



Policy Title: Faculty and Staff Release for Sponsored Research Participation

Policy Statement: St. Mary's College of Maryland allows eligible¹ faculty and professional staff to be released from a portion of their contracted duties to participate in externally funded research and sponsored programs. This policy establishes eligibility, procedures, and budgetary requirements for requesting and approving release time, ensuring compliance with institutional, state, and federal guidelines.

Responsible College Administrator: Provost and Dean of Faculty

Effective Date: October 1, 2025

Date of Last Review/Update: April 21, 2026

Responsible College Office: Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

(The information provided above will be shown on the front pages of the Policy Website. The following information will be found at the web location for each policy)

¹ Full-time tenured, tenure track and lecturer positions as well as professional staff including administrative faculty with academic or 12-month appointments.

Audience:

This policy applies to full-time tenured, tenure track and lecturer positions as well as professional staff including administrative faculty with academic or 12-month appointments who participate in externally funded sponsored research at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Purpose of the Policy:

This policy provides a framework for faculty and professional staff to obtain release from teaching or other contractual duties to engage in research and scholarly activities funded through grants, contracts, or other sponsored agreements. It ensures clarity around eligibility, procedural steps, and budgetary considerations related to release time, while maintaining compliance with relevant institutional, state, and federal policies (e.g., the Uniform Guidance and Code of Federal Regulations). It addresses how release time is calculated, approved, and recorded.

Procedures:**A. Background:**

- a. Full-time tenure, tenure-track and lecturer positions and professional staff, including administrative faculty, may request release time from their regular duties to participate in sponsored research or other program activities.
- b. Release time is distinct from professional leave, which is generally granted when a faculty member is released from all academic duties (teaching, scholarship, and service) for the purpose of pursuing a scholarly project or fellowship.
- c. Funds associated with release time are managed by the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Dean of Faculty and are typically reinvested within the College to support instructional faculty in covering the workload left vacant by the member's release.
- d. Full-time tenure, tenure-track, and lecturer teaching loads are typically equivalent to 8 course equivalents per academic year. The format may vary, including a 3-3 format with expectations of one additional course equivalent of scholarly activity and service each semester, or a 4-4 format where service and research expectations are reduced. The College recognizes that, in some cases, significant scholarly work may require a reduction in teaching load. In such instances, faculty members may request a reduced teaching load during their regular academic year appointment, allowing them to be "released" from part of their teaching duties to focus on research or other assigned responsibilities, while continuing to receive their regular full-time salary.

B. Application:

- a. Faculty requesting release time must be tenure-tracked or tenured.

- b. Faculty with a 10-month and 11-month appointment may request release time when working on sponsored work during the academic year (fall and/or spring semester), allowing them to charge the grant for their release.
- c. Faculty with 10-month and 11-month appointments may charge grants for time spent on research participation during their off-contract period, as permitted by the Code of Federal Regulations.
- d. Faculty and professional staff with a 12-month appointment may only participate in sponsored research by following the formal release time process.

C. Release Time Allocation:

- a. Cost Calculation for 10-month and 11-month employees: The standard method for calculating the cost of a course release, in line with federal regulations, is based on the faculty member's base salary rather than the replacement cost for a course. A full-time faculty teaching load is typically equivalent to 8 course equivalents per academic year. This can be structured in one of two common formats: a 4:4 format (four courses each semester, with reduced expectations for service and scholarly activity) or a 3:3 format (three courses each semester, with one additional course equivalent per semester assigned for service and/or scholarly activity). In both formats, the total workload equals 8 course equivalents per year. One course release is equal to 12.5% (1/8) of the faculty member's annual institutional base salary (IBS), plus applicable fringe benefits. For example, a faculty member with a base salary of \$65,000 would request \$8,125 for the release, plus on-contract fringe benefits (~38%) of \$3,088, totaling \$11,213 for one course buy-out.
- b. Cost Calculations for 12-Month employees: The standard method outlined by federal regulations is followed to calculate the cost of a release for a 12-month employee. This method is based on the faculty member or professional staff's base salary rather than the replacement cost of an equivalent course. In accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, the release buyout can be charged to the grant. For 12-month employees, the amount of release time is determined at the discretion of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA). For example, if one month of release buyout is approved, the grant will be charged 8.333% (1/12) of the annual institutional base salary (IBS), plus associated on-contract fringe benefits. If the employee is approved for more than one month, the percentage should be adjusted accordingly.

D. Approval Process for Release Time:

- a. Office of Research & Sponsored Programs (ORSP):
The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs assists with budgeting

the buyout in the proposal and ensures that the release time is properly accounted for in the grant proposal.

- b. Faculty Member/Professional Staff: Once budget estimates are confirmed by ORSP, the faculty member completes the Course Buyout/Release Request Form, which includes a detailed description of the project's scope, sponsor funding, and requested release time (semester(s) and year(s) of requested release). This form is forwarded to the program chair for recommendation.
- c. Program Chair: The chair reviews the release request in the context of the external grant application and recommends either support or non-support. The Course Buyout/Release Request is then forwarded, along with the chair's recommendation, to the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs (AVPAA).
- d. Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs: The Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs reviews the request to ensure it aligns with the faculty or staff member's workload and institutional priorities and may provide clarification or adjustments as needed. The AVPAA then forwards the Course Buyout/Release Request to the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) with a recommendation for support or non-support. The VPAA has final approval authority for all release time requests.
- e. Once approved, the form will be kept on file in the ORSP, AVPAA, and Chair Offices during the grant submission and review processes. Faculty are required to complete the Course Buyout/Release Form prior to grant submission.
- f. If the grant or sponsored activity is funded, ORSP will re-circulate the Course Buyout/Release Form, noting the award, through the appropriate offices to ensure all parties have a record of the funding.

E. Frequency:

- a. Release time is granted at the discretion of the Vice President of Academic Affairs. The primary responsibility of college faculty is to provide a consistent and high-quality educational experience. Approval is neither automatic nor guaranteed; each release time request will be evaluated individually, considering the needs of the program, the College's overall academic and institutional priorities, availability of funds, and the needs of the faculty/professional staff member.

F. Restrictions and Limitations:

- a. Faculty with a 10-month appointment may use their two months outside their contractual period (June and July) for research or sponsored activity, subject to institutional approval of the proposal submission.

- b. Faculty with an 11-month appointment may use their one month outside their contractual period (June or July) for research or sponsored activity, subject to institutional approval of the proposal submission.
- c. Faculty and professional staff with a 12-month appointment may only participate in sponsored research through the formal release time process. The total time spent on their normal duties, combined with any release time, cannot exceed 12 months for grant charging purposes.

Sanctions:

Failure to follow the required procedures for seeking release time or requesting a course release in advance may result in the College declining to honor the request. Retroactive approvals may not be granted, and faculty or staff may instead be required to fulfill their full contractual responsibilities.

Charging grant funds for unapproved or unsupported release time is not permitted under this policy. All release time or course releases must be formally requested, reviewed, and approved through the appropriate channels prior to submission of the grant proposal or commencement of the sponsored activity.

Definitions:

- A. Release Time: The approved time granted by the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Dean of Faculty for eligible faculty members and professional staff to engage in research, scholarly activities, or sponsored programs.
- B. Academic Year Appointments:
 - a. 10-month Appointment: Faculty with professional responsibilities from August 1 to May 31.
 - b. 11-month Appointment: Faculty with professional responsibilities from July 1 to May 31 or from August 1 to June 30.
 - c. 12-month Appointment: Faculty or professional staff with responsibilities from July 1 to June 30.
- C. Sponsored Research Course Release: Funding provided by a sponsor to release a faculty member from contractual duties to focus on a sponsored project, covering the equivalent cost of the release time.
- D. Course Buyout: A course buyout funded by extramural funding refers to the process by which a faculty member reduces their teaching load by one or more courses, with the cost of the buyout covered by an external grant or sponsored agreement. The external sponsor provides funding to cover the faculty member's salary during the buyout period, allowing the faculty member to focus on research or other scholarly activities.

Hyperlinks

1. [Office of Research & Sponsored Programs \(ORSP\)](#)
2. [Uniform Guidance \(2 CFR 200\)](#)
3. [SMCM Faculty Handbook](#)
4. [Course Buyout/Release Request Form](#)