

**Hot Topic Session**  
**Models of Student Funding**  
**11-12:00 Tuesday, July 12, 2016**

**Discussion Summary**

**Session Discussion Facilitators**

- Lorie Liebrock, Dean, Graduate Studies, New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology
- Kent Holsinger, Vice Provost, Graduate Education and Dean, Graduate School, University of Connecticut

**Sources of Funding at the Institution**

Dean Liebrock opened the discussion on funding by asking for perspectives on how much funding of assistantships and fellowships is controlled by the graduate school or by other units at the university.

- Dean Holsinger noted that at the University of Connecticut, the graduate school controls less than 10% of the student funding with collegiate deans controlling the remaining resources. He further noted that teaching assistantships are driven by the teaching needs of the university and not by its research priorities.
- Florida International reported a similar division in funding of assistantships with 25 to 30% of the funding for assistantships coming through the graduate school and the remainder with other sources. The dean noted that this creates a challenge for the graduate dean with trying to leverage its funding to promote graduate education priorities when most of the funding comes from the college deans. He noted that funding sources for the awards are primarily from institutional resources such as tuition and state resources.
- Another institution reported that their university no longer uses the model of a graduate school and all of the assistantships are funded from the provost's office to the collegiate deans according to the criteria established for the awards.
- New Mexico Institute reported that the provost's office allocates funding for the awards; however their institution is currently reconsidering this model. The graduate dean is advocating for two separate allocations. One allocation would address the teaching assistantship needs for undergraduate teaching. The second allocation would be reserved for recruiting the best doctoral candidates to the programs. The dean further explained that same appointment criteria are used for either award. Her interest is to change the focus from meeting teaching goals to achieving the institution's desired recruitment goals. There was consensus on the value of this approach to funding.
- Florida International added support for the focus of funding to meet recruitment expectations rather than simply fulfilling teaching needs. He explained that the teaching assistantships at his institution are too often used

as a “default” form of funding in contrast to their use as strategic recruiting tools. He further reported on the discrepancies in funding among disciplines. At FIU all students in the sciences are guaranteed funding and at some point all of the candidates must hold a teaching assistantship in order to gain teaching experience. He reported that FIU offers a limited number of university wide assistantships; however, these funded awards are very competitive because they guarantee 5 years of support. The resources for these awards; however, are in the colleges and not the graduate school. He concluded by saying that although every student is guaranteed funding in the sciences; this was not the case for those studying in the humanities.

### **Discussion of Tuition, Tuition Waivers and Tuition Waiver Policies**

- University of Texas at Tyler opened the discussion by providing an overview of some of the tuition guidelines and tuition waiver policies available in Texas. The dean noted that if a non-resident student receives an award of \$1000 or more then that student is eligible to receive a waiver of the non-resident portion of tuition and will be billed only for the in-state tuition. The dean noted that graduate students may be assigned a wide range of contract obligations that may range from 10 to 20 clock hours of teaching per week and their stipends are adjusted according to their contractual obligations. He further noted that contracts also vary according to the designation. Some student awards carry the title “teaching assistants.” A teaching assistant assists a faculty member of record with the course. Others students hold appointments as “instructors of record.” These teaching assistants have full teaching responsibility. The teaching assistants who carry the “instructor of record” designation generate certain fees that can then be used to support the awards.
- Another dean from a university within the Texas system noted that all students who are designated as teaching or research assistants are assessed the resident tuition rate regardless of their residency status. The upper contractual limit for either award is 20 clock hours per week. The lower limit might be 10 hours per week. He further clarified that the contracts result in the waiver of the non-resident portion of tuition. The candidate is then assessed the residential tuition rate which she/he must pay. The award includes a stipend to offset the tuition charges, but the award currently only pays for 80% of the assessed residential tuition charges. In conclusion he noted that a teaching assistant’s contract is “capped” at 29 clock hours per week. A contract that is any larger would require the institution to provide health care benefits.
- The dean from St. Johns University of New York reported that masters’ students hold teaching assistantships, but are not provided with a health care benefit of any kind. She further noted that the university is reducing the number of hours of teaching that the institution’s PHD candidates who hold teaching awards are required to perform in order to promote degree completion.

- The dean from Appalachian State University reported that the state of North Carolina does not allow for the offer of tuition waivers of any kind. Instead, the state allocates money to the institutions to pay the out of state portion of the tuition; however the state has failed to increase the award payments to keep pace with rising tuition rates.
- The dean from George Mason University noted that the Office of Graduate Education manages all of the waivers. The dean noted that the rules offer the flexibility of applying a waiver for the full cost of tuition or just the out of state portion of tuition. The dean noted that the policy was currently under review. The dean further noted that the institution was also considering a plan to move away from a central funding of assistantships model in order to focus its awards on research assistantships, scholarship and fellowships in order to promote research goals.
- The dean from Wright State University reported that all graduate assistants are eligible for “waivers” but this was really a misleading term because the policy states that all tuition must be paid. He noted that because these are perceived as waivers in contrast to a scholarship or award with money; they are often overspent without retribution. Due to recent budget challenges, these awards are now being held to the approved budgets and for the first time are creating some significant challenges.
- The dean from Boston College/School of Education noted that each college runs its own graduate school. The budget office allocates scholarship money and the colleges have full control over what they do with it. All doctoral candidates are funded. Master’s candidates may be offered a scholarship or assistantship.
- The dean from Kansas State University affirmed that similar to North Carolina, the state of Kansas does not allow waivers. The process at Kansas State includes an annual pool of resources that are allocated based on the full-time-equivalent assignment of the student. Those students who hold teaching assistantships with .4 to .5 FTE appointments are awarded up to 10 hours of tuition money per term. All teaching assistants are assessed the in-state tuition rate. Awards supported with grants follow a similar policy. The dean noted that the institution is currently focusing on a budget priority in order to get research assistant funds that will achieve equity among GA’s and RA’s. All tuition FTE’s are assigned to the college dean. The dean makes the assignments.

### **Discussion of Stipends**

- The dean from New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology reported that one of the graduate school’s important recent achievements was to successfully advocate for award equity for graduate assistants and teaching assistants.
- The dean from Portland State University described their post-doc teaching appointments. The program provides a two-year experience for the candidates. During the first year, the candidate shadows the instructor of

record. During the second year, they are appointed as the instructor of record. The program was funded via a philanthropic donation. The program is supported on the basis of 50% from the philanthropic gift and 50% from research PI. During this part of the discussion, a question was raised about how assistantship minima are derived.

- The dean from New Mexico explained that it took advocacy with the VP for Finance to make the TA/RA awards equitable so that they were on a more equivalent scale. The dean noted that approval of all contracts goes through the graduate school. The new minimum is the same for all academic fields. She reported that the awards are each worth a total of \$21,000; with \$7,000 for tuition and \$14,000 for the stipend.
- The dean from the University of Connecticut noted the university has also established a minimum range for their awards. The dean indicated that \$25,000 for the stipend and \$13,000 for the in-state tuition and \$4,000 for single health benefits and \$11,000 for family benefits. The tuition award is increased to \$33,000 for candidates who are billed out of state tuition.
- A dean from one of the Texas institutions reported that the institution currently offers more funding for STEM candidates in comparison to humanities candidates. The awards also vary by as much as \$7,000 to \$10,000.
- A dean from the State University of New York system explained that stipends vary since they are allocated by the collegiate deans in a lump sum to each program. They are currently working on benchmarking their awards by looking at the stipend rates of peer institutions.

### **Discussion of Health Care Plans**

- A member of the group asked for a show of hands regarding the offer of health insurance and about 50% of those in attendance currently offer health insurance. Concerns were expressed about the emerging complications of offering health insurance due to a combination of federal and state issues.
- The dean from South Florida provided an overview of the 4 month negotiations process for improving their graduate assistant awards. She explained that health insurance was at the top on the negotiations list along with stipend increases. The new health care benefit will cost \$1 million to implement. Approximately \$1.5 million in stipend increases were secured.
- The dean from Appalachian State noted that the university does not provide health insurance.
- The dean from Kansas State University explained that graduate assistants have access to a student health plan when they hold a .5 FTE appointment. Seventy-five percent of the cost of the plan is paid by the university or employer. The student pays the remaining 25%.
- The dean from George Mason University reported that the university subsidizes a health plan for full time PHD students only. The plan is currently a “platinum” plan. It’s a great plan, but the university will not be able to offer this plan after this year. They are not sure what they will do.

The options include offering higher stipends and letting the students find their own plans or offering another more costly plan.

### **Discussion of Tuition Charges to Grants**

- A dean from the University of Texas system asked for views about the charging of tuition to federal grants. He noted that currently their institution follows a policy that states the university cannot charge tuition on federal grants under most circumstances.
- The dean from the University of Houston reported that they do charge tuition to federal grants and noted that the PI's were outraged by this action because they feel this is a penalty for their success as the most productive faculty. As a result the university backed away from the policy. The question was raised: "Why not just add tuition to the budget?"
- The dean at Rutgers University noted that faculty grants must pay any tuition differential and must be responsible for all student costs after the first year of study. With tuition at \$60,000 for in-state students and \$80,000 for out of state students, the faculty members need discretionary funds to do this. As a result, many are pulling out of graduate education due to the cost of tuition coverage for graduate students. The dean sees this as a crisis-level concern as the faculty can no longer afford to engage in graduate education.
- The dean from the University of Connecticut noted that at his institution it is less expensive to hire a post doc than to fund a graduate student and pay for the tuition/fees.
- The dean from the University of Texas system explained that grant submission at his institution must include coverage for tuition unless the PI provides a rationale for excluding this funding. Faculty members who earn funding are now re-budgeting to hire post-docs because of the lower cost. As a result, additional reviews and approvals for grant proposals have been implemented.
- The dean from St. Johns University noted that they rely heavily on their NIH grants to support the institution. As a result, they cannot afford to support graduate students. Instead, the dean provides a "tuition waiver" but pays the institution back to the institution with the indirect costs.
- The dean from New Mexico explained that she pays students an amount that covers their tuition and includes a stipend. She argued that graduate students are the reason we can do this research. She feels we need to advocate for these waivers or related tuition payments and may need to consider development funds for such support.
- The dean from the University of Connecticut discussed the issue of graduate student contracts that end in the middle of a term.
- The dean from Wright State University noted that at his institution, contracts are for a "semester" and you have to have funding for the whole term.
- The dean from New Mexico noted that they follow a similar "semester" contract process. She discussed problems that sometimes emerge when programs want to split awards. She reported that now contracts at her

institution are not approved unless the students sign up-front that they understand that if they stop mid term they will be charged the out of state tuition rate.

- The dean from East Carolina University discussed strategies for extending payment through the whole term and noted that a solution at his institution was to pay the contract from another fund.
- The dean from Clemson University explained that his institution would build the contract through the entire term also.
- The dean from Wright State University noted that his institution will allow the contract to pay the stipend from multiple sources to ensure funding through the entire term.
- The dean from New Mexico further noted that when contracts start mid-semester her institution will seek to find “bridge funding” to swing that extra amount to ensure that the student can be paid from the beginning. She noted the challenge that she does not always have the money to do this.

### **Discussion of Tuition Return Models**

- The dean from New Mexico asked for discussion regarding the return of tuition money back into the unit for tuition paying students. She explained that at her institution tuition money is not returned to the unit, but remains in a general fund to cover other costs of the university. This includes money generated from application fees.
- Rutgers University reported that her institution uses a full tuition recovery model where the units that generate the tuition earn all of that tuition money to support their programs. Individuals can then make strategic investments with their tuition resources in order to grow their programs. She explained that the university is considering a return to a more typical resource allocation plan where the tuition money will be collected centrally and allocated back to the departments.

### **Discussion of Teaching Assistantships**

- A dean asked for a discussion about concerns for ensuring summer support to graduate assistants. She noted that about 30% of the graduate teaching assistants have 12-month contracts, but the majority of the assistants have 9-month awards. She noted that at her institution all research assistants have 12-month funding. She asked to discuss opportunities for extending summer contracts for some students with 9-month teaching awards.
- George Mason University reported that the university instituted summer research fellowships on a competitive basis. Those who receive these awards will receive resources to cover 1-3 credit hours of tuition without a work requirement. This allows the students to focus on their research. She noted that the awards may provide up to \$8,000 for PHD candidates and about \$4,500 for master’s students. These awards have been well received by the faculty who write letters of support to assist their students. Those

who receive the awards are invited to discuss their summer research experiences.

### **Discussion of Travel and Professional Funding Awards**

- A member of the group reported that graduate students at his institution pay fees that are then allocated to the graduate student council. These fees create competitive student travel awards to support research presentations.
- The dean from New Mexico reported that they reserve \$75,000 per year for travel to support presentations and field work. Students can apply for the funds to attend conferences. The applicants must also explain how they will use the funds for networking.
- The dean at St. Johns University reported that the graduate school retains a separate pool of resources for graduate student travel, but the resources are restricted for use by students who have their work accepted for presentation at a conference.
- The dean from an institution in Utah reported that they retain a pool of UT: funds for student travel for presentations. The decisions regarding these awards rest with the colleges.
- A representative from the Texas system noted that they use a college matching process so that the graduate school and college provide an equal contribution toward travel.
- The dean from Rutgers University reported that they provide travel as required by contractual arrangement through the faculty union. The union negotiated a development fund that is unrestricted and can be used for anything related to the development of a student.
- The dean from Florida noted that a travel award is tagged onto their assistantship contracts .