

Tuition Waiver Committee Final Report

I. Members

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II. Background and Process

The final report of the NDSU Budget Study Work Group, dated June 8, 2016, contained several recommendations in response to legislative adjustments to NDSU appropriations. One recommendation was a review of policies and practices for tuition waivers used at NDSU. That recommendation was the basis for establishing this committee, which met periodically throughout fall semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. The committee or individuals of the committee met with and interviewed assorted NDSU employees, including deans and department chairs/heads, as appropriate.

When the committee began its work in August, the most recent complete set of tuition waiver data was for FY 2015. Because of this, FY 2015 is used for analysis throughout this report, unless otherwise stated. Dollar values of various tuition waivers reported are based on the tuition structure (Appendix A). In short, the tuition rate charged is based on the following:

- Residency: North Dakota residency is granted to students meeting the residency guidelines found in the North Dakota University System (NDUS) Procedure 504. This is calculated as 100% in Appendix A. Minnesota undergraduate residents are charged at 112% of the in-state resident rate while Minnesota graduate residents are charged 127% of the in-state resident rate, per the MN Reciprocity Agreement. Undergraduate and graduate tuition for residents of the other contiguous states and states participating within exchange programs is 150% of the in-state rate. Undergraduate and graduate tuition for residents of all other U.S. states and international students is 267% of the in-state rate. Higher non-resident rates directly correlate with higher values of waivers.
- Full-time/Part-time status: Tuition is charged per-credit and capped at 12 credits, with the exception of the Public Health Program, which is charged per-credit for all credits. In addition, online classes are not included in the tuition cap and are charged per-credit. Details are available at: https://www.ndsu.edu/onestop/accounts/tuition/graduate_tuition_full_time/.
- Differential Tuition: Some undergraduate and graduate programs (e.g., engineering) charge a higher differential tuition than the base tuition. In some cases, the differential tuition above the base rate was also waived and so contributed to the overall values reported.

While the majority of students who received a tuition waiver received only one category of waiver, some students received more than one kind of waiver. These individuals may be counted in multiple waiver categories reported in Appendices B and C, but are included only once in the total reported waivers. For this reason, there is some discrepancy between the number of waiver recipients described in the written text and numbers reported in the Appendices.

III. Findings

The committee recognized the importance of North Dakota Century Code and official policies of both the North Dakota University System (NDUS) and NDSU with regards to mandating or authorizing tuition waivers. In particular, the committee notes that SBHE Policy 820 permits institutions in the system, including NDSU, to grant tuition waivers *“to promote enrollment of a culturally diverse student body, including members of Indian tribes and economically disadvantaged students, for the benefit of all students and the academic community, to promote enrollment of graduate students and research, and for other purposes consistent with an institution's mission.”* All of NDSU's tuition waivers appear to meet this SBHE policy.

NDSU granted tuition waivers to 3,414 unduplicated individuals worth \$18,280,163 in FY 2015. Some waivers were for partial tuition and others were for full tuition. Tuition waivers in FY 2014 were valued at \$17,873,252 and were awarded to 3,530 students. The value of tuition waivers increased 2.3%, but increased at a lower rate than revenue which increased 4.23%. Data more recently released show that tuition waivers for FY 2016 were \$18,635,529, representing a 1.9% increase in the dollar value of waivers over FY 2015, but that also was less than the 2.4% increase in the tuition rate between the years.

The committee observed significant diversity in the number and types of waivers used. To facilitate work, the committee divided FY 2015 tuition waivers into two broad groups. The first group, summarized in Appendix B, included waivers mandated by North Dakota Century Code or by policies of the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) and NDSU. These waivers accounted for approximately 8.8% of the total dollar value of waivers in FY 2015. Because these waivers are mandated, they were not reviewed further by the committee.

The second group of waivers, identified in Appendix C, were awarded by NDSU within the guidelines of SBHE Policy 820. These waivers are not required by ND Century Code nor SBHE Policy and therefore were the focus of the committee work.

III. A. Graduate Assistant Waiver (GAW). The dollar value of graduate assistant tuition waivers accounted for \$9,919,252, or 54.3% of the value of all tuition waived in FY 2015. This percentage was in-line with FY 2014 and FY 2016 results as well. The high value of the GAW results from two factors that do not occur together in most other categories. First, GAWs typically waive 100% of the base tuition (engineering students receive a 100% waiver of the full Engineering Differential Tuition), which is relatively rare in most other waiver categories at NDSU. Second, the graduate student population contains a higher percentage of international students, who are charged a higher base tuition, than does the undergraduate student population. Both factors are common at our peer institutions throughout the country.

The common unifying feature of the waiver is it is awarded to graduate students on a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA), Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) or a Graduate Service Assistantship (GSA). In addition to receiving a waiver, graduate assistants receive a stipend to perform research, teaching and service activities, respectively, that directly benefit NDSU and help it serve its mission. In FY 2015, 48% of NDSU graduate students were on one of the three types of assistantship. Of those receiving assistantships, 58.3% were on a GRA at either the Ph.D. or the Master's level. By comparison, 36.1% were on a GTA and the remaining 5.6% were on a GSA.

The vast majority of assistantships are either ¼-time, which require an average of 10 hours

of student time per week to complete assigned responsibilities, or they are ½-time and require 20 hours per week. An exact breakdown for FY 2015 is difficult; however, an estimated 75% of graduate students on assistantship were ½-time with the remaining 25% less than ½-time, including all those on ¼-time. All assistantships ¼-time and above carry a full (100%) tuition waiver for the graduate student, regardless of the stipend level. This full waiver is applied to all on-campus degree-eligible credits including Continuous Enrollment credits. Students who have completed their Program of Study, filed with the Graduate School, but who have not completed their thesis, paper, or dissertation are required to register for at least one Continuous Enrollment credit each semester. In addition, the Graduate School automatically grants waivers for summer semester to students on an assistantship during spring semester.

Amounts for ½-time assistantships can range to over \$20,000; however the vast majority of ½-time assistantships at NDSU pay less than this amount. Stipends for ¼-time assistantships are correspondingly lower than ½-time assistantships. Some ¼-time assistantships pay a stipend of only a few thousand dollars per year. These “minimal assistantships” were discussed at length. The committee acknowledges that such assistantships provide some level of financial support to the student and benefit departments utilizing them by facilitating an increase in their graduate enrollment when finances do not permit full support of the student. Some units use minimal assistantships as a tool to manage special or unexpected circumstances on a short-term basis of a few weeks or months. As a result, it appears that minimal assistantships and the associated tuition waiver likely enhance graduate student recruitment and retention. However, some on the committee had concerns that students who receive such assistantships do not receive adequate stipend support and may be engaged in work not clearly aligned with the professional development of the student.

III. B. International Student Waivers. This category comprises a number of waivers developed to increase the diversity and size of the international student population. Most undergraduate students on an international waiver have tuition reduced by 50% from the nonresident rate. This means that the majority of students on an international waiver pay tuition to NDSU, often at the rate of 133% of in-state students. In addition to paying tuition, international students on waiver inject money into the local and state economy and expose the NDSU student body to perspectives from other cultures.

III.B.1. International Academic and Cultural Sharing Scholarship (ACSS). This scholarship, awarded as a waiver, is calculated at 50% of base non-resident tuition, and is awarded by the Office of Admission to eligible international students seeking admission to undergraduate programs. Criteria for selection include demonstrated leadership, community involvement and high academic ability. This waiver is renewable to any matriculated international undergraduate student who maintains a 2.5 CGPA. In addition, recipients are required to participate in 10 hours of cultural sharing activities per semester with the NDSU community. In FY 2015, 217 students utilized the waiver. That number has been trending down over the years as fewer international undergraduate students attend NDSU.

III.B.2. Junior/Senior Scholarship. This scholarship is also awarded as a waiver and is awarded through the Office of International Student and Study Abroad Services to 10 outstanding international undergraduate students in either their junior or senior year of study. Unlike the ACSS described above, this competitive award waives 100% of the non-resident base tuition to a select few international students. The award is made annually and

some exceptional students receive the award for both the junior and senior year.

III.B.3. Miscellaneous Undergraduate International Student Waivers. NDSU makes assorted tuition waivers to undergraduate students in special, select categories including World Learning Scholars, international partner affiliate students, and exchange students. World Learning scholars and affiliate students pay 50% of non-resident base tuition (which is equal to 133% of the in-state rate). In FY 2015, NDSU made waivers to 32 students in this category. Incoming exchange students receive a full waiver of the base tuition rate; however, these waivers are in effect revenue neutral as outgoing NDSU exchange students pay tuition for the incoming international exchange student and vice versa. NDSU hosted 24 international exchange students in FY 2015.

III.B.4. Graduate International Student Tuition Waivers. This subset of waivers differs from all others above, including Graduate Assistant Waivers, in that they are awarded to graduate students not on an assistantship. Waivers in this category are provided to external award recipients such as Fulbright (100% waiver) and World Learning scholars (30% waiver). Included in this category are waivers that result directly from Memorandums of Understanding between NDSU and specific affiliated international universities or institutions (e.g., National University of Sciences and Technology in Pakistan). In FY 2015, 38 graduate students received waivers in this category. The committee notes that the majority these students are enrolled in programs, many in the College of Engineering, that involve original research and lead to the M.S. or Ph.D. degrees.

III. C. Undergraduate Academic Waiver. These waivers are offered as academic scholarships by the Office of Admission. Award criteria as of FY 2017 include:

- Presidential Scholarships awarded to first year students with an ACT of 32 or higher or equivalent SAT and a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher. This is an annual \$3,000 scholarship for up to four years. The Scholarship Committee in the Office of Admission aims to award 50 new Presidential Scholarships each year.
- Presidential Honor Scholarships awarded to first year students with an ACT of 29-31 or equivalent SAT and a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher. This is an annual \$2,500 scholarship for up to four years. The Scholarship Committee in the Office of Admission aims to award 200 new Presidential Honor Scholarships each year.
- Provost's Scholarships awarded to first year students with an ACT of 25-28 or equivalent SAT and a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher. This is an annual \$1,500 scholarship for up to four years. This scholarship was previously a one-year award.
- Transfer Awards awarded to a pool of transfer students with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 from each institution previously attended. Awards vary from \$500-\$1,500 one-year awards.
- Non-Resident Tuition Benefit awarded to first year students from non-resident states who meet admission guidelines. This waiver reduces the tuition rate from the 267% Non-Resident Rate to the 150% Contiguous tuition Rate and is awarded for up to four years. A maximum of 20 awards are available.

NDSU has offered these awards to remain competitive with scholarships offered by competing universities. NDSU provided \$5.4 million of various academic awards during FY 2015 which include the above waivers. Of the \$5.4 million, \$3 million was processed as scholarships funded through the NDSU Foundation or NDSU local funds. The remaining \$2.4 million was processed as waivers. These waivers reduced undergraduate tuition billed from \$99 million to \$96.6 million collected. The NDSU Foundation and Alumni Association has recognized the need to increase scholarship funds to NDSU. The Foundation has recently adopted a simplified Fee

Assessment Policy that lowers the gift fees and endowment fees assessed on donations, which is hoped to attract additional gifts. In addition, the Foundation has recently added three new development officers.

III. D. Cultural Diversity Tuition Discount (CDTD). In order to support NDSU's strategic plan and ensure a level of diversity in the student body, the Office of Admission devotes staff and resources to the recruitment of underrepresented domestic multicultural populations. NDSU awards this waiver to approximately 80 new students per year on a competitive basis. Award recipients must be from a federally defined under-represented group and show financial need. New freshmen, transfer, graduate, and returning students are eligible to apply for the award. The award results in a waiver of tuition equivalent to the North Dakota resident tuition rate, regardless of the recipient's state of residence. The award is renewable for up to 5 years or 10 semesters. An analysis of waiver recipient data was initiated in 2015. Under consideration is the point structure used to make the award, populations eligible for the award, and academic requirements to receive and maintain the award. The review is expected to be done by the summer of 2017.

III. E. Graduate Dean Tuition Waiver. This waiver, originally known as the North Dakota University System Waiver, was started approximately 15 years ago at NDSU and other institutions in the system by the NDUS. The original intent across the system was apparently to encourage the acquisition of graduate degrees by public school administrators. The name was changed within the last five to ten years and is now known at NDSU as the Graduate Dean Tuition Waiver.

This waiver is currently awarded only to graduate students in the College of Human Development and Education; the vast majority of recipients are in the School of Education. Approximately 100 waivers are provided each year. Recipients tend to be part-time students not on assistantship who are otherwise employed in some capacity in a public or private school system as a teacher or administrator. Awards, which are limited to 3 credits per semester, are made on a competitive basis; criteria for selection include: completion of at least 6 graduate credits, full-standing in a program and minimum 3.0 GPA in graduate studies. Priority is given to students who demonstrate need, are North Dakota residents in a doctoral program with an approved plan of study, and are close to completion of their program.

The committee notes that recipients of the award are not required to conduct research or engage in teaching or other service activities, as is typical of other graduate students who receive a waiver. The committee acknowledges that NDSU benefits in undergraduate recruitment and in other areas by the presence of administrators, teachers and other staff working in public and private schools in the state and region who have graduate degrees from this institution.

III. F. Miscellaneous Waivers. The majority of these waivers result from a tuition appeal which may include medical reasons. Also included in this category are Upward Bound Tuition Waivers granted to high school graduates enrolled in the Summer Bridge program to make a successful transition to college.

III. G. Differential Tuition and Department Waivers. A few degree programs at NDSU carry an additional tuition charge for students in the program, termed differential tuition, to offset higher program costs. Tuition waived in this category is charged directly to the program, usually as reduced allocation. Most waivers in this category resulted from appeal

situations. Also included in this category is the Division of Fine Arts waiver of approximately \$7,500 awarded to incoming freshman interested in the theatre program.

IV. Summary of waivers.

NDSU, like most peer research-intensive, land-grant universities, awards and uses tuition waivers as a recruitment and retention tool for students. The committee believes that NDSU has been responsible in use of waivers to attract and retain a qualified and diverse student body that impacts essentially all undergraduate and graduate programs. In this regard, waivers are an important tool to help NDSU meet its enrollment goals. While the overall value of tuition waived at NDSU is large, in excess of \$18 million in recent years, the committee by and large does not view this as lost revenue. The paramount reason for this is that most students who receive the waivers across the categories simply would not have come to NDSU without the waiver. Significant reductions or elimination of tuition waivers may have severe impacts on programs and enrollment.

Tuition waivers made to undergraduate students account for a little less than one-half of the value of waivers made by NDSU in recent years. It appears in many cases that NDSU offers undergraduate waivers as part of a financial aid package, in lieu of scholarships. The committee emphasizes that the vast majority of undergraduate students who receive a waiver, regardless of the waiver category, pay tuition. For example, most undergraduate students from other countries receiving a waiver still pay tuition at a rate of 133% of in-state students. This implies a conscious decision by NDSU, which the committee supports, to gain both students and tuition from students who otherwise would not attend the institution.

Graduate Assistantship Waivers account for slightly over one-half of waivers awarded at NDSU. It follows that this waiver category received considerable attention from the committee. NDSU, like most research-intensive universities, is heavily reliant on graduate students for original research activities, classroom teaching and other creative and scholarly endeavors. These all enhance the state's economic, intellectual and cultural capacity. NDSU received \$65.5 million in external research awards during FY 2015 which provided for research breakthroughs in agriculture, engineering, economics, sciences and other areas. NDSU graduate students make direct and significant contributions to the state's economy and contribute to job creation and other citizen benefits throughout the state. Some grant applications require institutional contributions in the proposed budget; in some cases graduate student tuition waivers are used as an in-kind resource in securing certain external awards. Successful graduate student research, in particular, is critical to the institution as NDSU continues to enhance its reputation nationally and internationally. Teaching activities engaged in by graduate students are essential for helping NDSU meet its core mission of undergraduate education. This is evident with the help graduate students offer in a number of general education courses and science laboratory courses. Tuition waivers in exchange for those kinds of teaching activities are efficient and effective for the university and the state and offer direct and valuable experience to our graduate students. Finally, as residents of our communities, graduate students participate in the local and state economy; many ultimately seek permanent employment in the state and region.

As is described elsewhere in this document, the committee identified some concerns with the 1/4-time minimal graduate assistantships. While some possible changes to the delivery of graduate research assistantships are identified below, the committee cautions that changes may have significant implications for graduate enrollment at NDSU. Growth in graduate programs likely is a cornerstone for enrollment goals currently being developed at NDSU.

V.A. General Recommendations for NDSU

V.A.1. We note that NDSU lacks a clear and comprehensive statement or official position on the awarding and use of tuition waivers. Some peer universities have such a document. The committee recommends that NDSU develop and make publically available a statement regarding the university's philosophy about and use of tuition waivers at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Such a document would help NDSU frame the message to the public and level the playing field for all students who may be interested in or possibly eligible for tuition waivers. NDSU currently has a webpage that addresses some required waivers identified in Appendix B. That site, https://www.ndsu.edu/onestop/accounts/tuition/tuition_waivers, may be a logical location for such a statement.

V.A.2. The committee recommends that the complement of NDSU waivers be reviewed in five to ten year intervals. On their own accord, the Office of Admission currently is reviewing how it administers the Cultural Diversity Waiver. The committee believes such reviews should be more widespread and common.

V.A.3. NDSU provides tuition waivers as a scholarship proxy in some financial aid packages. NDSU should work towards establishing scholarships supported by endowment gifts, rather than utilizing waivers. Such a move would be dollar neutral for the student and would produce revenue for NDSU through collected tuition. This recommendation may be well timed as the Development Foundation expands its efforts to encourage giving to NDSU. Waivers that could be considered for replacement by scholarship dollars include:

- International Student Waivers
- Academic Scholarship Waivers
- Cultural Diversity Waiver
- Graduate Dean Waiver
- Fine Arts Waiver

V.A.4. Currently NDSU budgets the amount of waivers in aggregate. The committee recommends that a method be established to budget the various types of waivers, which are not required by state law or SBHE Policy, as a mechanism to control and monitor the waivers. The budgeting mechanism could be based on number of waivers and/or value of waivers allowed and could be at a college or departmental level.

V.B. Recommendations for graduate student tuition waivers.

V.B.1. The Graduate School, with the guidance of the Graduate Council, should review the Graduate Assistant Waiver policy published on its website at <https://bulletin.ndsu.edu/graduate/graduate-school-policies/graduate-assistantship-policy/> and link to https://www.ndsu.edu/onestop/accounts/tuition/tuition_waivers/ link to, as was discussed in IV.A.1. Items for further review include:

- The current Graduate School policy defines the waiver to cover the base tuition, but does not define the waiver of differential tuition for engineering students, which is the only unit on campus that currently waives differential tuition. A provision should be added by the Graduate School that clarifies the waiving of the engineering differential graduate tuition.
- The current Graduate School policy does not clearly define the types of fellowships that receive a waiver.

V.B.2. The committee is mindful that any changes in how assistantships are awarded may have negative impacts on graduate student recruitment and enrollment. Further, such impacts would likely be felt more severely in certain units. Nonetheless, the committee sees rationale for NDSU to explore the following items with the Graduate School, the NDSU Graduate Council and campus-wide academic units:

- Consider establishing variable levels of tuition waivers that are determined by the level of the assistantship. Currently, graduate students on a $\frac{1}{4}$ -time assistantship receive the same full tuition waiver as a student on a $\frac{1}{2}$ -time assistantship. Tiers could be established where, for example, students on a $\frac{1}{4}$ -time assistantship receive one-half of a tuition waiver and students on a $\frac{1}{2}$ -time assistantship to receive a full tuition waiver. A transition to such a tiered waiver approach would need to be implemented in a manner that ensures minimal impact on specific programs and on NDSU's enrollment goals.
- Assess the feasibility of establishing stipend floors for both $\frac{1}{4}$ - and $\frac{1}{2}$ -time assistantships.
- Review assistantships to ensure that activities required for the waiver are pertinent to the graduate student's academic program and professional development. To facilitate the latter point and to encourage mentoring, for example, the faculty member providing funds for the student stipend should be encouraged to become a member of the student's advisory committee when appropriate.
- Review the practice of providing waivers on summer classes when employed as a graduate assistant during spring semester but not in the summer term.
- Work to further develop graduate programs or create a new assistantship category that, in lieu of a waiver, would have the effect of a third party covering the tuition. This could be implemented as part of an overall plan for providing graduate assistantships to meet budget requirements under recommendation V.A.4. The committee did not have a consensus on how this would be implemented.
- Explore alternative methods for providing continuous enrollment credits to graduate students. In order to make reporting equitable between institutions, consider adopting a similar approach used at another ND University System institution, which uses a specific uniform course number for the continuous enrollment credits charged at a unique fee. Adoption of this would likely have a minimal effect to tuition revenue and waivers but may more accurately reflect student enrollment status.
- Review the process and procedures established for awarding of the graduate assistant waivers to ensure the waivers are efficiently and effectively being administered.

V.B.3. The Graduate Dean Tuition Waivers should be:

- Converted to a scholarship supported by an endowment, if possible, or
- Reallocated and applied directly to the college's funding as this waiver only supports one college.

V.C. Recommendations for undergraduate tuition waivers.

V.C.1. International Academic and Cultural Sharing Scholarship Waiver. The committee recommends that the following options be explored:

- The value of the waiver be changed to a dollar amount maximum rather than a percent of tuition, as this would align with the method used for awarding undergraduate academic waivers.
- Tiers be established for the waiver with sliding criteria to make the award more

competitive and more in line with the various credentials of the student receiving the award. For example, NDSU could establish awards at the \$3,000 and \$1,500 levels with different criteria for the different levels. This also would align with the method used for awarding undergraduate academic waivers.

- Conversion of this award to a scholarship supported by an endowment, if possible.

V.C.2. Junior/Senior International Undergraduate Base Tuition Rate Scholarship Waiver. This award currently waives 100% of tuition to 10 or fewer junior and senior international students. The committee recommends the following options be explored:

- The waiver be capped at 100% of the in-state rate.
- Conversion of this award to a scholarship supported by an endowment, if possible.

Appendix A. Tuition Rate Categories with the ND University System

SBHE Undergraduate Approved Rates (% of ND Rate) Per NDUS Institutional Charges report					
	ND	U.S. Non-Resident	Inter-national	Contiguous	MN
BSC	100%	267%	267%	125%	112%
DCB	100%	150%	150%	125%	112%
DCB - all Canadian Provinces			100%	100%	
DSU	100%	150%	150%	125%	112%
LRSC	100%	100%	250%	100%	100%
MaSU	100%	150%	267%	125%	112%
MaSU - Canadian Provinces other than Contiguous			150%		
MiSU	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
NDSCS	100%	267%	267%	125%	112%
NDSCS *	100%	100%	100%	100%	110%
NDSU	100%	267%	267%	150%	112%
UND	100%	267%	267%	150%	112%
VCSU	100%	267%	267%	125%	112%
WSC	100%	100%	135%	100%	112%

(* NDSCS Students living on campus)

Appendix B. Summary of tuition waivers required by law or allowed by SBHE/NDSU policy as employee benefit during FY 2015.

Waiver Category	Authorization#	Number of recipients	Total value (\$)
NDSU Spouse/Dependent Waiver	SBHE Policy 820.1 & NDSU Policy 133.1	256	754,067
Employee Waiver	SBHE Policy 820.2e4 & NDSU Policy 133	257	525,508
National Guard Waiver	NDCC 37-07.1 & SBHE Policy 820	173	212,487
Veteran Dependent Waiver	NDCC 15-10-18.2, NDCC 15-10-18.3 & SBHE Policy 820	19	97,034
First Responder Survivor Waiver	ND Century Code 15-10-18.4 & SBHE 820	1	8,255
Senior Citizen Waiver	SBHE Policy 805.3	7	4,954
SBHE Student Member Waiver	SBHE Policy 820	1	3,542
Total		714	1,605,847

#SBHE = State Board of Higher Education, NDCC = North Dakota Century Code

Appendix C. Summary of tuition waivers authorized but not required by state law or SBHE/NDSU policy during FY 2015.

Waiver Category	Individuals receiving waiver	Dollar value (\$)
A. Graduate Assistant Waiver	1103	9,919,252
B. International Student Waiver	321	2,764,112
C. Undergraduate Academic Waiver	1062	2,466,183
D. Cultural Diversity Waiver	228	1,240,573
E. Graduate Dean Waiver	95	149,243
F. Miscellaneous	62	85,998
G. Differential Tuition & Department Waiver	30	48,955
Total	2901	16,674,316