Academic Sabbatical: What, Why, How, ...

Laurie Dillon
Michigan State University
My sabbatical history:
A study in 4-body compromise

1984: Visiting assist. prof. @ UMASS
   - No sabbatical “credits”

1985: Assist. prof. @ UCSB
   - Infant, toddler, & husband is full-time PhD student
   - Used sabbatical credits to reduce teaching load pre-tenure (mini-sabbaticals in residence)
     - Missed many benefits of a “real” sabbatical
     - It was the best I could do for my situation

1997: Left UCSB for MSU
   - Gave up 5 years of sabbatical credit
   - (And recent promotion to full professor)
My sabbatical history:
A study in 4-body+CSE compromise

2003: Agreed to Chair CSE Dept.
- Not a good time for me to be away from the dept
- Not a good time for reduced pay (kids in college)
- Sabbatical plans on hold for 4 years
- Lost 4-years worth of sabbatical credits

2007: Finally, a real sabbatical!
- Fall 2007: University of Lund, Sweden
- Spring 2008: AT&T Research, Florham Park, NJ
- Life should be a sabbatical!
(More details to come)
A “typical” sabbatical system

Mutual benefit: your university and you
- Academic revitalization
- Sustained time for research/creative activities
- Expand skills/qualifications

No more frequent than every 6 years
- NOT automatic (at MSU)

Application
- Detailed plan explaining mutual benefit
- Something you could not “normally” do
- Submit at least 6 months in advance (at MSU)
- Can be denied due to dept constraints (even if a good plan)
A “typical” sabbatical system

- Reduction in pay? Institution dependent.
  - At MSU:
    - 1 year at 50% salary
    - 6 months at full salary (discouraged)
- Restrictions on supplementing your income
- Sabbatical report afterwards
- You promise to return to your institution for at least as long as the sabbatical leave (pay back your sabbatical)
Potential sources for supplemental funding

Fellowships
- Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES): Fulbright Scholar Program
- Guggenheim Foundation
- Others?

Federal agencies
- National Research Council
- National Security Agency
- Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education
- Naval Research Laboratory
- NSF?
Potential sources for supplemental funding

- Industry
  - Google, Microsoft, IBM, …
  - Motorola, LogicBlox, …

- Teach at university hosting your visit?
  - This can be (but often is not) a good opportunity

- Consulting

- Many (most?) faculty cinch their belts to be free of extraneous obligations

**CAUTION: Don’t squander your sabbatical making money!!**
Recommendations for a stay-at-home sabbatical

**Don’t** go into the office

**Don’t** serve on dept committees

**Limit** other service

**Do** work with your graduate students (off-campus, if possible)

**Do** start new projects/research directions

**Do** take short trips

- Attend conferences
- Give talks on your research
- Visit other research labs

**Do** take some personal time to recharge
## To go or to stay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At-home option</th>
<th>Go somewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less overhead/disruption</td>
<td>Broaden your life experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-going projects/students get focused attention</td>
<td>Exposed to new ideas, different culture/way of doing things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can take short trips for research and to gain exposure</td>
<td>Close sustained interaction with top researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost-effective</td>
<td>Expand visibility of your work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naturally protected from dept politics, service, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factors to consider when selecting where to go

- Quality of work by those in your area
  - Their level of interest, commitment to you
- Overall quality of institution/lab
- Professional enrichment opportunities
  - Visitors, seminars, meetings, …
- Proximity to other interesting places
- Adequacy of facilities
- Quality of life
- Expense
My *real* sabbatical

University of Lund, Sweden, fall 2007

- Husband invited there
- I invited myself to visit CS dept
  - Learned of work I can leverage in my own research
  - Gave talks and attended several conferences and program meetings in Europe
  - Met regularly with my students and others via skype
  - Established two new research collaborations remotely

- Recharged
  - Traveled/spent time with husband, daughter & her boyfriend
  - Exercised regularly
  - Made many new friends and experienced many Swedish traditions
My *real* sabbatical

AT&T Research, Spring 2008

- Original plan: IBM Research
- Husband found a nearby institute (IES) to invite him
- Decided late that AT&T was a better fit for me:
  - Commuted to AT&T on Sundays, returned late on Wed’s
  - Started collaboration with Cantata group at AT&T
  - Arranged summer internships for my student
  - Gave talks (Rutgers, AT&T, local workshop, …)

- Recharged
  - Time with in-laws in New Jersey and Long Island
  - There for birth of our niece
  - Enjoyed museums, concerts, restaurants in NYC
Summary

萓 Find a way to take your sabbaticals
萓 And make the most of them!