UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

Policy Manual

Policy #:	ACD-7404	Policy Title:	Policy on Course Release and Course Buy-out
Effective:	08/15/2026	Responsible Office:	Provost's Office
Date Approved:	08/06/2026	Approval:	Executive Vice President and Provost
Replaces Policy Dated:	N/A	Responsible University Official:	Executive Vice President and Provost

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide clarity and consistency related to course release and course buyout practices for members of the University faculty and to support the quality of the University's academic programs and teaching excellence.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to full-time faculty members on continuing, tenured, or tenure-track appointments.

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POLICY STATEMENT:

ACD-7404.1 – Definitions

Course Release: Course release is a temporary reduction in a faculty member's teaching load, granted by the institution, in recognition of research or administrative service that significantly exceeds the normal responsibilities for a faculty member.

Course Buy-Out: Course buy-out is a temporary reduction in a faculty member's teaching load to perform work on a grant or project funded by an external entity. The sponsoring research agency, or entity (e.g., journal in the case of journal editing) provides payment for the course buy-out as specified in the University policy.

Teaching Overload Compensation: Compensation above base salary provided to a faculty member for teaching one or more credit-bearing courses in excess of the faculty member's base load.

Faculty Leave: Faculty release from all teaching responsibilities for one or more semesters; depending on the release type, faculty may also be released from service and/or research obligations. Release types are specified in the Faculty Handbook, and include mid-course leave, sabbatical leave, parental leave, and leave of absence.

ACD-7404.2 – Policy

As outlined in the Faculty Handbook, "Faculty play a special role in the life of the University as teachers, mentors, scholars and participants in faculty governance." In order to advance the academic mission, instructional faculty are expected to teach a full load of credit-bearing courses, as determined by the baseload in their appointment, while continuing to engage in research and service activities as defined in the Faculty Handbook. Despite the core importance of teaching to the faculty appointments and the University mission, release from teaching is an important means by which some members of the faculty may support administrative, service, or research responsibilities that fall outside of the normal expectations of faculty workload. Therefore, temporary reduction in a faculty member's teaching load may be obtained through approval of a Course Release or Course Buyout as described in the policy below.

Course releases or course buy-outs may be granted only when the administrative, service, or research activities exceed the time required for preparation and instruction of a 1-unit (or 3- or 4-credit hour) course or the course for which the member is receiving a course release and are sustained across a semester or longer. Consistent with the Faculty Handbook expectations for teaching, research, and service, course releases will not be granted for preparation of a new course, nor revision or transformation of existing courses.

While course releases and course buy-outs are intended to support a faculty member's additional research or service, faculty members with reduced teaching loads are expected to continue to be present on campus, engage fully in service and advising responsibilities, and participate in the intellectual life of the University. If a faculty member seeks or is granted a release from all teaching and all service/administrative responsibilities for a semester, that is not considered course release; it is considered a leave and must follow the University policies and Faculty Handbook expectations related to sabbaticals and other leaves.

Course releases and course buy-outs are intended to provide faculty with additional time. Therefore, a faculty member may not earn teaching overload compensation in any semester in which they are granted a course buy-out or course release. If an unexpected teaching need requires the faculty member to forego a course release or course buy-out that has been approved, that course release or course buy-out may be utilized in the following academic year.

Course releases and course buy-outs are not guaranteed. All course releases and course buy-outs and approvals outlined below must be documented in writing, typically as part of the annual reappointment processes in the spring for the following academic year.

Course Release

A Course Release is provided by the institution in support of extraordinary research, service, or administrative obligations and does not require an external funding source. The primary reasons for course releases are administrative appointments (e.g., Department Chair) or for successful applications to the University's Faculty Fellows Program. The scope and duration of the work and the associated deliverables must be documented for each course release (e.g., description of responsibilities for department chairs) and must clearly demonstrate that the scope of work is commensurate with the time commitment associated with preparing for and teaching a standard course. Course releases must be approved by the Provost and the Dean (and the department chair where relevant) of the school in which the faculty member is appointed prior to inclusion in any offer to a faculty member. Ordinarily course releases may not be banked or accumulated over multiple semesters; in extraordinary circumstances in which an overload is taught without pay or a faculty member foregoes a release due to the teaching needs of the School, a release expected in one academic year may be moved to the subsequent academic year.

Course Buy-Out and Externally Funded Faculty Leaves

A Course Buy-Out may be requested by a faculty member to support extraordinary research or service obligations when funded by an external source. Course buy-outs must be approved by the Provost and the Dean (and the department chair where relevant) of the school in which the faculty member is appointed. Course buy-outs included as part of a grant application should be proposed as part of the application development process and must be approved in advance of the application submission.

All course buy-outs must be taken within the grant period approved by the funding agency and may not be banked, deferred, or accumulated for use beyond that period. Remaining course assignments for the faculty member will be determined in consultation with the Dean (or Department Chair where relevant) and are subject to instructional needs.

Only one faculty teaching unit (a 1-unit course or a 3 or 4 credit-hour course) may be taken as a course buy-out in a single academic year. Ordinarily course buy-outs may not exceed three faculty teaching units in any six-year period. All course buy-outs must be fully funded by an external source (i.e., an external grant or a journal when serving as journal editor).

Typically, a course buy-out may not be combined with any other type of leave or course release to reduce the faculty member's teaching load to fewer than 2 units (or the credit-equivalent) in an academic year.

If a course buy-out is budgeted as an institutional matching or cost-sharing expense on an external grant, the cost allocation shall be based on the same rate as if funded by an external source, and all rules pertaining to course buy-outs shall apply. Start-up or professional development funds may not be used to buy out courses in the absence of external funding; however, such funds may be charged if a course buy-out is established as an institutional match.

When determining the cost of a course buy-out, the external funding source must cover the portion of the faculty member's salary equivalent to one course, defined as 1/8 (12.5%) of the faculty member's base salary plus the current fringe benefit rate. If the specific faculty member who might receive a course buy-out from a grant is not known at the time of submission, the budgeted 12.5% will be based on an average salary as provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. All funds recovered by this mechanism will be pooled and used to help support temporary teaching requests.

Individual faculty members may apply for and receive external funding to support a faculty leave, extended sabbatical, or participate in another project in lieu of teaching at Richmond which is expected to last one or two semesters. Externally funded fellowships, faculty leaves, or other sponsored opportunities that provide full or substantial release from teaching responsibilities are not considered course buy-outs and are not subject to the limitations described above. Such opportunities are governed by the Faculty Handbook and other applicable University policies and approval processes. In such cases, the external entity typically pays for a faculty member's entire salary and benefits.

RELATED POLICIES:

Faculty Handbook

ACD-7401 Policy on Supplemental Compensation to Faculty

POLICY BACKGROUND:

Original policy reviewed by President's Cabinet and Deans prior to approval in August 2026.

POLICY CONTACTS:

Executive Vice President and Provost