Guidance Memo: Tuition Remission on Sponsored Awards

**Responsible office**: Sponsored Programs Administration

**Responsible officer (title only)**: Associate Vice President for Research and Innovation Partnerships

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**Initial date**: 12/07/2008

**Review date**: 3/3/2025

**Revision date**: 3/3/2025

**University policy reference**: tuition remission

# Purpose

Tuition remission for graduate assistants (GAs) is a vital component of sponsored award budgets, reflecting the educational benefits associated with their research and educational activities. Federal regulations governing sponsored programs acknowledge tuition remission as part of the student’s overall compensation package and sponsors expect budgets to include these costs. A program of tuition remission helps the university recoup tuition revenue to invest in future research and educational programs.

This guidance applies to tuition remission on non-training grants. Charging policies and procedures for tuition costs on training grants should be addressed separately with the Graduate School.

# Definitions

Graduate assistant: Working under the supervision of a faculty member, graduate assistants apply research and artistry concepts, practices, or methods of scholarship and artistry by conducting experiments, creating new works, analyzing data, presenting findings, collaborating with others in preparing publications, reports, or exhibitions, presenting at conferences or performances, or conducting institutional research or artistry as part of their degree program.

Tuition waiver: A form of financial aid that waives all or part of the tuition costs for eligible NIU students based on defined university criteria. Students receiving a tuition waiver are not required to pay the waived portion of tuition.

Tuition remission: The term for the financial support recovered by NIU to cover the cost of tuition waivers for eligible NIU students as part of their overall compensation and benefits package.

Effort: Actual amount of time spent working on a sponsored project. Effort is expressed as a percentage of the total amount of time spent on all NIU work-related activities for which the employee is compensated. Graduate assistants paid from sponsored project(s) are considered employees and complete time and effort reporting.

Cost share: The portion of the total project costs not borne by the sponsor.

# Guidance and Procedures

When graduate assistant(s) are included in grant proposals and contracts, Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA) will include costs for tuition remission unless the sponsor expressly prohibits it. SPA will look to the funding announcement and other formal agency policies and guidelines to interpret any restrictions.

Tuition Remission is calculated based on the student’s appointment as presented in the proposed budget and based on full in-state tuition following tuition rates set forth by the University Bursar.

Most graduate student appointments follow one of the scenarios below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Term** | **12 months**  | **9 months**  |
| Appointment | 20 hrs./wk. (100%) | 15 hrs./wk. (75%) | 10 hrs./wk. (50%) | 20 hrs./wk. (100%) | 15 hrs./wk. (75%) | 10 hrs./wk. (50%) |
| Credit Hours Budgeted | 21 | 16 | 11 | 18 | 14 | 9 |

* Associated student fees or tuition differentials are not covered by the university and are not calculated as tuition remission.
* Tuition Remission will be identified as a direct cost in the “Other” budget category with the following justification to the sponsor “Tuition remission is provided to all Northern Illinois University graduate assistants employed on non-sponsored as well as sponsored activities and in accordance with the provision of 2 CFR 200.466.”
* Tuition Remission is excluded from indirect cost recovery when applying NIU’s federally negotiated indirect cost rates or if otherwise stipulated by the sponsor.
* Tuition Remission is considered a restricted budget line in the NIU PeopleSoft budget. Any rebudgeting out of the budget line during post award requires prior SPA approval.
* Investigators wishing to add a graduate assistant to a funded project will need to include the associated tuition remission costs. This will likely require rebudgeting funds from another budget category and may require sponsor approval.
* Tuition remission payments are posted directly to the student’s Bursar accounts and are charged to the sponsored award through the PeopleSoft Financial Management System.
* Remission charges are based on the student’s grant appointment effort and credit enrollment for a given semester up to the max rates stipulated in this guidance.

# Cost Sharing Tuition Remission

Requests to cost share tuition remission must receive approval prior to proposal submission or post award rebudgeting. Investigators are strongly encouraged to plan budgets in advance of sponsor and university deadlines to allow time for approvals, especially when pursuing programs requiring mandatory cost share.

Requests to cost share tuition remission are made through InfoEd and require the approval of the department chair, college, RIPS, and Graduate School.

# National Institutes of Health (NIH) Cap on Graduate Student Compensation

The maximum amount that NIH will award to support compensation for a graduate research assistant remains at the stipend level for a postdoctoral scholar at zero years’ experience at the time of the award as described in the current Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Stipends, Tuition/Fees and Other Budgetary Levels Notice. This information is released on an annual basis and published as a notice on the NIH website. The combined sum of the graduate student stipend and tuition remission costs are subject to this maximum amount.

# Roles and Responsibilities

## Principal Investigator

* Include tuition remission in grant budgets when allowable.
* Explain the necessity of tuition remission for the success of the sponsored program as part of the budget justification.
* Monitor the allocation of tuition remission funds to ensure they are used solely for eligible students and purposes.

## Sponsored Programs Administration

* Advise principal investigators on appropriate calculations for tuition remission on sponsored programs.
* Provide guidance to departments and principal investigators on the application of grant funded tuition remission processes.
* Review grant proposals to ensure that tuition remission is properly budgeted and meets institutional and sponsor policies.
* Manage the financial aspects of charging tuition remission to sponsored awards.

## Graduate School

* Determine eligibility for tuition remission for graduate students.
* Communicate general tuition waiver policies and changes to students and departments.
* Authorize cost share for tuition remission.
* Coordinate with the Sponsored Programs Administration to address tuition remission matters related to grants.

# Related University Policies

* [Policies Pertaining to Graduate Assistantships](https://www.niu.edu/policies/policy-documents/policies-pertaining-to-graduate-assistantships.shtml)
* [Tuition and Fee Waiver Policy](https://www.niu.edu/policies/policy-documents/tuition-and-fee-waiver-policy.shtml)
* [Effort Reporting](https://www.niu.edu/policies/policy-documents/effort-reporting.shtml)
* [Cost Sharing](https://www.niu.edu/policies/policy-documents/cost-sharing.shtml)