

**College of Social Science Guidelines for Course Buyouts and Course Releases:
Research and Scholarly Activity for Tenure System and Fixed-Term Faculty
March 19, 2025 FINAL**

The College of Social Science encourages its faculty members to apply for extramural grants and fellowships while at the same time assuming that teaching remains a comparable priority for the faculty and that the teaching needs of academic units are considered. As part of their job, each tenure-system faculty member devotes 40 to 65 percent of their workload to scholarly and creative inquiry but there may be occasions when faculty members need to request a course buyout from their academic unit to support extra time needed to complete a project. Some fixed-term faculty in the College have research assignments. As a result, faculty members may request a course buyout as part of an external grant or fellowship application. In addition, when internal funds are used to support the research efforts of a faculty member, such requests are considered course releases.

At the same time, we need to ensure that the course buyout rates from external grants are equitable across units and academic ranks within the College while enabling Chairs/Directors to secure sufficient funds to defray the salary and fringe benefit costs of fixed-term teaching focused faculty, ad hoc course instructors, and/or graduate teaching assistants who are hired as replacement instructors. The costs of instruction have risen considerably over the past several years (6-10%) and are expected to continue their upward spiral.

The criteria presented below will assist faculty members and units in making decisions about faculty requests for course buyouts that pay for additional time to complete scholarly projects that are funded by external grants or fellowships as well as internal course releases.

- In all cases, faculty members must seek approval from their Chair/Director before applying for a grant or fellowship that includes course buyouts/releases as part of their applications. Any reduction in instructional obligations needs to be approved in advance of applying for fellowships or grants. When feasible, this should be done at least 6 months in advance of course scheduling.
- Administrative and service work as well as planned leaves from teaching must be considered in reviewing course buyout requests for grants or fellowships. If a faculty member will already be provided release from teaching for administrative or service obligations, they are limited in the number of course buyouts they can propose as part of a grant or fellowship application.
- When deciding to request course buyouts as part of grants or fellowships, it is expected that faculty will consider the teaching needs and resource limitations of the unit.
- At least 15% of annual salary and corresponding fringe benefit costs (3-credit course minimum rate) for the faculty member must be charged to an external grant/contract for each course buyout. Rates vary by standard teaching workload and by course credit hours using 5% per credit hour. The minimum buyout cost per 3-credit course = 15% of 9-month (AY) salary + fringe benefits; 15% of 12-month (AN) salary + fringe benefits minus administrative attachments. The maximum buyout cost per course = 12.5% of NIH

salary cap (currently \$225,700) + fringe benefits. These rates will be adjusted every two years to respond to rising personnel costs.

- Course buy-out rates are cumulative. For example, one course buyout is 15%, a two course buyout is 30%. Chairs/Directors may charge a higher course buyout rate second or subsequent course buyouts.
- In general, all resident tenure system faculty members not on leave or special assignment are expected to teach *at least one course* annually. Under exceptional circumstances, faculty members may request in writing a short-term buyout from all courses during a given academic semester or year. These requests must be approved by the Chair/Director and also by the Dean prior to the submission of a grant or fellowship application.
- The grant/contract/fellowship must be awarded and funds available at the beginning of the semester in which the course buyout is requested.
- Competitive, prestigious fellowships are typically at least a year and do not allow faculty members to teach courses for the College of Social Science at the same time. Application to such fellowships that do not allow faculty to teach for an academic year or more must have approval of the Chair/Director and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs prior to an application being submitted. The aforementioned per course buyout rate applies unless approval is obtained from the Dean's Office for other arrangements (e.g., leaves for prestigious fellowship).
- Internal grants and fellowships should at a minimum generate enough funding to cover the costs of replacement instructional needs created by the faculty absence.
- Buyout of teaching load does not release faculty members from performing advising and mentoring of students, other teaching obligations, or their service obligations on behalf of the University, college, department/school, or from meeting their responsibilities as a citizen of the University, college, and department/school.
- Any deviations from these guidelines must be approved by the Dean. Considerations for any exceptions have to be revenue neutral.

INSTRUCTIONS DOCUMENT

March 19, 2025

Procedure for Requesting a Course Buyout or Course Release

Definitions:

A course buyout, release or workload reduction is considered anything that deviates from the typical teaching load within the academic unit.

Course buyout: Release from teaching that is supported by extramural funding.

Course release: Release from teaching that is supported by internal funding within the unit, College, and/or University.

Faculty member (applicant)

1. At the time of the grant/fellowship application, faculty member budgets for course buyout/release and completes the Course Buyout/Course Release Request Form.
2. Preliminary approval of the course buyout/release by the Chair/Director should be forwarded to the assigned research administrator and uploaded into the MSU KR System Proposal Document (PD). In the case of a fellowship application made directly by the faculty member to the sponsor, a copy of the preliminary approval of the course buyout/release should be included in their personnel file.
3. At the time of award, the faculty member and Chair/Director will finalize the semester in which course buyout/release from teaching will be granted. Notification and a copy of the course buyout/release form is sent to the College's Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs.

Chair/Director

1. At the time of the grant/fellowship application, the Chair/Director approves or denies the course buyout/release request.
2. The Chair/Director forwards the approved Course Buyout/Course Request to the College's Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and the Office of Research (ORSI).
3. If funding is awarded, the Chair/Director notifies the College's Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs of the finalized buyout agreement.
4. The Chair/Director notifies the department/school unit representative/fiscal officer of approved course releases for internal awards using non-grant funds.

Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs

1. Reviews, negotiates, and approves course release.
2. Returns approved course release to the Chair/Director and the Office of Research (ORSI).

Academic Unit Representative/Fiscal Officer

1. Processes labor change to charge faculty member to grant during approved semester.
2. Processes labor change to return to the department's general fund at the end of the semester.
3. Transfers the required amount from the salary savings from full-time faculty budget line to the part-time faculty line in the general fund that can be used to support full- or part-time fixed term faculty for which a course buyout/course release is sought.

Exclusions

- Teaching reductions related to counter offers, distinguished professorships, or other offer letter terms are excluded from course buyouts.
- Faculty members may not buy out of teaching responsibilities if it will compromise the ability of the department/school to deliver its instructional program.
- Buyouts for pursuit of external personal or business interests not related to the mission of the University shall not be granted.
- Buyouts for activities by a faculty member that may be detrimental to the department/school in question shall not be granted.