

Dated: October 14, 2005.

Anthony M. Coelho, Jr.,

Acting Director, Office of Federal Advisory Committee Policy.

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; Notice of Closed Meeting

Pursuant to section 10(d) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, as amended (5 U.S.C. Appendix 2), notice is hereby given of the following meeting.

The meeting will be closed to the public in accordance with the provisions set forth in sections 552b(c)(4) and 552b(c)(6), Title 5 U.S.C., as amended. The grant applications and the discussions could disclose confidential trade secrets or commercial property such as patentable material, and personal information concerning individuals associated with the grant applications, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.

Name of Committee: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Special Emphasis Panel Review of Institutional National Research Service Award (T32) and NRSA Short-Term Research Training (T35)

Date: November 15, 2005

Time: 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Agenda: To review and evaluate grant applications.

Place: Nat. Inst. of Environmental Health Sciences, Building 101, Rodbell Auditorium, 111 T. W. Alexander Drive, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709, (Telephone Conference Call).

Contact Person: Leroy Worth, PhD, Scientific Review Administrator, Scientific Review Branch, Division of Extramural Research and Training, Nat. Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, P.O. Box 12233, MD EC-30/Room 3171, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709, 919/541-0670, worth@niehs.nih.gov.

(Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Nos. 90.115, Biometry and Risk Estimation-Health Risks from Environmental Exposures; 93.142, NIEHS Hazardous Waste Worker Health and Safety Training; 93.143, NIEHS Superfund Hazardous Substances-Basic Research and Education; 93.894, Resources and Manpower Development in the Environmental Health Sciences; 93.113, Biological Response in Environmental Health Hazards; 93.114, Applied Toxicological Research and Testing; National Institutes of Health, HHS)

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health

National Institutes of Health Town Hall Meeting on Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Tuition, Fees and Health Insurance Policies

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The purpose of this notice is to announce that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will hold a Town Hall meeting to hear comments and insights concerning possible revisions to certain fiscal policies that govern the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards (NRSA), which comprise institutional training grants (T32 and T34s) and individual fellowships (F30, F31, F32, F33). The meeting which is open to the public will focus primarily on the funding of educational costs such as tuition, fees and health insurance provided through institutional training grants. The meeting will be held November 30, 2005 in the Natcher Conference Center, Room E1/E2 on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland.

Background: NRSA programs currently support over 17,000 predoctoral and postdoctoral research training positions mostly in the nation's academic laboratories. While the budget for the NRSA programs grew smartly during the five years in which the overall appropriation for the NIH was doubled, since fiscal 2003, the last of the growth years, the appropriation for NRSA training programs has grown rather modestly. Given this reality, the NIH must re-examine aspects of its NRSA policies that may not be sustainable in a period of limited budget expansion.

The largest of the NRSA programs funds institutional training grants that use the T32 mechanism to support both pre- and post-doctoral research training. Currently, the direct cost funding of these programs is segmented into four categories: stipend, tuition/fees/health insurance (referred to collectively as tuition), travel, and training related expenses. The funding levels for three of these (stipend, travel, and training related expenses) are stipulated and controlled by NIH, although each can be adjusted as fiscal circumstances and

program needs evolve. The funding for tuition, on the other hand, is not fully controlled by NIH; the funding for tuition is governed by a formula tied to the amount each institution requests for this expense. The formula provides for each T32 trainee the sum of \$3,000 plus sixty percent of the requested tuition in excess of \$3,000. This formula is used to determine the tuition level provided via each competing grant; that level, once established for a given competing grant, is used for the subsequent non-competing renewal awards during the project period. This formula has been employed since fiscal 1996 and has been modified once.

During the five year growth period, the increased funding devoted to NRSA activities was used for meaningful, and long overdue, trainee stipend increases and for covering some of the escalating requests in the tuition category of training grants. However, in fiscal 2004 and 2005, when there was limited NRSA budget growth, the requests and outlays for tuition continued to rise substantially. Barring other adjustments, the continuation of this trend in tuition growth will result in a significant annual decrease in the number of NRSA trainee positions, and to fewer programs supported by T32 training grants. Since these outcomes could have a substantial disruptive effect on biomedical research training, NIH has frozen the tuition expenses on competing renewals of T32 awards in fiscal 2006. (See <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-05-059.html>) Moreover, NIH training officials have decided to study various options for handling the funding of trainee tuition in the future. The goal of this effort is to find an approach that equips the agency both to adjust to budgetary challenges and to continue to provide appropriate support to institutions to help defray the educational costs of NRSA trainees. This town hall meeting is being held to gather the views of the training community on this issue.

Among the options that will be studied are the following:

1. The current tuition formula could be applied in conjunction with a ceiling; the funds provided would be the amount dictated by the currently-used formula or the amount dictated by the ceiling, whichever is less. The magnitude of the ceiling would be based on the fiscal resources available as well as on applicable data. For the sake of discussion, those offering comments may assume the ceiling could be in the range of \$16,000 to \$18,000.

2. A fixed allowance could be provided for tuition; the same allowance per trainee would be provided to each