

**Ad Hoc University Research Committee Response to the Proposal for an Interim Policy for Cost Sharing in the form of tuition remission for externally-funded graduate students.**

**Request for Feedback**

On November 8, the Faculty Senate President tasked the Ad Hoc University Research Committee to carefully consider the following Proposal:

Therefore, we would like to ask for comments on the following as a proposal for an interim policy.

- Cost sharing in the form of student aid (tuition fee remissions) will only be provided by the University for externally sponsored programs that provide full Facilities and Administrative (F&A) costs and support a graduate research assistant stipend for a minimum amount of \$3,400 awarded competitively per semester (\$850 per month).
- Graduate students must be registered for a minimum of six hours.
- To be eligible for this form of cost sharing the following limits apply
  - Externally sponsored programs with an award total of at least \$100,000 – Two semesters of tuition per award
  - Externally sponsored programs with an award total of at least \$250,000 – Four semesters of tuition per award
  - Externally sponsored programs with an award total of at least \$500,000 – Six semesters of tuition per award
  - Externally sponsored programs with an award total of at least \$750,000 – Eight semesters of tuition per award
  - Maximum of eight semesters of tuition per award
- Exceptions may be requested but must be approved by the Office of the Vice President for Research

Additionally, the Committee was asked to provide comments, and recommendations.

**Membership**

Fred Garber	Chair
Madhavi Kadakia	BSOM
Derek Doran	CECS
Tara Hill	CEHS
Valerie Stoker	COLA
Sherrill Smith	CONH
Scott Watamaniuk	COSM
Giovanna Follo	LAKE
Anand Jeyaraj	RSCOB
Jeff Cigrang	SOPP

After soliciting responses from committee members and their constituencies, we offer the following response and recommendations.

Response:

Though not all faculty constituencies will be impacted by this proposed policy, responses from faculty who currently support graduate students through externally-funded awards are seriously concerned with the immediate and significant negative impact on externally-funded graduate student research, and are equally disturbed that the policy and its stated motivation appear to be arbitrary, inequitable, and unnecessarily vague and complex. In what follows, we briefly describe the concerns of constituent faculty as clustered in these categories.

- 1) **Arbitrary:** The lack of context with respect to the university's fiscal health or its research mission is troubling. Even if implemented, the policy will have no meaningful impact on FY18. This, in turn, raises a number of questions: Is there a specific OVPR budget target in mind for FY19 and onward? Is the university seeking to preserve or discourage particular types of research? By what analysis did the OVPR determine that \$1M was the proper amount of tuition cost-share to support our research mission? Did the analysis include: the historical annual tuition budget, the breakdown of awards including the total amount of each award, the F&A rate, the total F&A, the amount of cost share, the number of tuition waivers provided, the graduate student support strategies of our model-peer institutions?
- 2) **Inequitable:** The rationale of the proposed award-cost-share thresholds is not clear. The arbitrariness of this structure will likely lead to perceptions of unfairness among faculty and sponsors – especially junior faculty and faculty in areas where awards of more than \$100K are rare exceptions. The policy appears to be targeting particular sizes of contracts. This will adversely impact some faculty populations and research activities that we should be fostering. In particular, the proposed award-cost-share thresholds will likely result in particular harm to junior faculty members who require graduate students to jump start their career, to build a research lab, and to develop reputation in the scientific community.

It is estimated that this policy will force a marked decline of student-centered research at the university, possibly eliminating all but a handful of large programs with the capability to maintain long-term external award portfolios. Moreover, this policy most negatively impacts Ph.D. students due to their longer-term needs of support and will almost certainly reduce our Ph.D. student population.

While the policy allows for exceptions (sometimes a symptom of a poorly-crafted policy), it is unclear how exceptions would be equitably granted.

- 3) **Vague and complex:** The policy uses a number of terms and phrases without definition. For example:
  - a. "externally sponsored" - Does this include funds originating from every entity outside the university legal structure? What about affiliated entities? What about state funds budgeted through the university?
  - b. "tuition fee remission" - Does this include in-state and out-of-state (international)? If out-of-state, why does OVPR not charge the in-state rate on tuition remission? Note that the cost to place students in classes are identical whether the student is from Ohio or not.
  - c. "full F&A costs" - In the past, this has been interpreted as the full F&A permitted by the sponsor (e.g., if NSF requires 10% F&A, that is considered full F&A), the full F&A associated with the work location (i.e., 26% is full F&A for off-campus research), or full F&A is the maximum F&A that the university is permitted to charge via its federal rate agreement (i.e., 50%). If the last one is intended, is it really the intention that GRAs working off-campus (e.g., on base), should not be provided tuition waivers?

- d. "\$3,400 awarded competitively" - Does this mean that GRA positions must be formally competed in some way? The committee has grave concerns with forcing a competition for GRA positions when PhD students rely on GRAs for financial survival.
- e. "award" - What constitutes an award? Normally, cost share is specified at the proposal stage. In many cases, the number and amount of any awards is unknown. Many contracts are incremented and modified many times, and each of these is processed as an "award".
- f. "minimum of six hours" – But no maximum? The policy appears to be arbitrarily lower bounding its cost share commitment, while not providing an upper bound. There is little flexibility in the policy to allow for best academic practices of programs relative to their graduate students.
- g. Will this apply to new grants only going forward? The committee believes that previous awards, supporting existing students, should not be subject to any change in policy.

In summary, it appears that the full impact and consequences, both intended and unintended, of the proposed policy have not been considered. For many faculty, the tuition-remission cost-share is the primary enabler of their research productivity and represents an important condition of their employment. The university simply cannot afford the negative impact on morale and research production that the proposed policy will realize.

Recommendation:

It is the strong recommendation of this committee that no changes to the current policy (see: <http://www.wright.edu/research/research-and-sponsored-programs/pre-award/budget-development#cost-sharing> ) be implemented until comprehensive strategies for student-centered research development are formulated by a properly assembled body with Faculty representing a diversity of research and graduate programs. Further, the committee recommends such strategies include the consideration of elements that will be suggested in the Report to the Faculty Senate from this committee. That report will be delivered by November 21.