

NMSU Works Because We Do:

**A CASE FOR TUITION COVERAGE
FOR GRADUATE WORKERS**



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THE CURRENT CRISIS

“AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT, ON TOP OF A 20-HOUR ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT LIMIT, I AM NOT QUALIFIED FOR MOST SOURCES OF FINANCIAL AID AND GRANTS, OR ANY OFF-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES. OUR STIPEND DOES NOT COVER MEDICAL INSURANCE OR OUR TUITION, WHICH HAS A HUGE INFLUENCE ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS WE LACK OUTSIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCOME.”

-YUXUAN ZHAO, COUNSELING & EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

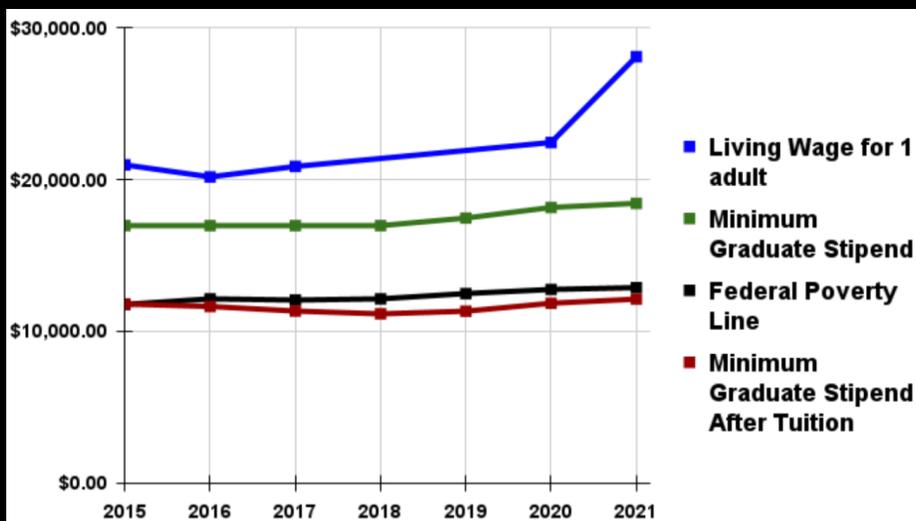
“AS A TRANS, DISABLED GRADUATE STUDENT, I HAVE STRUGGLED TO AFFORD THE CARE I NEED ON WHAT REMAINS OF MY STIPEND AFTER TUITION COSTS. WHILE I HAD HOPED TO REMAIN AT NMSU TO PURSUE A PHD AFTER MY MASTERS, I CANNOT SEE MYSELF SURVIVING ON \$12,000 PER YEAR FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. THE LACK OF TUITION COVERAGE HAS MADE IT NIGHT IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO LIVE AUTHENTICALLY, TO PURSUE MY EDUCATION, AND TO BUILD A FUTURE FOR MYSELF AND MY FAMILY.”

-GAUGE BURNETT, DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS

The roughly 900 graduate employees at NMSU make vital contributions to the teaching and research mission of the university, providing instruction to thousands of undergraduate students every semester while advancing a wide variety of research projects.

For the 2021-2022 academic year the “on-paper” minimum stipend for graduate employees was \$18,435.¹ However, this does not account for the \$6,189² in tuition and fees that graduates must pay to be enrolled and therefore eligible to work as graduate assistants. While some graduate employees receive scholarships and grants to cover their tuition costs, the majority of graduate assistants at NMSU are paying roughly $\frac{1}{3}$ of their annual salary right back to the university.

In a 2020 survey of graduate employees across NMSU, 78% of grads reported relying on credit cards, personal loans, and family assistance to afford basic necessities such as food and utilities.



THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE FOR A SINGLE ADULT WITH NO CHILDREN IS \$13,590.³ YET, THE ANNUAL INCOME FOR AN NMSU GRAD WORKER AFTER PAYING TUITION IS \$12,123.

PROTECTING THE FUTURE OF NMSU

“Including tuition in compensation packages will greatly improve graduate student recruitment, success, and well-being at NMSU.”

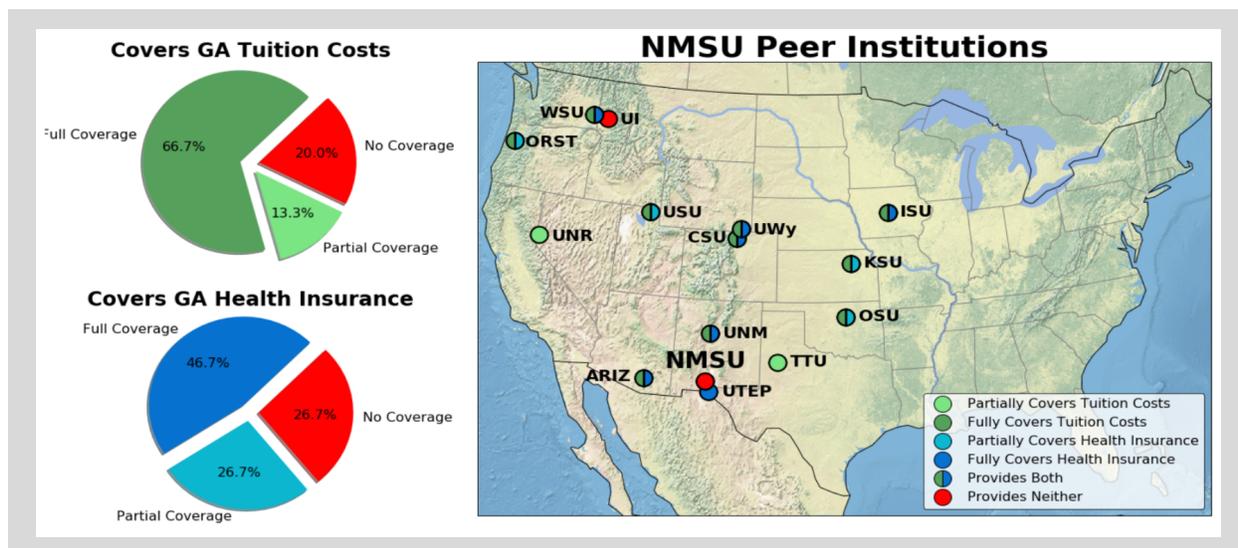
-LUIS CIFUENTES, PH.D. (NMSU VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH) “ON GRADUATE TUITION”⁴

Graduate workers are not the only stakeholders who see the benefits of tuition coverage. Tuition coverage for graduate employees providing educational and research labor for a university is in fact a standard benefit for PhD and Masters students at hundreds of universities across the country. In fact - 80% of NMSU’s listed peer institutions provide full or partial tuition coverage for graduate employees.

Guaranteed tuition coverage provides higher financial security year to year, decreases disruptions in research staffing, and allows graduate workers to more deeply invest themselves in multi-year research projects that ultimately increase NMSU’s research output.

Guaranteed tuition coverage for graduate employees also has the potential to improve undergraduate retention as graduate teaching assistants are often some of the most involved instructors in the start of an undergraduate student’s education.

As of 2020, 48% of graduate students at NMSU had considered dropping out or switching career paths as a result of the unfair financial compensation.



“In order to be competitive with peer institutions, the university will need to develop standard teaching and research assistant awards that provide funding for both the stipend and tuition.”

-NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL OF GRADUATE STUDIES STRATEGIC CONSULTATION REPORT, 2018⁵

NMSU CAN AFFORD TUITION COVERAGE NOW; GRAD WORKERS CAN'T AFFORD TO WAIT

“We’ve had some of the best years in fundraising, with near record annual donations and the highest ever university endowment”

-JOHN FLOROS, JANUARY 7TH 2022⁶

How much does graduate tuition contribute to revenue?

In the NMSU Operating Budget, all tuition, including the tuition paid by graduate employees, is considered “unrestricted revenue” within the Instruction & General (I&G) section of the budget.

Graduate employees are projected to pay about 2.7 million in fall 2022 and 5.4 million of the total 96 million in projected tuition revenue for the 2022-2023 academic year (FY2023).

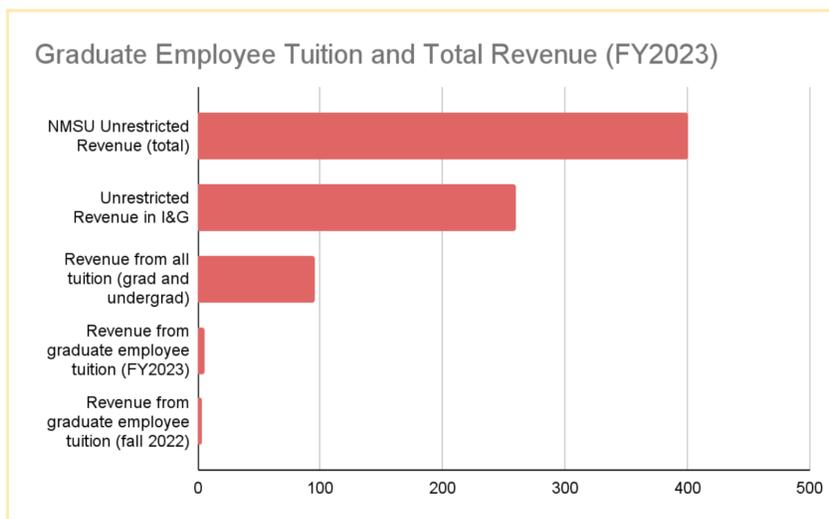
Tuition paid by graduate employees represents 5.6% of total tuition revenue, 2% of unrestricted I&G revenue, and just **1.35% of the total unrestricted revenues for 2022-2023 (FY2023)**.

How might the university make up for a 1.35% drop in revenue?

For the 2022-2023 academic year (FY2023) NMSU has budgeted \$269.00 million in unrestricted I&G revenues with \$208.3 million in expenditures and around \$52.2 million already shuttled into other funds (predominantly research and student aid). **This leaves a fairly substantial \$8.5 million balance in unrestricted I&G funds for the 2022-2023 (same that NMSU had back in 2019).**

The actual positions occupied by NMSU graduate workers are mostly within the I&G budget (TAs and GAs) or the Research budget (RAs). However, the University already has a separate line item for Student Aid Grants and Stipends. In FY 2022-2023 NMSU already plans to transfer \$21.6 million from I&G to this line item. Essentially all of the annual budget for this line item comes from I&G, meaning that this is a normal use for I&G funds.

There is projected to be a **\$2.5 million** unspent fund balance in the Student Aid Grants/Stipends line at the end of the fiscal year, which is an additional revenue source that NMSU could exhaust before pulling more I&G funds. Between 8.5 million in surplus unrestricted I&G revenues and 2.5 million in unspent Student Aid the university has at least **\$11 million** in surplus unrestricted funds, more than enough to cover a 5.4 million drop in revenue.



RECOMMENDATIONS

We know from the financial data above that NMSU has the ability in its current operating budget to provide tuition relief for all of its graduate workers for the fall semester of 2022. The \$11 million surplus currently sitting idle in the Instruction and General fund and the Student Aid Fund must be put to work to provide immediate relief to the hundreds of graduate students whose work in teaching and research is essential to NMSU fulfilling its mission. Without the graduate workers, NMSU cannot achieve the research and education benchmarks necessary for obtaining R1 classification. It's well past time that the resources generated by the hard work of graduate employees is invested into strengthening the university for everyone.

We, The Graduate Workers United of NMSU, are calling on the NMSU administration to:

- Meet the graduate workers at the bargaining table with a proposal containing immediate relief from tuition costs for the 2022-2023 academic year.*
- Work together with the graduate students, at the bargaining table and in the state appropriations process, to find long term solutions to the problems graduate students at NMSU face.*

WORKS CITED

- 1 <https://hr.nmsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Grad-Assistant-Salary-Table-7-1-2021.pdf>
- 2 <https://fa.nmsu.edu/cost-of-attendance/>
- 3 <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>
<https://rand-p.nmsu.edu/News/Digest1/322.html>
- 4 <https://leads2025.nmsu.edu/>
- 5 GCS strategic consultation report 2018
- 7 <https://www.lcsun-news.com/story/news/education/2022/01/07/nmsu-president-john-floros-steps-down-chancellor-dan-arvizu-sole-leader/9137209002/>