

MSCF Minute



An electronic publication of the Minnesota State College Faculty

One Mistake. Gone.

by Kevin Lindstrom, MSCF president

This article was originally published on December 11, 2015, in MSCF Minute Volume 2, Issue 14.

If you don't already, you need to know that a handful of our members have lost their jobs in the last couple years over failure to complete their sabbatical plans. While each case is unique, it's fair to say that each of the affected individuals did a portion of their plan, but did not complete it in its entirety.

As you would expect, we filed grievances in these cases. We wound up taking one case to arbitration. In the arbitration case, the faculty member had clearly done a lot while on sabbatical, including things not listed in the plan, but also clearly hadn't done everything in the plan. The arbitrator's ruling said that failure to complete the plan in its entirety constituted grounds for dismissal. While we could spend a good deal of time bemoaning the case and the result, what we really need to do is consider how this construct impacts us going forward. I would also suggest we put this construct in context.

First, let's establish the fact that the arbitrator's ruling

doesn't compel colleges to do anything. They still have the choice whether or not to pursue action in any individual case. Even if a college is compelled to act, they don't have to move to dismiss. There are all kinds of options other than dismissal that exist for colleges. The fact, however, is that colleges have moved straight to dismissal in several cases.

Next, let's consider a hypothetical case. In this case, the faculty member clearly didn't complete all portions of the sabbatical plan. It's also clear that the faculty member did, in fact, complete a good portion of the plan. Let's estimate that 75% was completed and that 25% wasn't. The college moved to dismiss and, ultimately, the faculty member lost their job.

Consider the simple math associated with this case. Let's say the faculty member collected salary and benefits worth \$100,000 while on sabbatical (that's probably an overestimate). If they didn't complete 25% of their sabbatical, a theoretical \$25,000 was lost. In other words, this faculty member lost their job when the college

spent \$25,000 that they otherwise didn't need to. It's worth noting that the faculty member in this theoretical case may have had a 20+ year career of exemplary service. All parties agreed the faculty member was a great teacher, very popular with students, and had no blemishes on their record. One \$25,000 mistake, however, and they're gone.

So, the threshold has been established. Create a \$25,000 expense for the college due to failure to do your job and you're gone, period. Imagine the impact if that standard were applied consistently throughout the system.

Sabbatical Advice

- Don't write an overly ambitious plan. Make it reasonable.
- Don't be overly specific in your plan. We have an arbitration award that says you don't have to be overly specific.
- Make your plan your own. You don't need to accommodate college agendas in your plan.
- If you need to change a component of your plan, submit a written amended plan.
- Don't do any work for the college while on

Volume 3, Issue 11
November 3, 2016

sabbatical. It doesn't count for anything.

- Complete all elements of your plan.
- Submit a sabbatical report on time. The report must document the completion of your plan, but doesn't need to go beyond that documentation.
- Finally, if you need help with any portion of your sabbatical, contact the MSCF office.

Welcome New Members!

Melissa Schultz, Minneapolis
Bridget Fitzpatrick, Normandale

