

School of HHS Guidelines for Determining Faculty Effort on Externally Funded Projects

History

Faculty research is highly regarded in the School of Health and Human Sciences (HHS). Faculty engaged in creative activities, entrepreneurial endeavors, scholarship with graduate and undergraduate students and externally funded research enhance the teaching environment and benefit all members of the university community. In the past, HHS faculty and Department Chairs requested guidance regarding how to determine faculty effort on externally funded research. No university guidelines exist for this purpose. However, a task force convened by former Provost Perrin and Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, Terri Shelton, in 2012 recommended that any such policies and procedures:

1. Incentivize excellence in research,
2. Enhance transparency,
3. Foster productive and collaborative interactions between investigators and administrators,
4. Clarify roles and responsibilities of stake holders (e.g., the Principal Investigator is the expert in the substantive and methodological elements of the research process; Contracts and Grants is responsible for overseeing compliance with funding agency requirements related to change in faculty effort),
5. Clarify expectations about the interactions among stakeholders (e.g., PIs and department chairs should engage in active discussions about workload and effort before proposal preparation and often thereafter).

In addition to these recommendations, there are many policies and procedures to consider when determining faculty effort on externally funded projects. These include policies or procedures at the local (UNCG), state (UNC System), and federal (e.g., NIH, OMB, PHS) levels, as well as the private level (e.g., foundations, hospitals, community organizations) that address faculty effort, cost-sharing (whether voluntary or required), and percent effort certification and reporting. Given the complexity of this issue, guidelines must be **flexible**.

The initial and revised guidelines and procedures were created with all of the above in mind and feedback was sought from the HHS Research Advisory Committee faculty members, other research active faculty members in HHS, HHS department chairs, the HHS Dean, the HHS Office of Research (OOR) staff, the Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement, and the Director of Contracts and Grants prior to implementation.

Guidelines

Based on the considerations outlined above, the following guidelines have been developed regarding faculty effort on externally funded projects:

1. The overall framework for faculty workloads is determined by the UNC Board of Governors and by UNCG policy that is consistent with those UNC policies. Department policies guide the specifics, but the department policies must be in line with the overarching policies. (See “UNCG Faculty Workload Guidelines”, January 5, 2016 at <http://provost.uncg.edu/publications/personnel/workloads.asp>). Teaching, research, service, and directed professional activity efforts vary among units and departments, depending on program needs. Given this reality, faculty effort on externally funded projects must be discussed between the faculty member and the department chair prior to proposal submission.
2. The **primary** factor determining effort should be based on the scope of work required to complete the project. Faculty effort on externally funded projects should be consistent with the project scope of work, the role of the faculty member on the proposal, and the related expertise and time needed to complete the activities which are approved by the funding agency.
3. Faculty effort on external grants/contracts results in salary support paid for by the external agency. Most projects will require faculty effort during the academic year and during the summer months. Budgeting for effort during the academic year is handled differently from budgeting for summer:
 - a. During the academic year, the funds budgeted for faculty effort are referred to as “**salary savings**”. The external funding pays for the time that the faculty member would otherwise spend teaching or carrying out other aspects of their workload that are paid through state funding. The grant funds are used to pay the corresponding percent of salary normally paid with state funds, hence the term “salary savings”. These “salary savings” funds are used by the Dean’s office to support the research efforts of HHS. The main expenditures of salary savings are 1) salary paid to lecturers to cover courses normally taught by the investigator, 2) graduate student stipends, 3) funding HHS OOR initiatives launched in 2018 which include enhancements to summer grant writing stipends, top off funding, international travel funding, funding to promote building research collaborations, funding to support research-related training, and funding for special projects, and 4) paying for expert external review and editing of grant proposals prior to submission.
 - b. Faculty effort during summer months is budgeted differently because most faculty are not on contract and are, therefore, not paid by state funds during the summer. Therefore, external funding for faculty effort is not considered as salary savings for faculty with nine- or ten-month appointments. Salary from grant funds during this period is referred to as “add-pay” and is paid to the faculty member for the amount of time working on the research project. The [UNCG Policy on Compensation Beyond Contract for Faculty and EHRA Nonfaculty Employees](#) states, “*For a nine-month appointee, total compensation earned from all forms of work done during the summer (such as continuing education activities, teaching Summer School, and research and curriculum development activities) cannot exceed one-third of the current nine-month salary.*” Furthermore, the policy states, the “*level of compensation awarded for participation in sponsored program activity during the summer months will be determined for each employee at a rate not in excess of the base salary*”

divided by the period to which the base salary relates and will be limited to charges made in accordance with the other parts of this section. The base salary period used in computing charges for work performed during the summer months will be the number of months covered by the faculty member's official academic year appointment."

4. Faculty, department chairs, and the HHS Associate Dean for Research (ADR) must be **reasonable** and **flexible** when determining externally funded effort. Not all funding mechanisms provide large enough budgets to charge significant portions of salary against the funded grant. In addition, some agencies restrict the level of salary support. In general, the budget should reflect the level of effort that is dedicated to carrying out the proposed activities, with consideration for the specifications and context of the specific proposal.
5. The faculty member and department chair may consider releasing a faculty member from teaching a course to carry out the proposed activities. This is referred to as "course buyout," and salary savings from the external project may be used to pay for a lecturer to teach a course that would normally be taught by the faculty member. Faculty requests for a "course buyout" are typically noted in Cayuse at the time of submission. Since salary savings are managed by the HHS Dean's office, the HHS OOR staff notes those grants requesting "course buyout" in Cayuse. These requests are tracked by the HHS OOR staff as they are considered when planning for lecturers to teach courses in future semesters and for graduate student stipends. **Effective July 1, 2022, submitted grant proposals which include a request for a course buyout, must include a minimum of 12.5 and up to 15% faculty effort per requested buyout in order for the submission to be approved by the HHS Associate Dean for Research** (see [HHS Course Release Policy \(DOCX\)](#)). In rare circumstances, faculty may request exceptions. Such requests must be submitted in writing to the ADR with a rationale; an email is sufficient. The ADR will consult with the Dean in making final determinations and will note the reason for exceptions in Cayuse so a permanent record will exist. The following will be considered in making such decisions: the amount of the shortfall from the standard (i.e., 12.5%-requested %); budgetary restrictions from the funder; proportion of faculty AY salary relative to summer salary in the context of the proposed work; funder policies; other existing sources of salary savings for the faculty member; the potential of the work to lead to additional future funding; and the extent to which the proposed budget provides revenue for graduate student stipends and tuition.
6. Although decisions about effort are made on a "grant proposal by grant proposal basis," it is acknowledged that any individual faculty member's portfolio of funded research is a "moving target over time." That is, it is impossible to predict in advance which proposals will be funded, the exact start and end dates of grants, and how many overlapping grant funded projects will exist at any particular time. Thus, faculty may need to request from their department chairs additional course buyouts or other workload reductions and/or request that the timing of these buyouts/workload reductions be altered (e.g., a course buyout planned for fall may need to shift to spring because of project related needs). Faculty and department chairs should work together on an overall plan for the faculty member's externally funded effort, and keep the ADR informed as plans for individual externally funded projects change.
6. In situations where a faculty member has funded effort across multiple funded projects, the sum of percent effort on all projects should be used to determine the necessity and eligibility for course buyouts. Salary savings to cover course buyout should be negotiated by the department chair with the HHS ADR to reflect the total effort of the faculty member on

several research projects. Consistent with above (see point 4), the sum of effort across grants to justify a course release must include a minimum of 12.5 to 15% effort, and in rare circumstances faculty may request exceptions.

7. Faculty and department chairs may agree to workload reductions beyond course buyouts. For example, a faculty member and chair may agree to reduce the undergraduate advising load, service, or other administrative duties. Or faculty members and chairs may agree to the assignment of a graduate assistant to help with teaching a course. There are many ways to support time for externally funded research and we need to be **flexible** in providing an environment conducive to our academic and scholarly needs.
8. When funding is awarded, faculty meet with the post-award research administrator in the HHS OOR and staff from Contracts and Grants to discuss their grant accounts and other award details. At this time any revisions to the budget (e.g., award is lower than requested in the proposal) are discussed and plans finalized for implementation of the budget. Changes in faculty effort should be consistent with the faculty effort and within the guidelines of the granting agency (e.g., NIH must approve a 25% or more decrease in faculty effort), and must be agreed upon by the department chair, faculty member, and ADR. This process is applicable for revisions made in any year of the grant for multi-year grants. Revision in faculty effort may result in changes in the originally agreed upon “course buyout” if faculty effort is reduced below the minimum of 12.5%; considerations noted in point 5 apply here as well. It is essential that changes in faculty effort are approved by the department chair and the ADR since salary savings are used in planning for hiring of lecturers, graduate students’ stipends, and research initiatives. Changes in effort for a buyout from the approved pre-award budget must be recorded in writing via an email exchange and will be uploaded to Cayuse by the HHS OOR to ensure a permanent record is in place.
9. Determination of faculty effort varies from unit to unit. These differences should not become barriers to multidisciplinary research. Conflicts arising from differences in policy and procedure guidelines between departments should be reviewed by the HHS ADR, and differences between units should be reviewed by the Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement in consultation with the appropriate Deans.

These guidelines will be shared with new faculty during their orientation, permanently posted on the HHS OOR website, and shared with department chairs on an annual basis. The ADR is happy to meet with individuals, departments, or other groups to answer questions about the guidelines.