the
administrative load for coordinating a team of tutors (Glazer, 2014; Yang et al., 2018) to ensure quality teaching across classes in the same course (Metzger, 2015; Rawle et al., 2018; Rideout, 2018). However, finding a substitute instructor for an undergraduate course-based class is significantly easier, even though there remains a financial implication, than finding doctoral-supervision cover for a sabbaticant. Indeed, handing over coursework teaching is much less complicated than handing graduate students into the care of a colleague for a six- or twelve-month period.

We know that good supervision involves establishing positive, caring, and trusting relationships; however, these relationships may be damaged if supervisors pass their graduate students over to others in their faculty who may or may not provide effective and caring supervision (Delany, 2009; Halbert, 2015). The other concern surrounding supervision is the rise of graduate-supervision loads for many in the academy. Increased supervisory loads can mean faculty members may not be able to take a sabbatical free of supervision responsibilities, and supervisory ties may influence the effectiveness of the sabbatical. If a supervisor maintains their supervision loads, then this can deleteriously impact the time for sabbatical activities. As Burton (2010) wittily mused about his lack of sabbatical progress, “about seven of my doctoral advisees had unwittingly ‘conspired’ to begin making major progress toward completion of their dissertations at the same time. This required me to schedule 4 to 8 hours each week to read drafts of dissertation chapters” (p. 1). Therefore, good supervisors frequently experience genuine concern about letting their students down by transferring their supervision because of a sabbatical; but they also want to enjoy dedicated time for their own research or teaching activities away from the demands of their graduate students. This, therefore, presents a conundrum.

**Conclusion**

Even though the concept of the academic sabbatical was born in 1880 as a strategy to attract and retain pre-eminent scholars, the purposes of sabbaticals have morphed over time from a period of rejuvenation and rest to one of increased productivity. This was noted in the shift in nomenclature from “sabbatical,” with its underlying philosophy of “rest,” to that of “research and scholarship leave,” which has the explicit expectation of greater research productivity and/or teaching
innovation. One interesting point from undertaking this literature review was the enhanced relevance that this “gift of time” has for the twenty-first-century academic. Academics day-to-day realities of navigating the ever-increasing expectations for greater research productivity and teaching and learning quality, as well as the larger administrative loads due to reduced funding and higher accountability, have heightened the importance of the academic sabbatical.

The academic purposes and benefits spanned intellectual and academic rejuvenation, increased research productivity, the reduction of stress and burnout, advancements in teaching and curriculum development, collaboration and collegial networking, skill development, the completion of graduate studies, and as a reward for long and loyal service or leadership. There was also a range of psychosocial outcomes—enhanced mental and physical well-being; the resetting of work-life balance; personal reflection, stock-taking, and resetting of priorities; enhanced family relationships; and enrichment from exposure to new cultural experiences. The psychosocial advantages to both the individual and the institution encompassed greater professional enthusiasm, renewed resilience, and improved faculty morale.

A dark side of sabbaticals encompassed a political dimension, lack of policy transparency and academic empowerment, gender issues, financial implications, and the conundrum of graduate supervision. These problematic dimensions highlighted the importance of leaders promoting fairness, equity, transparency, and academic empowerment.

Our final point was to advocate for the retention of the academic sabbatical as a means to promote quality research and teaching, but more importantly, to ensure the maintenance of a healthy, balanced, and resilient academy. The sabbatical truly is a valuable “gift of time”!

References


# Appendix: Methodologies within the Literature

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