Policy Statement on Maximum Faculty Effort Commitments on Sponsored Projects
03/24/11

In the absence of a school-specific policy, the following Policy Statement applies:

Activities of faculty members at universities include teaching, public service, and administration in addition to research. Since percentages of faculty effort committed on sponsored projects must be certified in order to comply with federal requirements, Harvard University limits faculty effort commitments on sponsored projects to ensure that time is available to fulfill these other obligations.

OMB Circular A-21, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions, establishes principles for determining costs applicable to grants, contracts, and other agreements with educational institutions. Section J.10 of the Circular, “Compensation for Personal Services,” establishes guidelines for relating compensation to effort expended on sponsored projects, but recognizes that a certain degree of uncertainty may exist:

In the use of any methods for apportioning salaries, it is recognized that, in an academic setting, teaching, research, service, and administration are often inextricably intermingled. A precise assessment of factors that contribute to costs is not always feasible, nor is it expected. Reliance, therefore, is placed on estimates in which a degree of tolerance is appropriate. J10b(1)(c)

In order to allow time for non-research activities and to be able to comply with Circular A-21 reporting requirements, Harvard University limits a faculty member’s total “committed effort” (the total percentage of effort on sponsored projects for any individual) to a maximum of 95% for the period certified. “Committed effort” refers to any effort pledged to sponsors, via either a request for salary or an explicit commitment of time (“I plan to spend 10% of my time on this project.”). Individual schools at Harvard may place greater restrictions on committed effort levels, but no individual may commit more than 95% effort on sponsored awards at the University for any period being certified.

In certain situations, where a faculty member may expend more than 95% of his or her effort on sponsored projects within a certification period, approval by the school’s Sponsored Official is required. If your school does not currently have a mechanism for approval, please contact OSP.