

## **2023 Report of the NDSU Graduate Council on the 2022 Tuition Waiver Working Group Recommendations and Proposals**

Graduate Council Members:

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### **Intro and Executive Summary**

In fall 2022, the NDSU Graduate Council was tasked by the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies (CGIS) dean with reviewing the 2022 [Tuition Waiver Working Group document](#), which can be found on the Provost's NDSU Transform website.

The document that the Council reviewed is made up of four (4) recommendations and six (6) proposals. The Council discussed the recommendations and proposals over the course of the fall semester and formally voted on them at the monthly Graduate Council meetings. Additional discussions took place in January and February 2023.

As the University moves to a new Tuition Incentive Model – tuition waiver decision-making will move to the colleges and allocation of resources to each of the colleges will be more transparent – it is hoped that the 2023 Graduate Council Report will help to inform graduate student support decision-making and, in turn, make the graduate experience better and more sustainable.

### **Summary of Findings**

Graduate Council:

- Affirms the need for transparency concerning the granting of tuition waivers, and clear criteria used to determine the distribution and use of tuition waivers,
- Acknowledges that a proposed Tuition Incentive Model is likely to enhance college-level accountability and transparency of fall and spring semester graduate tuition waivers,
- Supports the recommendation to adjust the billing of tuition for Graduate Assistants at the in-state rate,
- Supports awarding full tuition waivers for academic year (fall/spring) assistantships (and does not support the recommendation to award partial tuition waivers for academic year partial assistantships),
- Supports setting a minimum enrollment of six (6) cr to hold a fall or spring Graduate Assistantship (with exceptions),
- Supports awarding summer tuition waivers to both summer Graduate Assistants and fall/spring Graduate Assistants – who don't hold a summer Graduate Assistantship. (The CGIS dean also made an administrative change to the workflow for requesting summer tuition waivers; graduate directors/coordinators will now be included in the workflow.),

- Does not support the proposal limiting fall/spring Graduate Assistantships outside the program of study,
- Does not support the proposal setting different tuition waiver levels for master's vs doctoral students holding fall/spring Graduate Assistantships (and discussed impacts (unintended consequences) of a tiered system for master's students),
- Created a working group to advocate for creating mechanisms to increase stipend levels for fall/spring Graduate Assistants, and fund health care,
- Discussed the proposal for Time/Credit limits for fall/spring tuition waivers, and given the complexities of program-specific curriculum and lack of fiscal implications of this proposal, elected not to make a motion,
- Recognizes the implications of federal Uniform Guidance Policy and postponed discussion of tuition waivers in grant management until VPRCA is available to meet with Council, and,
- During the January 2023 and February 2023 Graduate Council meetings, extended discussions of guiding principles that should be considered when colleges/units formulate policy regarding granting of tuition waivers; a summary of this discussion is presented at the conclusion of this Report.

#### **Recommendations 1-4**

The authors of the 2022 Tuition Waiver Working Group document put forward four (4) recommendations. The Council revisited, discussed and deliberated these four recommendations.

#### **Recommendation 1: Enhanced accountability and transparency**

Discussion from the January Council meeting indicated strong support for the recommendation for clear transparency and accountability.

- This recommendation was discussed, but not voted on by Council because it did not have a direct fiscal implication.

#### **Recommendation 2: Adjustment of billing of tuition for Graduate Assistants to be at the in-state rate.**

Council discussed the benefits and possible drawbacks of this recommendation. Adjusting the billing would have a significant positive impact on the college tuition waiver budgets, particularly those colleges with large enrollments of non-resident students. It would also help with the billing of tuition waivers related to grant management. A possible drawback would be a reduction in college/program-specific differential tuition. Unlike the College of Engineering, where the college pays the tuition differential for all Graduate Assistants, other colleges/programs rely on the differential tuition to support the cost of delivering the program.

- Council motioned and voted unanimously to endorse the recommendation to bill at the in-state rate for all students holding a Graduate Assistantship.

### **Recommendation 3: Set minimum stipend levels for fall/spring Graduate Assistants**

Discussion from the Council suggested that, while low stipends make it difficult to compete for the highest quality graduate students to enroll at NDSU, the lack of any form of health care for assistants is potentially a greater hurdle for recruitment of top-quality graduate students. The Council assembled a working group in the fall to create a proposal for the formation of a committee to advocate, to upper administration and the Foundation, for creating mechanisms to fund health care as well as advocate for increased stipend levels for fall/spring Graduate Assistants.

- This recommendation was discussed, but not voted on by Council because stipend levels do not have a direct tuition waiver fiscal implication.

### **Recommendation 4: Only provide partial tuition waivers for partial assistantships**

It was noted that some graduate programs would not be able to remain viable if they were unable to provide a full tuition waiver for partial assistantships. Discussion centered on assistantships that provide critical non-classroom skills that enhance the competitiveness of the student for future employment in their area of interest and expertise. Further discussion noted that a subset of students receive tuition waivers but are not on assistantships. These are primarily in the School of Education. It was noted that, given that students not on an assistantship receive the full waiver, it would seem that students on partial assistantships should also receive the full waiver.

- Council motioned and voted unanimously not to endorse the recommendation to provide partial waivers for partial assistantships.

### **Proposals 1-6**

In addition to Recommendations 1-4, the authors of the 2022 Tuition Waiver Working Group document considered six (6) additional recommendations. Due to the complexity of the impacts of these additional recommendations, the Working Group didn't have consensus. Instead, they put forward a list of six (6) proposals. The Council revisited, discussed, and deliberated these six proposals.

### **Proposal 1: Minimum enrollments for fall and spring Graduate Assistants**

In discussion of this proposal, the Council suggested that requiring 6 credit hours to hold a fall/spring assistantship was likely to support progress towards degree and retention, but discussion also noted a need to allow flexibility for programs that differ in their curriculum.

- Council motioned and the motion was carried to require a minimum of six (6) cr for students to hold a fall/spring assistantship, with exceptions.
  - Does not apply if the student has fewer than six (6) cr remaining to complete the program.
  - Does not apply during the summer session.
- The Council's recommendation to require six (6) cr will be presented to Faculty Senate Executive Committee on March 6, 2023.

## **Proposal 2: Summer tuition waivers for Graduate Students not receiving summer support**

Discussion centered around the large impact this would have on students in good standing who benefit from the waiver to enroll in courses only offered during the summer term, which allows them to advance in their program. It was also noted that the cost savings are not particularly high. Thus, the cost to students seems to outweigh the fiscal savings of this proposal.

- Council motioned and the motion was carried not to support the recommendation limiting summer tuition waivers to just summer Graduate Assistants.

## **Proposal 3: Limit assistantships outside the program of study**

It was noted during discussion of this proposal that the learning opportunities and experiences these assistantships provide are often related to the graduate student's field of study and will provide an advantage to these students competing for jobs in their field after they graduate. It was also noted that eliminating these experiential assistantships would potentially diminish the quality of some of the programs that utilize these assistantships; these assistantships enable these programs to remain vibrant and diverse.

- Council motioned and the motion was carried not to limit assistantships outside of the program of study.
- During discussion of the motion to consider this proposal, a recommendation was made for the Graduate Council policy committee to discuss a monitoring process to ensure that students continue to make adequate progress towards their degree.

## **Proposal 4: Setting different tuition waiver levels for master's vs doctoral students**

Council discussed that an across-the-board policy setting different waiver levels for master's students would be detrimental to recruiting the top master's students. Certain master's programs are pipeline programs for doctoral programs; setting different tuition waiver levels for master's and doctoral programs would likely decrease enrollment in these pipeline programs, leading to a decrease in enrollment in PhD programs. In addition, undergraduate students would be impacted if the number of master's-level TAs declined; fewer TAs would increase class size or decrease the number of open sections, delaying undergraduate advancement in their program. These negative impacts would have a negative impact on of early career students who are most vulnerable for withdraw. Research would also be negatively impacted if the number of master's-level GAs declined. Both master's and doctoral GAs represent the workforce for the research enterprise; master's students often conduct research alongside doctoral students.

Further echoing the above points, although NDSU is an R1 institution, due to low stipends and no financial support for health care, recruitment of the very top PhD students to NDSU remains challenging. As a result, research faculty often rely on research-focused masters programs (and highly qualified research master's students) as a mechanism to support their grant-funded research. These robust research master's programs are often not offered at the highest ranking R1 institutions, allowing NDSU to compete for these high-quality graduate students. Further, students in master's programs where there is no corresponding doctoral program also conduct important research.

Lastly, setting different tuition waiver levels would, potentially, negatively impact time-to-degree for master's students (and doctoral students who are in programs where master's students are part of the research enterprise).

- Council motioned not to support the proposal and the motion carried.

#### **Proposal 5: Time/Credit limits for tuition waivers**

Council discussed that the curriculum should inform the timeline and that timelines are different for each program (one size does not fit all programs). Council discussed that some programs do have a cap on the number of credits for which a student may be funded or receive a tuition waiver, and that having limits can improve time-to-degree and retention.

- Council discussed the proposal and did not vote on it since the Working Group report stated that this proposal would not have a fiscal impact.

#### **Proposal 6: Tuition waivers in grant management**

Council discussed the implications of federal Uniform Guidance Policy and postponed discussion of tuition waivers in grant management until VPRCA is available to meet with Council.

- Council postponed discussion until VPRCA Colleen Fitzgerald can attend.

#### **Summary of Guiding Principles/Best Practices Governing Tuition Waivers:**

During the January and February Graduate Council meetings there was open discussion about ideas for best practices or guiding principles for college administrators to consider when formulating policy regarding distribution of tuition waivers.

First and foremost, discussion of the Council continued to return to the need for transparency and accountability regarding granting of limited tuition waivers. The Council discussed the need for transparency about who is making decisions for granting waivers, and the criteria that are being used to make decisions. Transparency and criteria for granting waivers were deemed as, possibly, more important than any of the voted upon recommendations/policies described above.

In addition, the Council discussed:

- Employee benefited waivers becoming a debit to the student's graduate program, instead of the hiring department,
- That the benefit for the institution/program must be justified for granting tuition waivers to students not on assistantship,
- Using a tiered system guided by the mission of NDSU as a student focused, land-grant, research university,
  - Research and teaching assistantships
  - Service assistantships
    - Prioritize assistantships that support the land grant mission

- Costs associated with filling these service positions using non-student staff must be weighed
- Education-related benefits to the students
- Graders
  - Graders support the teaching mission of the university, enabling critical skills assessments that would otherwise either not be able to be assessed, or would require a reduction in class sizes, limiting retention efforts. In addition, the grader is often engaged in research or teaching activities beyond grading; such activities that encompass more than grading would also be considered an assistantship and as such should receive a tuition waiver. Given the contribution of all graders to the mission of the University, it was discussed that graders warrant full tuition waivers similar to waivers granted for teaching assistantships, and that full waivers would positively impact time to degree, retention, and the quality of undergraduate teaching.
- Discussion by the Council strongly discouraged differentiation between different types (qualitative categories) of assistantship for the granting of tuition waivers.
- Using assistantships (and tuition waivers) to enhance the diversity in a program should be a consideration for prioritizing assistantships/waivers.
- Assistantships should clearly align with program goals and support the educational and research mission of those programs; service assistantships that provide non-classroom education for graduate students should be supported.
- A best practice may be for each program to clearly outline a time or credit limit appropriate for their program curriculum. Support for students exceeding these program-based limits may not be guaranteed.
- Adequate progress towards degree should be considered in funding decisions – there should be clear transparency about what constitutes adequate progress and how this aligns with a program’s goals.
- Council discussed the role that tuition waivers play in attracting high quality students. With low stipends and no health care, tuition waivers are one of the few incentives that can be used to attract the best students to NDSU graduate programs.