

Faculty Workload Policy

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**Volgenau School of Engineering
George Mason University**

**Revision History:
Version 1.3**

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Purpose of Policy: The purpose of this policy is to establish VSE guidelines for assigning instructional faculty teaching loads, while ensuring workload equity accounting for overall faculty activity and productivity in teaching, research, service, and outreach. This policy is to be implemented at both the school and departmental or program levels, and is to be reviewed annually and revised as appropriate.

Preamble

Faculty members are among the most important and consequential resources of any university, so it is essential that the university and each of Mason's academic units ensure workload equity while also maximizing the efficient use of our teaching, research, and service resources.

Recognizing and allowing for differences among units, these guidelines are designed to assure consistency of workload expectations both across our university and aligned with related policies and practices in our peer institutions. This document applies to all Volgenau School of Engineering (VSE) instructional faculty, and is consistent with the university's Faculty Handbook (University Policy 3008 - Faculty Teaching Loads and University Policy 4012 – Roles and Responsibilities of a Principal Investigator), Mason's Supplemental Pay procedures and State and Federal guidelines.

Base Teaching Loads

The base teaching load, as set by the University, is as follows:

Term faculty: 4 + 4 (4 courses per semester)

Tenure-track/Tenured: 2 + 2 (2 courses per semester)

The teaching load reflects the following average effort percentages:

Term faculty: 80% teaching; 20% service

Tenure-track/Tenured: 40% teaching; 40% research; 20% service

Performance Expectations and Workload Assignments

Within college guidelines, Department Chairs have the flexibility to establish faculty work plans based on workload assignments that meet the needs of the academic unit, are fair and equitable, and reasonable in helping individual faculty members achieve their annual performance goals and the Department in meeting its obligations to the School and University.

Establishing a transparent, equitable workload policy should involve considerations for qualitative performance issues (effort v. effectiveness), career stage, and the specific disciplinary culture. An appropriate balance of teaching, scholarship and research, service and outreach should be incentivized by the departmental or program faculty workload policies.

The faculty workload guidelines must be reviewed annually and revised as necessary to ensure that all course sections are covered with a qualified instructor. The most important priority must always be satisfying the teaching needs and obligations of the department or program to provide the highest quality of instruction for our students. As an overarching guiding principle, any reductions in faculty teaching loads for individual faculty members must be balanced by either: i.) an increase in teaching load for other individual faculty members; or ii.) the use of qualified adjunct faculty members. If adjunct faculty members are employed, the department must fund these positions from their departmental budget, including the use of faculty “buyouts” (see specific buy-out guidelines below).

All instructional faculty members are expected to engage in service. Service activities may include student mentoring and advising; departmental, school, or university committee work; service on the Faculty Senate; course coordinator assignments; assessment and accreditation assignments; administrative and/or special assignments; professional activities such as serving on a technical committee of a professional society, conference organization, journal editorship, technical paper reviews, etc.; outreach activities; and other activities appropriate to the particular discipline. Service activities will be recognized and incorporated into annual performance evaluations and tenure and promotion decisions. Routine service work, as a general faculty expectation, will not justify a teaching load reduction.

Additionally, all tenured and tenure-track faculty members are expected to engage in research, as stated in the Faculty Handbook, consistent with the discipline, and informed by peer benchmarking and Mason’s aspirations as a Research I institution. For tenured and tenure-track faculty members, service activities should not supplant research. Research expectations can vary significantly across departments and even within disciplines. Given that, specific research expectations must be determined and documented at the departmental level.

However, it is expected that research activities will have all of the following outcomes: 1) research publications, 2) external funding and 3) graduate student supervision. Departmental performance evaluations should determine the quality level of the research publications, and the number of publications that are acceptable. Similarly, the quality of the funding agency, and the amount of funding needed to qualify as an active researcher must be determined at the departmental level. If faculty research productivity is significantly below the norm for more than

two years (based on departmental evaluations), adjustments to increase teaching or service workloads should be made at the discretion of the Chair and the Dean. Tenured faculty members who are not active in research must make an equitable contribution to the department, school, and university.

Any tenured faculty member who within the previous two years has had no research funding, has not submitted proposals for external funding of at least \$150,000 (total budget), and has not supervised a doctoral student on the 998/999 mechanism (up to 24 credits), must have an increased teaching load up to the base teaching load of term faculty, depending on the level of service activities and other contributions to the department. However, meeting these criteria does not preclude assignment of a higher teaching load based on performance review of annual activities.

The amount of research funding (direct and indirect) received by the department and the college should be considered when evaluating research productivity. PIs are encouraged to budget student support on research funding. Workload assignments involving research on sponsored projects must comply with University, State, Federal and project terms in relation to effort reporting. All research effort should be reflected accurately and match actual effort worked throughout the year. If research is performed – or students funded by the award are supervised – during the academic year (AY), effort must be budgeted and reflected on externally funded projects as AY effort in alignment with policies of the sponsoring agency. Summer effort should be reflected for work performed during the summer, rather than for work performed throughout the academic year. PI effort should be budgeted in proposals and charged to the project when it is worked. (OMB Uniform Guidance 200.430).

Standards for class size should be established by each department and program for productivity and workload assessment, consistent with university guidelines. The departmental and program policies may allow for counting very large enrollment course sections as two separate courses for the purpose of course teaching load calculations. Similarly, laboratory course teaching assignments may be counted as more than one course for teaching load calculations, provided that the level of effort and time required is substantially more than that for a course with a traditional lecture format. Faculty also direct independent studies, thesis research, undergraduate research projects and senior design projects. Some faculty create new courses that have never been taught before, while others teach similar sections year after year. “Number of students taught” may also not be an adequate reflection of effort spent, as teaching a small doctoral level class may be as demanding as a large lecture hall class where teaching assistants handle a lab and/or grading. If Graduate Teaching Assistants or Graders are assigned to an instructor, consideration of how such assistants impact the teaching effort of the instructor should be given. For these reasons, Department Chairs may recognize teaching activity that is not reflected in the category “teaching a 3 credit course” as part of the base teaching load.

Exceptions to Base Teaching Loads

In recognition that high research activity does demand considerable time (often more than 40% effort), a course reduction can be beneficial to that productivity, and to incentivize faculty to become “exceptionally active researchers”.

The following exceptions to the general base teaching load are designed to recognize that faculty serve different roles, and adjustments to base teaching loads are appropriate to accommodate extraordinary research and service activities.

Course Reductions associated with Research Activities

New Faculty Hires

For recruitment purposes, the Dean may include additional teaching reductions as part of a competitive start-up package during a specified period for new faculty hires.

Tenured and Term Faculty

The teaching load of a tenured or term faculty member may be reduced by one course in a given year if the faculty member meets at least one criteria from Category 1 and at least two criteria from Category 2 for research productivity. Faculty who significantly exceed this minimum requirement may seek an additional reduction of one course at the discretion, and with permission, of the Department Chair and Dean.

Category 1 – Funding

- a. Had at least \$150,000 in research expenditures within the previous fiscal year;
- b. Successfully secured funding for research with a total amount exceeding \$250,000 within the previous fiscal year (i.e. new awards);
- c. Submitted proposals with total budgets exceeding \$500,000 as principal investigator or Co-PI or Co-I in the previous fiscal year;
- d. Serving as the lead organizer of a major, multi-year center-level or equivalent (determined by the Associate Dean of Research) research proposal with total funding of at least \$3,000,000.

Category 2 – Scholarly accomplishments

- a. Supported at least one 9-month GRA or 40-hour per week post-doctoral student on externally-sponsored research in the previous fiscal year;
- b. Had at least two papers accepted for publication in peer-reviewed/archival/tier 1 journals or conference proceedings that are recognized as the equivalent in specific fields in the previous fiscal year (appropriateness of journal or conference proceedings determined at Department level and in the spirit of this criteria as it is written);
- c. Served as the director of a PhD dissertation or chair of a MS thesis committee for a student who has successfully defended his or her dissertation/thesis within the past 12 months;
- d. Undertaking external service activity at the level of Editor-in-Chief or Associate Editor of tier 1 journal, or chairing a symposium or conference, or large committee (e.g. TRB, ASCE) in the same year as the course reduction

- e. Advising at least one doctoral student, registered for at least three credits of 998/999 and no more than 24 credits per student over a three year period, in the same year as the course reduction.

Course Reductions Associated with Service Activities

- a. To accommodate significant Administrative duties to the School and University, Department Chairs and Associate Deans who are instructional faculty may receive course reductions to accommodate these responsibilities but are required to teach a minimum of one course per year subject to the approval of the Dean.
- b. Exceptional service roles beyond 20% effort may result in a teaching reduction at the discretion of the Chair and with the Dean's approval. Such roles include, for example, Associate Chair, Program Director, Center Director, Course Coordinator, Laboratory Director, Director of Major Student Organizations (e.g. Engineers for International Development), Preparation of Major Accreditation Report (e.g. ABET, APR). The reduced teaching load ends when the service commitment is terminated.

Course Buyout Guidelines

Faculty with sponsored research may reduce their base teaching load with externally funded salary support during the academic year. Each course reduction requires 15% salary support. For example, a two-course reduction would require 30% salary support. The teaching load may not be reduced to less than 1 course per year. As with all course reductions, approval of course "buy-outs" will depend on the teaching needs of the Department in a given semester and are subject to the approval of the Department Chair.