Bowdoin

Grant-Funded Course Buyouts

A course buyout is when an external grant or fellowship pays for a percentage of a faculty member's regular academic year salary and benefits, "buying out" one course's equivalent of time and effort from the College to support the funded project instead. The faculty member's regular salary and FTE do not change, and their other responsibilities are unaffected, but they teach one fewer courses in a certain semester and instead dedicate that time to the funded project. To support their scholarship and artistic work, tenure-line faculty are eligible to request grant-funded course buyouts for sponsored research according to these guidelines.

Key Points

- The faculty member (principal investigator / PI) must request approval for the course buyout during the grant conceptualization stage and must receive approval from both their chair(s)/director(s) and the Dean for Academic Affairs prior to the grant application being submitted
- The grant must be fiscally awarded and managed through Bowdoin; the grant terms must allow a course buyout; and the awarded grant budget must cover the course buyout's full salary cost (20% of the PI's base salary), plus benefits and/or overhead
- The curricular impact on the department/program and students is central to determining approval

Eligibility

Tenure-track may request up to one grant-funded course buyout in the period of time between appointment and post-tenure sabbatic leave.

After the first post-tenure sabbatic leave, tenured faculty may request up to one grant-funded course buyout in a single sabbatical cycle, i.e. the years of teaching between sabbatic leaves.

If a request is approved but the grant is not awarded, or the course buyout is cancelled and does not take place, it will not count as the faculty member's one allowed course buyout in the given time period.

Expectations / Parameters

A grant-funded course buyout buys out the teaching of one course: it does not reduce or affect the faculty member's other obligations, including advising and departmental or College service (e.g. committees, serving as chair/director).

A grant-funded course buyout may not be used, alone or in combination with internal course releases, to reduce the faculty member's teaching load to zero in any given semester.

Tenure-line faculty who hold half-time (0.50 FTE) appointments and therefore offer only one course in each semester are not eligible for course buyouts. They are encouraged to discuss alternate forms of grant salary support with Cara Martin-Tetreault (cmartin3@bowdoin.edu), Senior Director of Sponsored Programs and Policies, or Saari Greylock (s.greylock@bowdoin.edu), Director of Faculty Administration.

The grant must pay for 20% of the PI's base annualized salary rate in the year in which the course buyout is taken, plus benefits (fringe) and/or overhead if allowed by the sponsor.

Course buyouts should only be proposed for semesters far enough in the future that the department/program would have sufficient time to enact the appropriate curricular plan after the funding decision, whether positive or negative, is announced, i.e. at least a month prior to the opening of course registration for that semester and normally at least one month prior to the deadline for submitting the final course schedule for that semester.

The expectation is that the bought-out course will not be replaced, i.e. no additional staffing or overloads will be approved to teach that or another course in the PI's stead.

Eligibility to request a course buyout does not assume approval of that request by either the chair/director or the Dean for Academic Affairs. As an important part of departmental faculty governance, chairs/directors should review requests carefully and only grant approval if it is in the department's/program's interests and they are prepared and willing to manage the impacts.

Approved grant-funded course buyouts under this policy do not affect a tenured faculty member's ability to count the semester in question as a semester of service towards eligibility for sabbatic leave. Pre-tenure faculty may not request an extension to their tenure clock due to receiving a grant-funded course buyout.

These guidelines are implemented after significant consultation with and input from the faculty and on the recommendation of the majority of such faculty. The College recognizes that grant-funded course buyouts will be more feasible in some departments/programs than others, and that external funding for course buyouts may be more available in some disciplines than others. The impact will not be equitable across departments/programs or even for all faculty within a given department or program, but the Dean for Academic Affairs will seek to apply these guidelines consistently and fairly to all faculty.

Process

Faculty members who wish to request a one-time course buyout in a grant proposal must request specific approval of the buyout in addition to the standard grant approval process. It is the faculty member's (PI's) responsibility to do this early in the grant development process, well in advance of the grant proposal deadline.

In order to afford adequate time for planning, review, conversations, and integration of the decision about a course buyout into the grant proposal narrative and budget, the PI should begin conversations with their chair(s)/director(s) at least six to eight weeks prior to the grant deadline and, assuming departmental approval, should plan to submit the request to the Dean a month prior to the grant proposal deadline.

Approval by Department/Program(s)

After having confirmed with the Grants Office staff that a course buyout is an allowable cost per the grant guidelines, the PI must discuss the course buyout request with their chair(s)/director(s) and request approval.

The PI and the chair/director will develop a basic plan addressing the course buyout's impact on the curriculum, including:

- The specific anticipated semester for the course buyout
- The specific anticipated course and its place in the curriculum (or equivalent parameters, e.g. course level and type, core or elective), as well as the course that the PI will still teach in that semester
- How the course buyout fits into the department/program's overall staffing/leave pattern in that year
- How the loss of the course will impact the curriculum and students, including progress for majors and impacts on course sequences, teaching rotations, offerings of distribution requirements, and ability to meet enrollment needs
- What shifts or adjustments in course offerings or teaching assignments they will have to make to accommodate the lost course, if any

Other factors the chair/director might consider include the anticipated impact on colleagues; the time since the PI's last course buyout, if applicable; the time since their last / until their next sabbatic leave; if there are other requests for course buyouts in a similar time period; the time between likely award notice and the proposed course buyout; and other department/program-specific factors or criteria. Criteria should be as consistent as possible for all course buyout requests in that department/program.

The chair/director will consider the course buyout request in the context of the needs of the department/program, the curriculum, and the students, as well as of the PI, and will grant or decline approval. If the PI does not receive departmental approval, the course buyout is not permitted.

Jointly appointed faculty must normally obtain approval from both chairs/directors, and the curricular impact plan must address both departments/programs. If a jointly appointed faculty member is proposing a course buyout for a course that is only listed in one department/program and does not contribute to or impact the curriculum of the other department/program (nor will any resulting course changes or shifts), only the approval of the chair/director of the impacted department/program will be required, but the other chair/director must still acknowledge that they have discussed the plan with the PI and indicate whether or not they endorse it.

Approval by Dean

If the chair/director approves the course buyout request, the PI submits the approved curricular impact plan by email to the Dean for Academic Affairs, along with **(1)** a brief description of the overall grant goals and timeline with the size and scope of the work to be conducted and **(2)** an explanation as to why the additional release time during the academic year is necessary for the successful completion of the funded work, the specific work the PI anticipates doing during that semester, and how it will materially impact their ability to reach the grant's goals. Please remember that the Dean is not familiar with the grant proposal itself, and the description should help the Dean understand the specific rationale for the course buyout in context.

The Dean reviews the request, assesses the impact at a departmental and institutional level, and grants or declines approval of the proposed course buyout.

If approved, the PI will work with the Grants Office staff to incorporate the course buyout in the grant application and to complete the regular grant review and approval process prior to submission.

Post-Award

If the grant is awarded, the Grants Office staff will notify the Director of Faculty Administration, who will formally note the planned teaching reduction and associated curricular impact plan in personnel and department/program records. Any subsequent modifications to the approved plan will require prior approval from the chair/director and the Dean.

In the semester of the course buyout, the staff in the Grants Office and the Office of the Dean for Academic Affairs will coordinate to charge the appropriate amount of the PI's salary and benefits to the grant, based on 20% of their institutional base salary in that fiscal year.