Student Research Trainees (under AGEP, REU or similar training programs)
Guidance for Research Stipend Payments

Dear Faculty Member:

We are providing this memo to all faculty who will be hosting or overseeing both Rice and non-Rice student research trainees (SRT) receiving stipend support. Adherence to these guidelines and to the goals of the particular program will help ensure Rice preserves the non-employee status of SRT participants. Please take a few minutes to review this memo, which will familiarize you with the rules applicable to these SRT participants.

Background

Whether through AGEP, a Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) award, or similar training program, Rice hosts numerous initiatives designed to expand student participation in scientific and academic research. The SRT experience is intended primarily, and funded for the purpose of, providing an educational training experience for students (normally undergraduates) who might be interested in entering or continuing study in certain fields. By integrating research and education, these initiatives attempt to attract a diversified pool of talented students into certain targeted career paths, including teaching and research. The focus of these programs is not to provide employees to Rice or employment to the SRT, but to provide valuable educational experiences for these students through participation in university-level research efforts.

The stipends paid to SRT participants are not intended as wages and are not considered as being in exchange for services performed. These monies are provided as training/education stipends to allow students to forgo actual employment opportunities in favor of participating in university research and education programs. In order to distinguish them from visiting students whose research efforts primarily benefit Rice, these individuals are classified as SRT's or Student Research Trainees.

To preserve the non-employee status of SRT's, please follow these guidelines:

1) The primary purpose of the stipends under these programs should be to further the education and training of the recipient rather than payment for past, present or future services rendered to Rice. These students should not be viewed as performing required services for Rice’s benefit in exchange for their financial support.

2) The focus of the SRT experience should be on the experience provided to them and not on results of any research by them. The expectation is that these SRT’s will receive research experience by allowing them to join a research group and work closely with faculty and other students. Thus, these programs will, in accordance with their respective grants, provide orientation sessions, guest lectures, student presentations, social interactions and other professional development activities.

No “work” assignment is required or implied and an employment status is not intended. No payments should be withheld based on results, though further stipends can be discontinued if the student withdraws from the program. Other than their participation in the program, SRT students should not be required to provide Rice a particular product or result (what tax laws refer to as “a substantial quid pro quo”) in order to receive stipend payments.

3) Because SRT participants are not Rice “workers”, they should not be used directly to provide a work product required by a Rice research grant or a sponsored research project.

4) The schedule (or time present) for SRT’s should be determined by the elements of the program, and it is not intended that it an SRT’s schedule necessarily resemble the (work) schedule of paid research staff.

5) Stipend payments will be determined by the grant source and, because SRT’s are not employees, the stipends should not be determined by comparing their amount to the salary that might be received by paid research staff.

6) SRT’s should not be characterized as staff members nor accorded employee benefits.

To reiterate, tax laws, internal Rice procedures and applicable grant conditions do not permit Rice to treat these students as employees who are providing services in exchange for wages. If you have any questions regarding the appropriateness of this administrative procedure or practice, please contact your dean’s office.