

## Community Comments Previously Submitted Regarding an Approved Administrative Policy

### Policy on Tuition, Fees, and Charges (01.019.1)

The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees Policy on Tuition, Fees, and Charges was approved by the Board of Trustees effective November 7, 2025. A draft of this policy was posted for community comments from September 24 through October 7, 2025. Below are the comments submitted, together with responses provided in whole or in part by the policy owner, the Administrative Policy Committee (APC), and/or policy development staff. Respondents seeking additional context or clarification may contact [csbarker@uri.edu](mailto:csbarker@uri.edu).

Community Comments	Responses
<p><b>Comment #1</b></p> <p>I am concerned about this proposal to combine policy F-15 with policy F-11. This change appears to allow URI tuition to be set by "competitive market and demand." The current policy (F-11) has important protections in place for program affordability and student access.</p> <p>1) F-15 is a policy to set tuition rates for certificate and "employer sponsored" programs --&gt; these are programs designed to be paid for by employers and attended by adult learners who already hold degrees. F-15 programs are expensive by design.</p> <p>2) Eliminating F-11 creates the potential for higher tuition for certain URI departments (if this is not already in place). Coupled with URI's new budget model, this proposal could create / exacerbate funding inequalities within university programs.</p> <p>3) There is no definition of what "market demand" is and how it will be determined. Transfers a significant amount of power to URI staff without oversight or transparency, opening the door to mistakes, neglect, and even corruption (higher education administrators are not and should not behave like for-profit corporate professionals). For example:</p> <p>3.1) Will URI simply set rates according to what other schools do?</p> <p>3.2) Will outside consultants be hired to determine rates? (and who pays their fees?)</p> <p>Policy F-11 should be preserved in its current form to protect the interest of students from Rhode Island (and beyond!) who need a quality, affordable public university.</p>	<p>1) Policies F-15 and F-11 of the RI Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner ceased being governing policies for the University of Rhode Island upon the February 1, 2020 establishment of the URI Board of Trustees (R.I.G.L. § 16-32-2).</p> <p>2) This policy sets out the process for making changes to tuition, fees, and charges, but does not influence whether they are increased or by how much.</p> <p>3) Market analysis may include, but is not limited to, consideration of peer comparisons and the job market for graduates from the program. The URI Board of Trustees is committed to maintaining affordability and access to educational opportunities while also promoting sound management of the University's fiscal resources.</p>

## Comment #2

As a graduate student, I appreciate the University's effort to create a clear and consistent framework for how tuition and fees are determined. However, several elements of the draft policy raise serious concerns about affordability, transparency, and fairness for graduate students.

### Differential Tuition and Program Fees:

The policy allows programs to set differential charges based on costs, demand, or market factors, without clear limits or accountability measures. This could lead to substantial tuition increases in certain graduate programs, particularly in high-demand or professional fields, creating inequity across programs. Graduate assistantships typically cover standard tuition only, so students on assistantship may face unexpected out-of-pocket costs if their programs introduce new differential charges or "program delivery" fees not covered by remission.

### Affordability and Cost of Living:

Even under current tuition and stipend levels, the cost of living in Rhode Island has become increasingly unmanageable for many graduate students. Monthly stipends often do not keep pace with rising housing, transportation, and food costs. Any tuition or fee increase, even modest, would significantly worsen this financial strain and could make it infeasible for many graduate students to remain enrolled or complete their programs.

### Lack of Exception or Hardship Provisions:

The policy explicitly states "Exceptions: None." This rigidity could disproportionately affect graduate students, many of whom face variable funding cycles, grant delays, or international visa constraints. A provision for limited exceptions—such as temporary deferments or hardship-based waivers—would provide a safety net without undermining fiscal responsibility.

### Decision-Making Transparency and Student Input:

The policy concentrates approval authority within administrative offices and allows the President (or designee) to approve certain tuition and fee changes without Board review. There is no formal requirement for student consultation or representation during the proposal and review process. Given that tuition and fees directly affect students' ability to continue their studies, the absence of a mechanism for graduate student input is concerning.

### Redefinition of Mandatory vs. Non-Mandatory Fees:

The distinction between "mandatory" and "non-mandatory" fees could be used to reclassify existing program costs as mandatory, effectively increasing the total cost of attendance. Clarifying this distinction—and requiring justification for new or reclassified mandatory fees—would improve transparency and protect students from unexpected increases.

This policy sets out the process for making changes to tuition, fees, and charges, but does not influence whether they are increased or by how much.

The URI Board of Trustees is committed to maintaining affordability and broad access to educational opportunities while also promoting sound management of the University's fiscal resources.

Market analysis may include, but is not limited to, consideration of peer comparisons and the job market for graduates from the program.

As a result of comments submitted, the policy definitions of *tuition*, *mandatory fees* and *non-mandatory fees* were adjusted to better convey their respective uses.

As a result of comments submitted, the policy text was edited to specify that all changes relating to an upcoming fall semester will be published no later than March 15.

**Comment #2 (continued)**

Recommendations for Improvement

- Define clearer guardrails for differential tuition, such as requiring justification linked to measurable program costs and setting an annual review cap to prevent excessive increases.
- Add a provision for hardship-based exceptions (temporary deferments, tuition waivers, or fee adjustments in extenuating circumstances).
- Include student representation (e.g., through the Graduate Student Association or Student Senate) in the review process for proposed tuition or fee changes before they advance to the Executive Budget Committee.
- Require public posting and justification for any new or reclassified mandatory or differential charges, along with clear advance notice to affected students.
- Specify that assistantship and fellowship tuition coverage must align with any program-specific tuition rates to ensure equitable funding across departments.

Points Needing Clarification

The draft does not indicate how tuition remission or waivers interact with differential charges. Clarification on whether assistantships cover such fees would prevent confusion and financial hardship.

The term “market factors” is broad and subjective; defining its parameters (e.g., regional comparison group, cost basis) would strengthen the policy’s accountability.

**Comment #3**

There is no specification as to when student fees and tuition changes can be made with regard to the calendar year or the academic calendar. There is also no specification as to when students shall be notified of the financial changes before they are incurred. Surprise fees and expense changes are an unnecessary source of anxiety and have a negative impact on those who incur them. These issues have already impacted many members of our graduate student community, and they should be remedied before the final version of this policy is published. Thank you.

As a result of comments submitted, the policy text was edited to specify that all changes relating to an upcoming fall semester will be published no later than March 15.

**Comment #4**

I find it ridiculous that we are even having this discussion. Raising student fees at ALL is a cheap way for the university to pocket more money from its students. And for graduate assistants, who already tow the line between 'student' and 'employee,' the fact that you ask us to pay \$700-\$1,000 per semester is absurd. There is absolutely no reason that these fees should not be included in the tuition - except, of course, how can you convince prospective students to come to URI if you keep raising tuition?

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I (and an increasing number of graduate assistants) see this for what it is: a scam, a way to undercut the small wage increases that we receive, an attempt to squeeze money out of the most vulnerable people at URI. I know the Board would never consider perhaps paying our failing basketball coach less than \$2.4 million dollars in total annual earnings - no, it has to come from the bottom line.

**Comment #5**

The National Education Association of Rhode Island (NEARI) appreciates the chance to offer comments on the Board of Trustees' DRAFT 20250923 CC, titled "Policy on Tuition, Fees, and Charges." As the union for the over 700 Graduate Assistants at URI, student fees have a significant impact on our members.

Financial concerns are critical to our members, with many of our expenses being fixed costs. Our members earn, on average, roughly half of the cost of living for Washington County. In a Spring 2025 survey of 387 URI graduate assistants, roughly 45% of respondents experienced food insecurity and 30% experienced housing insecurity, with 85% of respondents allocating over half of their monthly incomes to rent alone. 42% of respondents reported having to cut the size or skip meals entirely. 92 respondents (nearly 1 in 4) were unable to pay their full amount of rent or mortgage. Any additional or increased fees would require forewarning to be able to afford additional fees for some of our members.

We acknowledge and appreciate the need for a written set of standards concerning the institution of and changes to tuition and fees. We offer the following comments/concerns:

1. The policy lacks a timeline for notifying students of new fees or fee changes, which imposes a burden on our Graduate Assistant members. Our members are on very tight budgets and plan their bills carefully. Students should be given at least six months notice so they can plan accordingly.

2. The policy does not define what a student fee is and how it differs from tuition. While the administration may have a right to impose certain fees, we are opposed to any so-called "fees" that are, in actuality, increases in tuition. We believe all student fees should be clearly designated for specific student services, that such monies should fund only those services rather than general expenditures, and that such services must be distinct from what students obtain through tuition.

We are submitting this comment to provide feedback on the proposed policy. We are not waiving any rights to grieve, demand impact bargaining, or otherwise address actions of the administration in the future.

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