WSSU

PHASED RETIREMENT PROGRAM
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This document highlights several important issues regarding the Phased Retirement Program (hereinafter referred to as the "Program"), but it is not intended as a substitute for the full program policy statements. All deans, department/division heads and chairs, the director of the library, and eligible faculty are urged to review the program materials carefully.

1. **What is the purpose of the Phased Retirement Program?**

   The Program is designed to provide an opportunity for eligible faculty members, including tenured professional librarians, to make an orderly transition to retirement through half-time (or equivalent) service. The goals of this voluntary Program are to promote renewal of the professoriate in order to ensure institutional vitality and to provide additional flexibility and support for individual faculty members who are nearing retirement.

2. **Who is eligible to participate in the Program?**

   A full-time tenured faculty member who meets the following set of conditions is eligible to apply for participation in the program:

   NC Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System (TSERS)
   - at least five years of full-time service at WSSU
   - at least age 62 upon entering the program
   - be eligible to receive a retirement benefit under TSERS

   Optional Retirement Plan (ORP)
   - at least five years of full-time service at WSSU
   - at least age 59 ½ upon entering the program
   - be eligible to receive a retirement benefit under ORP

3. **May phased retirement participants (hereinafter referred to as "participants") withdraw from the Program and return to their tenured positions at the institution?**

   No. The decision to enter the Program is binding; however, refer to Question 10 regarding the "Release Signing" and "Release Revocation" periods.

4. **If a participant had been employed in a three-quarter-time position before entering the Program, would the one-half salary be based on a full-time rate?**

   No. The faculty member would be deemed "full-time" for purposes of eligibility for State retirement and comprehensive health plan coverage and thus eligible for the Program; however, that salary, whatever its amount, would then be halved for purposes of the first year of phased retirement. The salary, if based upon three-quarter-time service, would not be adjusted for phased retirement calculations to the equivalent of undiminished ("true" full-time) service. One unwilling or unable to accept a salary at one-half that for prior three-quarter-time service may consider deferring entry into the Program until the base salary reflects a prior year of true, full-time service.

5. **The Program requires that participants agree to a pre-established work plan for the two-year period of phased retirement. May the plan be altered during the period?**

   Upon entry into the Program, a two-year work plan must be established. The plan may, however, be modified upon approval of the department head, dean, and Provost. The policy states that work plans will be reviewed for possible modification after each annual performance evaluation of the participating faculty member. If a plan is modified, it must be done through execution of a new agreement or as an addendum to the original. With regard to either approach, the document must be signed by all officers who signed the original agreement.

6. **May participants teach during the summer sessions?**

   Summer school assignments may not be part of the participant's work plan under the Program. Program policies do not, however, preclude a participant from entering into a separate contract to teach during the summer. A participant, if not a 12-month employee (such as a research professor), may negotiate a contract for employment incident to summer session curricula if that contract does not prescribe any duties that are to be part of the participant's work plan.

Guidance from UNC General Administration indicates that the establishment of summer contracts is perilous and is therefore discouraged. For example, it has been noted that summer employment may cause participants who are taking retirement under TSERS to exceed the annual statutory limit on State employment income received during any year in which a retirement allowance is being paid. Such an event would terminate TSERS retirement payments for the balance of the calendar year in which the limit was exceeded. General Administration has advised that participants consult the employment benefits staff to determine the attendant risks of summer employment.

7. **May an eligible faculty member elect to participate in the Program if there has been a hiatus between full-time employment and the planned date of program participation?**

   Faculty members may not retire and later enter the program. As long as the application materials have been approved within the timelines established by the program policy, the faculty member will not be disqualified from program participation by taking a leave of absence upon completing the fall term during which the program application was submitted and the agreement executed. Leave itself must, of course, have been properly sought and obtained.

8. **What must an eligible faculty member do to apply to enter the Program?**

   A faculty member is considered to have applied for the Program when a "University of North Carolina Phased Retirement Application and Re-Employment Agreement" (hereinafter referred to as the "Agreement") has been submitted to the department head and contains: (a) complete information at the top of page one of the Agreement, and (b) the proposed duties that the faculty member will perform under the Agreement. The unsigned Agreement must be delivered to the departmental office (for receipt by the department head) prior to the application deadline. It is not necessary for approving signatures to be in place at this time.

   After the forms are signed by the department head and dean, the dean should forward these materials to the Provost for signature. The documents will then be delivered to the faculty member for signature. The original document will be retained in the Office of the Provost. The Assistant Provost for Planning & Administration will forward fully signed copies to the faculty member and department head.

9. **What is the deadline for application to enter the Program and what are the relevant dates for program participation?**

The application period is September 15 through February 15 of the academic year preceding proposed program participation. By September 1, faculty will be notified of their eligibility to begin participation in the Program the following academic year. By mid-September, campus-wide program information sessions will be held.

10. **What are the "Release Signing" and "Release Revocation" periods?**

The 45-Calendar Day "Release Signing" Period

After the fourth and final agreement signature (Chief Academic Officer) has been obtained, the faculty member and department head will be notified by the Assistant Provost for Planning & Administration in the Office of the Provost. The date of receipt of the documents begins a 45-calendar day period in which the General Release must be signed. The date of "receipt" is the date on which WSSU physically delivers to the faculty member the completed Agreement and Release or the date on the return receipt card signed upon delivery to the faculty member by registered mail. If the General Release has not been signed by the faculty member by the end of this period, the Agreement will be voided. (The original signed General Release should be submitted to the Assistant Provost for Planning & Administration.) If the General Release has not been executed within the 45-day period, the Assistant Provost for Planning & Administration will notify the faculty member and department head that the Agreement has been voided.

The 7-Calendar Day "Release Revocation" Period

Under the Age Discrimination Employment Act (ADEA), a faculty member has the right to revoke the Agreement and the Release anytime within seven calendar days after both documents are fully executed by all parties. If not revoked within this period, the faculty member's commitment to enter the Program becomes irreversible. A statement of revocation must be in writing and personally delivered to the department head or postmarked by U.S. Mail and mailed to the department head within the seven-day period. A department head receiving a statement of revocation should retain a copy and forward the original to the Assistant Provost for Planning & Administration in the Office of the Provost.

11. **Who should faculty members call if they have additional questions?**

Faculty should consult their department heads/chairs to discuss the work plan and other departmental issues. Questions related to employee benefits should be directed to the Benefits Coordinator in the Office of Human Resources at (336)750-8724; other questions related to the Program should be directed to the Office of Faculty Affairs, at (336)750-3090.