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**Sibbald, T., & Handford, V. (Eds.). (2022).
The academic sabbatical: A voyage of discovery.
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Reviewed by: Sara McCowell, Brock University

In *The Academic Sabbatical: A Voyage of Discovery*, editors Sibbald and Handford (2022) explore the genesis, history, and impact of the sabbatical in higher education. The authors conceptualize the term *sabbatical* as having a multifaceted history that significantly predates its contemporary associations with universities to attract and maintain faculty members, as is often thought in broader, modern society. Sabbaticals are “negotiated structures that provide an option for faculty” to focus solely on their research without interrupting their other scholarly duties (Sibbald & Handford, 2022, p. 7). To broaden this definition, the contributing authors strive to provide readers with an exploration of sabbaticals as having roots in both agriculture and various religious denominations that reinforce the essence of sabbaticals as periods of rest, critical self-reflection, and restoration (Bakels, 2009; Endres, 2001; Kimball, 1978). Sibbald and Handford (2022) use the personal accounts of several academics who have taken sabbaticals, commonly referred to as *study leaves*, during their careers. These accounts serve as guideposts to illustrate the potential and diverse experiences that may occur during these leaves. This book is a natural follow-up to two previous publications by the same editors on the academic experience, *The Academic Gateway: Understanding the Journey to Tenure* (Sibbald & Handford, 2017) and *Beyond the Academic Gateway: Looking Back on the Tenure-Track Journey* (Sibbald & Handford, 2020), and contributes to the literature on sabbaticals and their connection to and impact on the academic experience. Several authors in the current publication also contributed to the two aforementioned titles. This continued collaboration has led to a longitudinal aspect in the present work, thus providing additional opportunities to expand theoretical insights in this field of study.

This book has five parts and 12 chapters. The first part includes the introduction and a thematic literature review, followed by three sections with three to four chapters each. These sections reflect three primary themes drawn from the narratives spanning Chapter 2 to Chapter 12: the first sabbatical experience, the first sabbatical experience with significant travel, and multiple sabbatical experiences. The final part comprises the conclusion, contributors, and index.

The primary intention of the editors is to chronicle the history and origins of sabbaticals and to supply polyvocal, international conceptualizations of sabbaticals through personal accounts. The narratives come from authors at various stages of their academic careers and with different disciplinary orientations. Readers will encounter stories from academics with limited or abundant sabbatical experiences, on the cusp of retirement, significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and driven by initiatives outside their universities. They will also come across joint accounts highlighting reoccurring themes across experiences. Thus, this book is an enriching roadmap for those in higher education who are considering applying for their first study leave, looking to learn from the experiences of others that may differ from or mirror their own, and planning to engage or currently engaged in research on this subject.

The central thesis of this book speaks to the curious transformation of sabbaticals from a period of earned revitalization to benefit both the academic and the institution to a potentially detrimental and

convoluted experience for the academics themselves. Responding to the lack of recent and available research on the subject, Sibbald and Handford (2022) illuminate the lived experiences of novice and veteran sabbatical takers to assist in deconstructing the negative assumptions and conceptualizations occasionally associated with sabbaticals. The narratives offer unique and intimate perspectives through an extensive exploration of sabbatical experiences and the potential obstacles and successes that come with study leaves.

However, the editors identified a recurring dilution of criticism across the narratives that seemed to suggest the contributing authors were reluctant to be fully revealing in their recounts, as some of them refrained from mentioning the personal struggles they experienced while taking a sabbatical. Compounding this challenge is the scarcity of recent and available research on the subject, making it difficult to consider the set of narratives as an accurate and thorough representation of the issues associated with sabbaticals. Acknowledging these limitations, Sibbald and Handford (2022) conclude that further research on sabbaticals and their impact on academics is required to fill the gaps caused by the dearth of recent and relevant studies in this area.

In the first part of the book, Sibbald and Handford (2022) begin with a comprehensive introduction to the history of sabbaticals, diverging from its contemporary association with universities and reminding readers of its earlier connection to agriculture and religion. The term sabbatical, which is linked to the agrarian technique of fallowing and to practices of various religious denominations that collectively advocate for rest and renewal, has been transformed and consequently reconstructed as a time for restoration to revitalize productivity (Bakels, 2009; Sibbald & Handford, 2022).

Following the introduction is Chapter 1, where Scott and Scott provide a thorough review of the literature on sabbaticals and discuss their history and origins, various qualification periods and nomenclature across institutions, purposes and intended benefits, psychosocial benefits, and challenges and conundrums associated with applying and acquiring them. They point out that, fundamentally, sabbaticals are meant to provide academics with time to focus on their studies and research. As a result, productivity is generally increased, new skills are acquired and refined, and said skills can be brought back to the institution for its own benefit and the benefit of other academics. The authors identify eight purposes and benefits of sabbaticals: increase research productivity, reduce or prevent burnout, collaborative engagement, teaching and curriculum development, complete graduate studies, intellectual and academic rejuvenation, skill development and sharing, and/or as political rewards and recognition (Sibbald & Handford, 2022, pp. 17–20).

Despite the recognized benefits of the sabbatical experience, Scott and Scott acknowledge opposing conceptualizations that manipulate this opportunity for restorative renewal and increased productivity into a period of laziness, unprofessionalism, and withdrawal from academic commitments. This misconstrued perspective has strengthened existing barriers and formed new challenges for those interested in applying because the ethos of study leaves appears to have changed. Based on their review of available literature, and the insights they gathered from the narratives, the editors conclude that academics may refrain from applying for sabbaticals due to several reasons. These include a lack of transparency and inadequate support during the application, the perception that taking a sabbatical might jeopardize their current career trajectory, inadequate or unavailable funding, the implications of privilege and inequality in selecting candidates, and the impact of the negative perceptions of others who might misconstrue the necessity or intention of the sabbatical (Brazeau & Van Tyle, 2006; Eastaer & Westmarland, 2010; Sibbald & Handford, 2022). Sibbald and Handford (2022) also acknowledge the intricate position of some academics who supervise graduate students, drawing attention to the guilt they may feel when humouring the notion of taking a sabbatical. Supervisors would have to find someone else to fulfill their role, entrusting the graduate student and the direction of the student's research to a colleague (Burton, 2010; Carraher et al., 2014; Eisenberg, 2010; Sima, 2000).

Despite the identified challenges, the editors and contributing authors highlight the numerous benefits associated with study leaves and how they can effectively support and improve productivity, prevent burnout, and lead to revitalization. Scott and Scott identify eight common psychosocial benefits associated with study leaves: improving physical and mental well-being; enriching family relationships; stock-taking, personal self-reflection, and resetting priorities; enriching personal perspectives and cultural experiences; developing a positive work–life balance to reduce burnout and stress; and restoring

professional engagement and resilience (Benshoff & Spruill, 2002; Blum, 2007; Davidson et al., 2010; Else, 2015; Friedman, 2018; Gallagher, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2007; Kraus, 2018; Lakkoju, 2020; Marshall, 2014; Parkes & Langford, 2008; Smith, 2020; Smith et al., 2016; Swenty et al., 2011).

In the second part, Section 1 presents the personal accounts of academics who took their first sabbatical and how it contributed to their research goals, productivity, and personal rejuvenation. With contributions from Elliott-Johns, Handford, Rodríguez de France, and Sibbald, this section guides readers through experiences influenced by the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, retirement, the COVID-19 pandemic, and time itself. These narratives illustrate not only the nature of sabbaticals as periods for continued research and scholarly engagements but also the potential issues that can arise during these leaves.

In the third part, Section 2 presents contributions from academics for whom significant travel was part of their research endeavours and how their travel plans enriched the quality of their sabbatical experience and work. Armenakyan, Block, and Lin collectively espouse the inclusion of travel in a study leave to enrich one's experience significantly, as travel provides opportunities for unique cultural experiences and understanding.

In the fourth part, Section 3 explores the personal accounts of academics with more than one sabbatical experience. Specifically, it focuses on the commonalities among these sabbatical experiences and how the academics who lived them used such commonalities to unpack the implications of sabbaticals on their academic and personal lives. The section begins with an account from Kornelsen, followed by a thematic analysis of collective sabbatical experiences from Badenhorst et al. Bujaki then recounts multiple study leaves and the unique challenges faced in each. The section concludes with a collaborative account from Scott and Scott, who recount their multiple sabbatical experiences, including the challenges they faced as an academic couple.

The final part of the book includes the editors' concluding remarks; a list of the contributing authors, with brief descriptions of their professional identities; and a comprehensive index. It revisits the key insights highlighted throughout the text regarding the function, effectiveness, and impact of sabbatical experiences on the institution, the faculty members that apply, and those who are granted the opportunity and the hidden adversities that can arise in the process.

The Academic Sabbatical: A Voyage of Discovery offers readers a unique and an intimate glimpse into the possibilities surrounding study leave applications and what such leaves can look like in practice. Both novice and veteran sabbatical takers can appreciate the personal insights and lived experiences of the academic voices in this book, along with the historical analysis of the creation and function of sabbaticals as part of the practice of higher education institutions. In response to the exhaustive trilogy of responsibilities held by academics that often lead to burnout, the editors and contributing authors of this work advocate for readers and scholars alike to take advantage of study leave opportunities to reap the restorative benefits of such experiences and to take a break from their teaching and service responsibilities. The sabbatical is an "earned privilege that reaps benefits for the academic and the institution, and includes benefits that extend beyond both" (Sibbald & Handford, 2022, p. 227). Yet, despite this notion, the editors and contributors collectively caution readers about the adverse effects and challenges that can arise when applying for and during study leaves. They conclude, however, that the benefits significantly outweigh the drawbacks. The editors conclude the current publication by encouraging further research on sabbaticals, the experiences of scholars seeking them out, and the impact study leaves have on the scholars and their research endeavours.

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