Faculty Request for Unpaid Leave of Absence

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approve the request for unpaid leave for Sharon Bywater-Reyes.

BACKGROUND

Sharon Bywater-Reyes, Associate Professor, Earth & Atmospheric Sciences, NHS – Academic Year 2026/2027

Summary: The leave will allow Dr. Bywater-Reyes to apply her academic expertise to critical community safety and infrastructure projects while gaining high-level industry experience that will be of value to her academic unit and the university upon her return.

Relevant Board Policy:

2-3-1004(1) Leave of Absence.
A leave without pay may be granted by the University upon request of a faculty or staff member. Leaves without pay will be approved by the department chair, the dean, the CAO, the President, and the BOT. A leave without pay may be granted an individual for the pursuit of a degree program, leaves for the betterment of society including election to a city, State, or national office, etc. Time spent on leave without pay granted prior to tenure shall not, in itself, affect a faculty member's rank, but will not be counted as time toward eligibility for consideration for tenure. With respect to appointment term, promotion period, and salary schedule, the individual's position shall be the same as it would be if the individual had not been on leave. A period of time spent on leave without pay will, however, affect an individual's service credit toward PERA benefits as well as the survivor and disability protection of the employee. A "Certification of Leave of Absence" form must be completed prior to the "Leave of Absence." It is important that appropriate provisions are made with the appropriate University offices for continuation of fringe benefits, if desired, prior to the beginning of the leave without pay. The employee on leave shall be responsible for payment of all amounts necessary to continue such benefits.

Leaves without pay may be granted for periods up to one year and may be renewable for a period of no more than one fiscal additional year.

K. Fleming	5/21/26		06/05/2026
Responsible Staff	Date	President	Date
Board Action	Date		

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

College of Natural and Health Sciences
Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 12, 2026
TO: Kamel Haddad, Dean, College of Natural and Health Sciences
FROM: Cindy Shellito, Chair, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences
RE: Leave of Absence Request – Sharon Bywater-Reyes

I support and approve of Dr. Sharon Bywater-Reyes' request for Leave of Absence in the 2026-27 academic year, as outlined in her letter. I find this request in concordance with Board Policy 2-3-1004(1) Leave of Absence. Dr. Bywater-Reyes' proposed experiences through this Leave of Absence will be of value to the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and to the University of Northern Colorado as a whole.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

University of Northern Colorado, 501 20th St Box 100, Greeley, CO 80639

Tel: 970-351-1086 | **Email**: sharon.bywaterreyes@unco.edu

Date: May 11, 2026
Subject: Request for Professional Leave of Absence

Dear Dr. Lucinda Shellito (Chair of Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences),

I am writing to formally request a professional leave of absence to pursue an opportunity as an Intermediate/Senior Geoscientist with Stantec's Geohazards and Geomorphology team in Fort Collins. This role offers a unique opportunity to apply my academic expertise to critical community safety and infrastructure projects while gaining high-level industry experience that will directly benefit the University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) upon my return.

This transition into professional practice aligns with UNCO's mission by strengthening our institutional ties to the environmental consulting sector and enhancing the "real-world" educational framework I provide to my students. My participation in this role serves the University in several key capacities:

1. Enhancing Applied Research and Industry Collaboration
In this position, I will be conducting geomorphological and landslide hazard assessments and modeling natural hazard phenomena using industry-leading software. Some of the software and applications are ones I am familiar with and already train my students in (HEC-RAS, ArcGIS Pro, Metashape), but others are developed by Stantec as international leaders (DebrisFlow Predictor and drone-based lidar). By mastering these practical applications and workflows, I will be better positioned to:

- Bring current industry best practices and state-of-the-art modeling techniques back to the UNCO classroom.
- Learn and follow environmental consulting best practices, including gaining Professional Geology licensure and following appropriate statues and laws across the U.S, which I can bring back to UNCO students through hands on training (e.g., short courses and workshops).
- Strengthen existing partnerships with local agencies and consulting firms, building on my previous advisory work with the Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed and local/regional municipalities (City of Greeley, Larimer County, City of Fort Collins, City of Boulder, and City of Longmont).

2. Developing Career Pipelines for UNC Students
A primary goal of this leave is to bridge the gap between academia and the professional geoscience workforce. By serving as a subject matter expert within a global firm like Stantec, I can:

- Identify the exact skill sets and competencies that our students need to be competitive in the current job market.
- Establish direct networking pipelines for UNCO graduates, helping them transition into high-impact careers in geomorphology and geohazard mitigation.
- Understand the landscape of current hiring practices for entry-level geoscientists into environmental consulting fields, including the Professional Geology licensure.

3. Faculty Development in Risk Management and Leadership

The responsibilities of this role include leading field crews, managing project budgets, and ensuring technical accuracy for state-level reporting. These high-stakes leadership experiences will enhance my ability to:

- Lead complex, multi-day field investigations and train students in safe data acquisition in rugged terrain.
- Mentor junior staff and students with a deeper understanding of professional ethics, quality standards, and stakeholder communication.

I am confident that this period of professional practice will allow me to return to my faculty role with renewed perspective and a modernized curriculum that ensures our students are not only academically proficient but truly career-ready.

Thank you for your time and for considering this request to further the reach and relevance of UNC's Environmental Geosciences program.

Sincerely,

Sharon Bywater-Reyes, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Environmental Geosciences University of Northern Colorado