



[www.nationalpostdoc.org](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org)

Statement Presented at the NIH Town Hall Meeting  
Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA)  
Tuition, Fees and Health Insurance Policies

November 30, 2005

- I. The NIH asserts that tuition costs have grown to a point that continuing the current model would require substantial reduction in the number of T32 positions.

**NPA RESPONSE** - there have been no data shown to indicate what percentage of the total tuition payout for T32 recipients comes from postdoctoral positions, or what portion of the tuition classification is actual tuition versus health insurance costs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that very few postdocs take classes which are paid for by their institutions. An informal survey of the NPA's 80 institutional members found just two institutions that were charging actual postdoc tuition expenses to the NIH. It is difficult for the NPA to form an opinion on this matter in the absence of data, and the NPA suggests that the NIH break the expenses down between pre- and postdoctoral fellowships, and also between actual tuition, health insurance and fees.

- The NPA recommends that tuition, fees and health insurance be handled as separate expenses. Lumping them together prevents the development of coherent policies to address the particular training needs of institutions and postdoctoral fellows supported on training grants. **Postdocs have little need for tuition but a pressing need for health insurance.** While a cap on actual tuition reimbursement would pose a limited burden on postdocs, a cap on health insurance expenditures would pose a significant burden.
- **The NPA endorses policies which seek to improve the quality of each fellowship, even if that quality comes at the cost of the number of positions.** Therefore, the NPA supports changing the current model of tuition payment for T32 positions.
- One caveat; if the reason for the skyrocketing costs associated with T32 turns out to be due primarily to pre-doctoral rather than post-doctoral fellowships, the NPA recommends that the number of postdoctoral positions not be sacrificed to pay for the costs.

## II. NPA ANALYSIS

**Of the three suggested possible models, the NPA supports the first model of placing a ceiling on the tuition of \$16,000 to \$18,000 for the following reasons:**

1200 New York Ave, NW, Suite 635, Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202-326-6424 Fax: 202-371-9849 E-mail: [info@nationalpostdoc.org](mailto:info@nationalpostdoc.org)

- The first scenario, setting a ceiling on tuition while retaining the current formula, seems the most logical and fair way of sharing the cost between NIH and institutions. It gives the institution incentive to keep tuition costs low and allows the NIH to accurately predict its maximum expenses for tuition. The drawback to this plan is that it requires more paperwork and oversight than the other two plans put forward; however, this does not increase the burden significantly over the current system.
- The third scenario, cutting positions without capping expenses for tuition, runs counter to the goals of the T32 program and has virtually no end point. If tuition costs continue to rise, T32 positions would continue to decrease, possibly to a point at which the program would cease to be a significant source of training for new scientists.
- The second scenario, giving an institution an allowance for tuition, seems to accomplish the same effect as the first scenario, but guarantees the maximum expenditure by the NIH. Institutions have proven quite apt at the game of “use-it-or-lose-it” funding, and it is likely that the institutions would find some creative way of maximizing their utilization of the allowance, whether truly justified or not. The benefit of this plan is that it requires less oversight by NIH and less paperwork on the part of institutions, and it does streamline and simplify the situation.

### **III. SUMMARY**

Overall, it would be instructive to have the pre- and post-doctoral pools separated for accounting purposes, and for data collection on the true costs of each type of award. If one type is placing a significant strain on resources, it is sensible to address that problem without unnecessary disruption to the other. The NPA appreciates the fact that costs indirectly associated with training have grown to unsustainable levels, and applauds the NIH for taking a proactive approach to solving this growing problem before it has a crippling effect on the T32 mechanism.

Statement submitted on behalf of the NPA by

Alyson Reed, Executive Director