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NSF OIG: MIT Inappropriately Charging GRFP Fellows Tuition, Fees

Based on an audit of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) by the National Science Foundation (NSF) Office of Inspector General (OIG), NSF intends to update its policy on the cost of education (COE) allowance for recipients of its Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP). According to OIG's Feb. 24 memorandum to NSF about MIT, which includes NSF's response, MIT is not complying "with current GRFP award terms and conditions requiring institutions to exempt fellows from paying required tuition and fees." Instead, MIT "holds fellows responsible for tuition in excess of the COE allowance provided by NSF." OIG quoted MIT's materials for GRFP participants that state they are responsible to pay the "substantial tuition shortfall remaining" after the COE allowance is applied. MIT's interpretation is based on guidance that is no longer in effect, and NSF "expects GRFP fellows to be compensated for their work to the same extent that other graduate students at the institution are compensated for similar work," OIG said. NSF should require MIT "to update its policies and practices to ensure it complies with Graduate Research Fellowship Program award terms and conditions related to waiving tuition and fees," OIG said.

In its response, NSF officials "confirmed with the GRFP Program that it has never been the intent that GRFP recipients would be required to fund any shortfall in tuition, be it through funds or teaching. Program further confirms that any teaching requirements must be decoupled from tuition, and consistent with institution policies and career development concerns." The agency added that it "is concerned that MIT's interpretation of the NSF policy on this issue may be held by other institutions." As NSF put it, to address the "potentially systemic nature of this issue," NSF intends to update its GRFP guidance and "communicate the updated policy to all awardee institutions to remind them of their obligations under GRFP awards, and direct that they update their policies as needed."

[Link to OIG memorandum to NSF](#)

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