McCausland College of Arts and Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

POLICY: Faculty Course Buyouts

DATE: October 15, 2025 (Revised)

I. POLICY

This policy applies to all units within the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences. The College policy is subordinate to related policies outlined in the University of South Carolina *Faculty Manual*. In cases of inconsistencies between this policy and the university, state, or federal policies, the university, state, or federal policy rules are the final authority.

Tenured and tenure-track faculty members in the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences may buy out courses to free up time for advancing their scholarly work and research endeavors. This policy governs course buyouts from extramural and intramural awards. Extramural course buyouts are generally funded from grants, contracts or other external sources. Start-up and retention funds used for course buyouts are determined at the extramural levels. For competitive intramural awards (e.g., EXCEL grants and Provost Research Competition Grant Awards 2025-2026), course buyouts are set at a lower level as outlined below. ***Please reach out to the CAS Grants Operations Team for assistance in budgeting for buyouts on grants.***

A. Definitions

1. **Course Release**
   Release from instruction granted by the Unit Chair or Director and/or Dean to an individual faculty member. Course release does not involve reimbursement from the College. Instructional coverage may or may not be provided by other faculty or temporary faculty. Typically funding from the college is not provided to support instructional coverage.

2. **Course Buyout**
   Release from instruction granted to individual faculty members by the Unit Chair or Director and approved by the Dean in exchange for funding (provided by the faculty member being released). The funding is used to pay for a substitute instructor (i.e., TFAC). Typically, a course buyout applies when a faculty member pays a portion of their salary from a grant, contract, or external source. Percent (%) Effort: The amount required for course buyout is based on your percent effort. This is the equivalent percentage of base 9-month salary (plus fringe benefits and health insurance) unless your salary is above a mandated salary cap such as the Federal NIH Salary Cap (12-month salary of $225,700 for 2025*). In these instances, the cost for buyout is based on the 9-month equivalent of the salary cap (For NIH, this is equivalent to $169,275).

** note that the NIH Salary Cap can change on an annual basis*

B. Unit Chair/Director Review

The Unit Chair or Director has the authority to approve or deny course buyout requests based on overall departmental needs, including continuity of course offerings. The Unit Chair or Director should assess the proposed course buyout's impact on the department/program's curriculum. A course buyout will only be considered if the department/program's curricular needs can be met.

The Unit Chair or Director should consider the following factors:

- Department/program needs (curriculum schedule, faculty on leave, administrative or service assignments)
- Course enrollment numbers
- Other instructional releases
- Suitable teaching replacements
- Number of sabbaticals or availability of other faculty in the department.

Faculty holding joint appointments will be governed by terms of the appointment for teaching responsibilities and teaching load. Course buyouts of cross-listed courses must also have approval of both impacted units.

Faculty are strongly encouraged to buy out graduate courses first and undergraduate courses second.

C. Service and Administrative Responsibilities

A course buyout does not release a faculty member from their professional obligations to the university, including service responsibilities. A faculty member buying out of a course will be expected to participate fully in service and administrative duties and should discuss with their unit chair or director what constitutes full participation. The buyout is strictly for teaching and must not be construed as approval for a full-time appointment to research.

Note that for faculty with existing course release for administrative duties, that release is intended to provide time for the administrative activity. Consequently, course buyout costs are determined by the faculty's base course load (i.e., without release in place).

D. Timing

A faculty member requesting a course buyout must plan accordingly to provide sufficient notification to the unit chair or director.

Requests for fall semester buyouts should be submitted by the previous July 1. Requests for spring semester buyouts should be submitted by the previous November 1, but no later than December 1.

E. Course Buyout Calculations

A common practice at peer institutions across the nation to buy out one semester is to set the rate at 25% of faculty base salary, plus fringe benefits. The College has decided to set a slightly lower salary rate. The cost of a semester buyout is 20% of a faculty base salary, plus fringe benefits or a 9-month equivalent of the NIH Salary Cap. Calculations for % of 9-month salary for varying teaching loads to use for buy out from extramural, startup or retention funds is shown below, with examples in Table 1.

For competitive intramural awards (e.g., EXCEL grants and Provost Awards 2025-2026), $10,000 will be required to buy out of one course for faculty on a 2:2 or higher teaching load or $20,000/course for those on a 1:1 teaching load.

1. **1:1 Teaching Load**
   The rate for a single course is therefore 20% of the faculty member's 9-month base salary. The cost of a semester buyout can be determined by multiplying the sum total of a faculty member's 9-month base salary or grant mandated salary cap (to include applicable fringe and health benefits) by 20%.

2. **2:2 Teaching Load**
   The rate for a single course is therefore 10% of a faculty member's 9- month base salary and the cost of each course buyout can be determined by multiplying the sum total of a faculty member's 9- month base salary or grant mandated salary cap (to include applicable fringe and health benefits) by 10%.

3. **2:3 Teaching Load**
   The rate for a single course is therefore 8% of a faculty member's 9- month base salary and the cost of each course buyout can be determined by multiplying the sum total of a faculty member's 9- month base salary or grant mandated salary cap (to include applicable fringe and health benefits) by 8%.

4. **3:3 Teaching Load**
   The rate for a single course is therefore 6.7% of a faculty member's base salary and the cost of each course buyout can be determined by multiplying the sum total of a faculty member's 9-month base salary or grant mandated salary cap (to include applicable fringe and health benefits) by 6.7%.

Table 1: ***Examples of course buyout costs for varying 9-month salaries***

9 month base salary	**Costs to buyout 1 course based on teaching load***			
	1:1 (20% 9 m)	2:2 (10% 9 m)	2:3 (8% 9 m)	3:3 (6.7% 9 m)
$75,000	$15,000	$7,500	$6,000	$5,025
$100,000	$20,000	$10,000	$8,000	$6,670
≥ $169,275**	$33,855	$16,927.50	$13,542	$11,341.43

* salary calculation does not include fringe benefits (32.72%) or health insurance costs, click here for most recent fringe benefits rates & insurance costs.
** NIH Salary cap as of Jan. 2025 (this is subject to change and can be restricted by the year award was made) – See NIH Guidance.

F. TFAC Funding
The College will retain the salary savings generated by course buyouts; in return, the College will provide the unit with a TFAC to cover the core curriculum, if necessary, subject to enrollment minimums. When submitting a TFAC request, please indicate if the request covers a course buyout and the faculty member's name.

G. Approval Process

To request a course buyout, a faculty member should complete the Faculty Course Buyout Request Form and submit it to the unit head. Requests for fall semester buyouts should be submitted by July 1. Requests for spring semester buyouts should be submitted by November 1, but no later than December 1.

The unit head will review the request. If approved by the Unit Head, it should be forwarded to the Associate Dean for Research to evaluate funding availability (through the College Grants Operations team), who also shares this with the Associate Dean for Courses and Curriculum to assess course needs. Once approval is received from the Dean's Office, the unit budget representative completes the corresponding Payroll Action Request Form (PARF).

The completed PARF and the approved Faculty Course Buyout Form should be submitted to the unit's College Budget Contact.

All forms and documents can be found online in the Office of the Dean Document Library.