

Tuition for Graduate Student Research-Assistants Supported by Sponsored Projects

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Effective September 1, 2003, Northwestern will adopt a direct tuition charging mechanism by which graduate student research-assistants (RA's) supported by sponsored projects will have the tuition component of their support charged directly to the projects. We are implementing this policy based on recommendations made by the GRAT/S faculty/staff sub-committee of the Committee on the Research Enterprise (CORE).

1. Two immediate benefits of the move to a direct tuition charging mechanism are:
RAs will no longer pay taxes on the tuition component of their support, and
2. Northwestern's practice will be in alignment with most of our peer institutions, which also use a direct tuition charging approach, facilitating easier comparison of relative research assistant support rates and removing the confusion that our current method sometimes causes sponsors in evaluating proposals

In moving to a direct tuition charge mechanism, we are setting the academic year 2003-04 tuition charges to sponsored projects that carry the full F&A rate as follows:

- \$2,817/quarter for full-registration students (representing ~30% of total applicable tuition)
- \$2,100/quarter for 588, 598, and 599 registrations (representing ~67% of total applicable tuition)
- \$894/quarter for 503 registrations (representing 100% of total applicable tuition)

The required tuition charges have been set for this year such that, when averaged across the entire University, the accumulated costs of supporting RA's on sponsored projects will be the same under the direct-charge mechanism as it is under the historical GRAT/S mechanism.

Neither the fringe benefit rate (which will be 1.8% for Graduate School student research assistants in FY 2004) nor the F&A rates will be applied to the tuition portion of an RA's support. An RA's compensation and tuition will be charged simultaneously to a project by completing a Research Assistant Scholarship form, available from The Graduate School, and appropriate payroll forms. Staff from The Graduate School will be contacting departments shortly to review this process and address any procedural questions associated with the new mechanism.

During the development of the direct tuition charge mechanism, a faculty/staff work group engaged deans, faculty, and staff across the University's research-intensive schools. The feedback received during these interactions was vital to the formation of the direct-charge structure that will commence September 1, 2003. The feedback, however, also revealed a number of other issues that the work group will vet this coming year. Most significantly, the work group has recommended that the University adopt a phased-in approach for achieving a more level tuition structure for all graduate students supported on full F & A rate recovery sponsored projects over the next three years. We have asked the work group to investigate the implications of this recommendation further; naturally, such a system would need to consider the impact on principal investigators as well as graduate students. Thus, while we view the implementation of a direct-charge mechanism as an important initial step, further changes are envisioned. The work group looks forward to working with many of you and soliciting your input and feedback during this continuing process.

Comments or questions on this policy should be directed to [Jake Julia](#), Assistant Vice President for Change Management.