

Graduate Assistant Restructuring Proposal

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Executive Summary

Graduate Assistants (GA's) are an important constituency of the NEIU community, and they assist with achieving the various missions of the university. While there are multiple purposes that graduate assistantships fulfill, their primary purpose is to provide a work experience for the student that will ***advance the student's academic experience in the discipline of their graduate program.***

Although GA's are compensated for their assistantship work via the Office of Human Resources, they are, strictly speaking, not employees, but instead receive a combination of a semester-based stipend and tuition coverage. The compensation provided to GA's represents a significant investment for the university, of close to \$1M. This proposal outlines a moderate restructuring of graduate assistantships at NEIU to achieve the goals outlined below; the fundamental structure of graduate assistantships at NEIU will remain the same.

Goals and Rationale

There are multiple reasons we need to restructure GA positions:

- 1) **Budgetary:** We have exceeded our GA tuition waiver (TW) budget in each of the past two years. In Summer 2020, we ran out of tuition waivers to support GA's, and could only hire the "essential" summer GA's, about 50% of the number we would normally hire in Summer.
- 2) **Strategic: We need to establish an approval rubric so the resources invested in GA appointments meet the strategic goals that such appointments are intended for.** We have no GA approval rubric, making it difficult to use the GA TW budget strategically. In the absence of a specific approval rubric, graduate assistantships are primarily awarded on a first-come, first served basis, based on historical precedent. This makes it difficult, with limited resources, to support the best set of GA opportunities and stay within the graduate TW budget.
- 3) **Vice Presidential requests:** In addition to these goals, both the Provost and the Vice President for Finance and Administration have requested an analysis of graduate assistantships at NEIU. The Provost has requested a restructuring of graduate assistantships at NEIU in part to better utilize the resources invested in graduate assistantships to support scholarship, research, and creative activities. The VP for Finance and Administration has requested an analysis of graduate assistantships as part of the UBPC effort to identify a set of money-saving proposals.
- 4) **Differential tuition coverage:** Finally, this proposal seeks to resolve the outstanding issue of whether TWs cover "differential tuition."

Major changes:

This proposal:

- Establishes a GA approval rubric. There are two elements to this approval rubric: (1) the key criteria for approval; and (2) and an award mechanism that allows the application of those criteria.
 - **The key criteria for GA approval:**
 - A work experience for the student that:

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- will **advance their academic experience in the discipline of their graduate program**
 - has some form of formal **disciplinary mentorship**
 - The resources that support Graduate Assistantships should **enhance the quality of the affiliated graduate program(s)**
- **An award mechanism** that allows the explicit application of the award criteria. Graduate Assistantship positions will be awarded in two ways, both in accordance with the three key criteria of Graduate Assistantships:
 - A set of recurring GA positions will be budgeted for the upcoming fiscal year as part of the annual budget-planning process each year.
 - A “flexible pool” of additional TWs will be available to allow the awarding of additional graduate assistantships that represent excellent GA opportunities on a semester-by-semester basis.
- Reassigns a number of job responsibilities that do not meet the criteria for graduate assistantships to hourly student employment. **This proposal incorporates increasing the budget of units hiring those students by the difference in cost, so the work can still be accomplished.**
 - GA positions in which the responsibilities are “operational” duties
 - most tutoring positions
- Removes fees coverage from GA TWs (Graduate Tuition Scholarships already do not cover fees).
- Will expand tuition coverage for all graduate tuition waivers to include differential tuition.

What this proposal achieves:

- **Maintains coverage of current GA job responsibilities**, either as GA positions or transitioned to Student Aide positions.
- **Financial:**
 - **The ability to operate within the allocated graduate TW budget.** This proposal would allow Northeastern to have a strategic mechanism by which to award graduate assistantships, while maintaining the budgetary responsibility of operating within the allocated graduate TW budget.
 - **Savings.** The financial ramifications of this proposal would be a savings of approximately \$100,000. This figure includes: (1) a reduced combined graduate TW budget that covers both GA and Graduate Scholarship TWs; and (2) the increased student employment costs to the hiring units.
- **Approval rubric.** This proposal establishes an official GA approval rubric, which includes both a set of key criteria as well as an approval mechanism.
- **Expanded GRA support.** To help grow GA opportunities and support for scholarship, research, and creative activities, this proposal sustains and moderately extends this year’s increase in the number of available RCA Graduate Assistant positions. Continued growth of GA opportunities to support this mission of the university will require additional budgetary investment in the future.
- **Better GA opportunities.** The established GA award criteria will result in a more consistent set of GA opportunities that will advance the students’ academic experiences in the discipline of their graduate programs, as well as provide experiences for their careers both inside and outside of academia.

Effect on graduate student financial support:

- **Graduate Assistants.** Graduate assistantships offer excellent financial support for a small number of graduate students, in many cases covering the complete cost of course expenses,

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plus a moderate stipend. This will be reduced slightly by the removal of fee coverage. All tuition charges will continue to be covered, and now expanded to include covering differential tuition.

- **Graduate Student Aide compensation.** The compensation for graduate students who carry out responsibilities that are proposed to transition from GA positions to Student Aide positions will be reduced; the loss of tuition waiver coverage will not be fully made up by the fact that the Student Aide pay rate is higher than the GA stipend. Budget calculations have included an increase in the minimum hourly wages for graduate students employed as Student Aides (to \$12/hr, from \$10/hr).
- **Maintains the number of graduate tuition scholarships and GA/SA positions.** Over the past years, a flat-dollar TW budget, combined with increasing tuition and fees, has resulted in yearly decreases in the number of graduate tuition scholarships and GA positions that can be funded. This proposal maintains the full number of graduate tuition scholarships as well as the funded graduate student work positions, despite the 2% increase in tuition and fees for AY2021-2022.
- **Differential tuition will now be included in tuition coverage.** Graduate tuition coverage for both graduate tuition scholarships and graduate assistantships, will now cover differential tuition – this has not been covered in the past. Although this affects a small number of students currently, as more programs institute differential tuition, it will be helpful to have a coverage policy for graduate tuition scholarships and assistantships.

I would like to thank the members of the GCAC sub-committee that worked throughout the Fall 2020 semester on this restructuring plan: Charletta Gutierrez, Jeanine Ntahirageza, and Laura Tejada. I would also like to thank Kate Hahn for consulting on the restructuring of the set of GA's who have served as tutors, and the other members of GCAC for reviewing our work.



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Key acronyms:

GA	Graduate Assistant/Graduate Assistantship
SA	Student Aide (hourly student employment)
TW	Tuition waiver (general term)
CTW	Course tuition waiver (specific amount of coverage) – 1 CTW covers tuition for the Resident portion of tuition for one (1) three-credit hour course. With the implementation of this program, it will now also cover differential tuition for those students in programs that charge differential tuition.

Categories of GA's:

GTA	Graduate Teaching Assistant GA Tutors
GRA	Graduate Research Assistant RCA-GA, RCA Graduate Assistant
PPGA	Pre-Professional Graduate Assistant (disciplinary training)

Other definitions:

Non-Resident Supplement: the Non-resident portion of tuition charges for one (1) three-credit hour course

Other acronyms:

DFI	Diversifying for Illinois Fellowship
SSLS	Supplemental Student Learning Support (Tutors, GTA's, Peer mentors, ...)

Graduate Assistantship: the foundational purpose of a graduate assistantship

Graduate Assistantships serve multiple roles both for the students who are awarded them as well as for the university. The primary purpose of Graduate Assistantships is to provide a work experience for the student that will ***advance their academic experience in the discipline of their graduate program***. A Graduate Assistantship also provides financial support for the student, so they can focus their attention on advancing in their graduate work. For the university, graduate assistantships provide a mechanism to involve advanced students in the missions of the university, particularly its teaching and research missions, attract high quality students, thereby enhancing the quality of its graduate programs, and support the academic work of the faculty in both teaching and scholarship.

Key criteria of Graduate Assistantships:

- A work experience for the student that:
 - will ***advance their academic experience in the discipline of their graduate program***
 - has some form of formal ***disciplinary mentorship***
- The resources that support Graduate Assistantships should ***enhance the quality of the affiliated graduate program(s)***

General Principles of the Proposal

Analysis of the current set (Fall 2020) of GA positions:

Based on the list of Fall 2020 GA's, their job descriptions, and the historical perspective of past GA appointments, each graduate assistantship appointment was analyzed and extrapolated as to how those responsibilities would be fulfilled via the implementation of this GA restructuring proposal.

- Graduate Assistantship positions that fully meet the proposed criteria will continue to be carried out via Graduate Assistantships. The TW portion of these positions will be awarded via one of the following two mechanisms:
 - Recurring GA positions have been slated to be included in NEIU's "budget book" (the stipend portion), with a guarantee of the fiscal year TWs that are part of the compensation package.
 - A "flexible pool" of additional TWs has been budgeted to allow the awarding of a set of more variable graduate assistantships that are within the current set (based on Fall 2020) that meet the key criteria. In addition, a few additional TWs have been added to this pool to support excellent GA opportunities that present themselves during the course of a fiscal year. GA appointments will be awarded from this pool prior to each semester by a panel of GCAC members working in collaboration with the CGSR Dean.
- "Operational" responsibilities, such as administrative or program assistance, have been slated to be covered by graduate student aides; the wage differential of hiring hourly student employees has been calculated so it can be added to the hiring unit's budget.
- The complete set of GA positions will be re-evaluated yearly as part of the annual budget-planning process, allowing adjustments to be made, as needed.

How specific categories of GA positions have been modeled in this proposal:

- RCA responsibilities - this comes in two basic types: GRA's, and RCA-GA's
 - Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) positions have been budgeted in the flexible pool
 - A set of TWs have been set aside for 20 [RCA Graduate Assistantships](#) which will be awarded after the review of applications
- Student Supplemental Learning Support - this comes in two basic types for this proposal: tutors, and classroom support
 - GA's who provide classroom learning support
 - The existing set of these GA's will be budgeted in this proposal.
 - **Tutors** have long represented a major fraction of graduate assistantships each semester. There are many additional non-GA tutors at both the graduate and undergraduate levels that are hired as student employees ("hourly").
 - This proposal shifts the majority of tutoring positions that had been GA's to student employee positions.
 - Several "GA Tutor" positions will be hired as GA's, the majority of which are in the tutoring center. Several additional GA Tutor positions may be awarded via the flexible pool.
- Disciplinary training, Pre-Professional Graduate Assistants (PPGA's)
 - The "operational" jobs without disciplinary mentorship have been shifted to student employee positions

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- Those positions that meet the GA criteria will remain as Graduate Assistantships (PPGAs); these are split between budgeted positions and those that will be evaluated in the flexible pool.

NOTE: GA positions that mix responsibilities, such as a GA who does some learning support (GTA) and some research support (GRA), are discouraged.

Background information

- Big investment – currently resources included in the hiring of GA's includes \$630,000 in GA TWs and approximately \$315,000 in stipends paid by the hiring units.
- Support for faculty scholarship, research, and creative activities. In Fall 2020 we had 19 GRA's from the competitive student-mentor RCA project applications! (far more than in the past, which topped out at seven)
- There is a cost differential between the stipend for GA's and the hourly wages for a Student Aide. This proposal defrays that cost differential by **increasing the budget for those hiring units by the difference in cost.**
(Why is there a cost differential? The university, rather than the hiring unit, takes on the majority of the cost of GA compensation by covering the TW.)

Financial implications

As mentioned in the Executive Summary, the financial ramifications of this proposal would be a savings of approximately \$100,000. This savings to the university includes both the reduced Graduate TW budget (which is allocated to CGSR) minus the additional costs of shifting some GA's to hourly student employees.

The requested budgets for AY2021-2022:

- \$440,000 GA TW budget
- \$325,000 Graduate Tuition Scholarship TW budget
- \$80,000 Adjusted funds for hiring Student Aides rather than GA's

The Graduate TW budget covers the cost of both GA TWs, Graduate Scholarship TWs, and a handful of other needs that include the coverage of tuition (e.g. DFI Fellows). The simplest way to understand the financial implications of the proposed changes is at the level of the full graduate TW budget. Graduate Tuition Scholarships (Merit Scholarships, Need-based scholarships, and Cohort Scholarships) will continue to cover only Resident tuition, and will be expanded with this proposal to also cover differential tuition. Fees and other tuition costs, such as the additional tuition charges for non-resident students (the "non-resident supplement") will not be covered, similar to how these have been treated in the past.

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Waiver coverage

There are two major changes to the elements covered by graduate tuition waivers:

- Fees will no longer be covered as part of Graduate Assistant TWs
- Differential tuition will be covered by all graduate tuition waivers

This makes all graduate tuition waivers have the following common coverage:

Covered:

- Resident tuition coverage
- Differential tuition, for those specific programs

Not covered:

- Fees

The sole difference in coverage: Graduate Assistant tuition waivers will also cover non-resident tuition, as it has in the past.

Appendix 1: GA Tutors

GA Tutors: Criteria

- Limited number
 - Awarded competitively
 - Hiring preference for prior tutoring experience
- Eligibility requirements:
 - tutoring assignment must be in their area of study
 - GA tutor application must include an explanation of their interest in pursuing teaching as part of their career
- Most GA Tutors are in the budget of the tutoring center; a few are possible via the flexible TW pool.

GA Tutors: Responsibilities

- Standard tutoring assignments

Additional responsibilities:

- Prepare (develop topics, slides, activities) and deliver student workshops for their tutoring area
- Assist with tutoring center data analysis and reporting
- Serve as a mentor to new tutors (required only of GA tutors who are experienced tutors)
- Locate readings on current theory and practice of tutoring in order to lead small-group tutor training session (required only of GA tutors who are experienced tutors)

Professional development:

- Draft a Statement of Tutoring Philosophy that is revised during the semester after completing training materials and gaining tutoring experience
- Prepare an e-portfolio documenting the work done over the course of the semester, including materials development, tasks, and revised Statement of Tutoring Philosophy

Appendix 2: Graduate Research Assistant categories

RCA-GA appointments:

Funding (stipend): from CGSR

RCA project design: submitted by the student with RCA mentor input
(Competitive award; see the [webpage](#) for more information)

GA Structure

- GA appointment - Fall/Spring assistantships
- 10 hrs/wk
- Budgeted to CGSR

GRA appointments:

Funding (stipend): from the hiring unit

Responsibilities: designed by the hiring unit/research mentor

GA Structure

- GA appointment – by semester
- 10/15/20 hrs/wk
- Awarded from the flexible pool