

Report on the Teaching Associate Fee Waiver Program, Fall 2002 to Spring 2004

Summary

San Jose State University began offering partial and complete waivers of student fees for Teaching Associates in the Fall of 2002 with the passage of the Teaching Associate Fee Waivers (TAFW) policy resolution by the Academic Senate (F01-03) and the signing of the resolution into policy by then President Robert Caret. This report is a review of the impact of the TAFW program during its first two years of operation as called for in the TAFW policy. The implementation of the policy has been reasonably smooth. Chairs of departments that use Teaching Associates and Teaching Associates themselves report many benefits of the TAFW program. The cost of the program has risen as both campus and miscellaneous fees have gone up and as the number of Teaching Associates employed on campus has increased. The fraction of total campus FTEF that Teaching Associates contribute has risen to approximately 3%. The benefits of the program to SJSU include increasing the number of course sections able to be offered, increasing FTES and decreasing time to graduation. The program has also enhanced SJSU graduate programs by improving on-campus employment and career development opportunities for current graduate students and making graduate programs more attractive to prospective students. As the benefits to SJSU's educational program outweigh the waiver's cost, it is recommended that the program be continued with only minor changes.

Recommendations

Given its alignment with university mission, the benefits to the university overall and the benefits to the graduate program in particular, the Teaching Associate Fee Waiver program should be continued with the following minor changes. It would be sufficient to review the program every five years rather than every two as the policy now calls for. Also, the present threshold of 3.0% of Teaching Associate FTEF as a percentage of total campus FTEF – which upon exceeding the program is sent into early re-evaluation – should be raised to 4.0% to acknowledge the new annual average number of the Teaching Associate since the establishment of the waiver, and so that the program does not routinely exceed its threshold and require special review. Finally, the current policy requires the percent Teaching Associate FTEF be evaluated every semester. It is recommended that the evaluation be carried out instead only once per year using annualized FTEF figures to conform more closely with standard practices of institutional research at SJSU.

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10. Projected Future Costs of the Teaching Associate Fee Waiver program

What is the SJSU Teaching Associate Fee Waiver program?

Teaching Associates primarily assist with the teaching of lower-division courses or the laboratory sections of large lower-division courses. In contrast to Graduate Assistants, Teaching Associates may, under a faculty member's supervision, also be the instructor of record (See Academic Senate Policy S99-2). Teaching Associates are evaluated both by the supervising faculty member and by their students using the standard SOTE surveys. The fee waiver program grants waivers to matriculated graduate students who are appointed and paid as Teaching Associates at SJSU, during the semester they teach, of mandatory campus and miscellaneous fees and state university fees equal to the "graduate 1.0 to 6.0 units" California resident rate if they have a fractional hiring time of 0.1 to 0.2 (one course). Teaching Associates with a fractional hiring time greater than 0.2 (two or more courses) receive a waiver equal to the "graduate 6.1 or more units" resident rate.

The justification for offering fee waivers to Teaching Associates

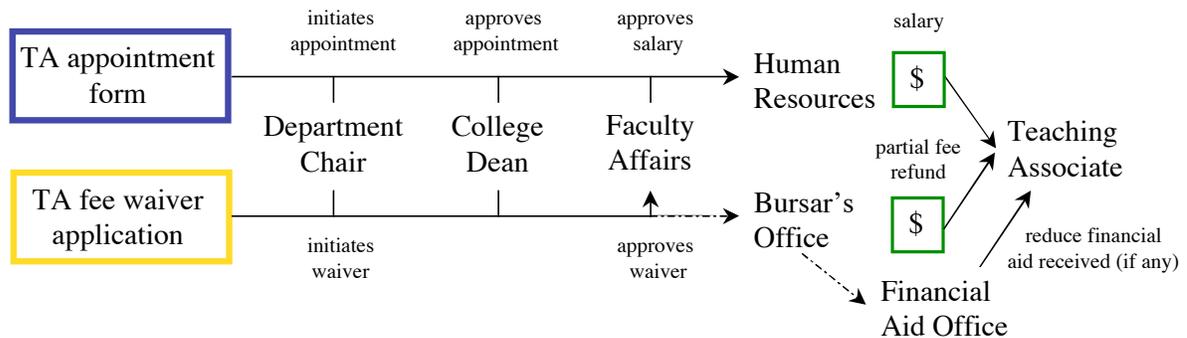
The TAFW program was established as part of SJSU's continuing commitment to achieving excellence in its graduate programs, to aid in SJSU's recruitment and retention of the best graduate students, and in recognition of the important service provided by Teaching Associates at SJSU. Teaching Associates

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contribute to the mission of SJSU in several ways. They often provide enthusiastic and academically strong role models who as a group match more closely the age, gender and ethnic distribution of SJSU undergraduates. Teaching is a valuable educational experience for graduate students as many of them aspire to academic careers. Serving as a Teaching Associate may also forge a closer bond between Teaching Associates and SJSU and bring Teaching Associates closer to their chosen academic field. Many SJSU graduate students, however, have few means of obtaining adequate financial assistance on campus and so must seek employment off-campus. Their off-campus work is often unconnected to their academic field or career aspirations, and sometimes precludes graduate students' more active involvement with their academic program on campus. For SJSU graduate programs the high cost of living makes recruiting the best graduate students difficult in the best of circumstances; constrained Department budgets further limit graduate student scholarships and salaries, aggravating an already difficult situation. Fee waivers assist in the recruitment and retention of the highest quality graduate students, strengthening graduate and research programs at SJSU. Finally, other student populations at SJSU receive fee waivers (some exchange students and some student athletes) and Teaching Associates at several other CSU campuses receive fee waivers, setting precedent for the use of fee waivers programs to support campus priorities. The SJSU Academic Senate and former President Caret established the fee waiver for program largely for these reasons.

How the fee waiver program has been implemented

Departments select graduate students to be Teaching Associates by a combination of academic record, faculty recommendation, interview, and classroom observation¹. Chairs set the salaries that Teaching Associates receive (currently ranging from \$2008 to \$4721 per 3 unit course, with an average of \$3078)². These salaries generally come from the Department's discretionary salaries budget but are in some cases paid using funds from external grants. Once a Chair has identified Teaching Associates to hire and set their salary, appointment forms are sent with fee waiver applications via the appropriate Dean's office to the Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA). The OFA checks that the Teaching Associate appointment is within allowable limits (0.4 FTEF for lecture sections; 0.53 FTEF for laboratory sections) and that that salary offered is within the range set by the CSU contract, and records the appointment of the Teaching Associate. The OFA records the name of the Teaching Associate, employee ID, the department employing the Teaching Associate, the fraction of full-time equivalent (FTE) of the appointment, and the date that the fee waiver application was sent to the Bursar's office. The OFA sends the appointment forms ('profiles') to Human Resources to complete the appointment. The Bursar's office notifies the Financial Aid Office of Teaching Associates receiving waivers in case the Teaching Associate is also receiving financial aid; if so, the financial aid package is reduced to reflect the fees waived. As students have already paid their fees by this point in the semester, a check corresponding to the amount of the waiver is sent as a refund to each student mid-semester or as late as the end of the semester.



¹ The C&R committee's "Survey of Chairs of departments that use Teaching Associates", March 26, 2004. Cover letter and informed consent material was included and approved by IRB, 4/16/04.

² The CSU salary schedule collective bargaining ID R11 (July, 2002 contract); Step 1 on the Teaching Associate salary scale = \$3078 / 3 unit course.

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Early feedback from Chairs (2002 survey)

Near the end of the Fall 2002 semester – the first semester the Teaching Associate fee waiver was offered – Chairs of all SJSU departments were surveyed about their usage of Teaching Associates and their opinions on the fee waiver program³. 37 of 58 surveys were returned (64%) with 16 from the 19 departments using Teaching Associates (84% of all using TAs), and 21 from those not (70% of all those *not* using TAs). This survey asked “Have you employed Teaching Associates in your Department this semester? If not why not?”. Reasons given for why departments don’t use Teaching Associates varied considerably but included the following, each given by between one and three survey respondents (n=21): (1) no (or very few) graduate students in the department, (2) no courses appropriate (in size or subject matter) for a TA to teach, (3) a belief that their students are not qualified to be TAs or that it is not appropriate to use TAs at SJSU, (4) College or Department policy or accreditation requirements prohibiting usage of TAs, (5) insufficient Department resources to pay the salary of TAs.

Chairs of Departments that *do* use Teaching Associates (n=15) were asked about their agreement or disagreement with various statements about Teaching Associates or the fee waiver program with (1) indicating strong disagreement, (3) indicating neutrality, and (5) indicating strong agreement. The statements, ranked by increasing agreement were as follows (with the mean numerical reply given in parentheses afterward):

- Having fee waivers for graduate Teaching Associates...
- (a) has allowed us greater flexibility in managing faculty workload and release time (3.7)
 - (b) has **NOT** been a significant administrative burden for my department or me (3.9)
 - (c) has allowed our TAs to work fewer hours off campus (3.9)
 - (d) has helped us recruit and/or retain high quality graduate students who otherwise might not have been able to afford to join or remain in our graduate program (4.0)
 - (e) has enhanced the educational experience of students in our department (4.1)
 - (f) is an appropriate acknowledgement of the contribution TAs make (4.6)

These Chairs generally wrote in comments expressing appreciation for the program and the opinion that it would strengthen their graduate program. A few Chairs expressed a wish for the fee waiver to apply to Graduate Assistants and/or Research Assistants, or for the fee waivers for Teaching Associates who are international students to be fully waived rather than being refunded only at the California resident fee level.

Feedback from Teaching Associates receiving fee waivers (2004 survey)

Several follow-up surveys were given two years later to examine the perceived effectiveness of the program, identify any areas needing improvement, and examine more closely the reasons why a department may choose to (or choose not to) use Teaching Associates (simply so the reasoning could be understood better). One survey was made particularly for Teaching Associates receiving the waiver⁴. Surveys were sent to Chairs to distribute to the Teaching Associates in their departments. Teaching Associates were asked several questions yes / no questions about their experience as Teaching Associates and their opinions on the waiver program. Nineteen Teaching Associates responded to the survey of the 80 surveys distributed (a 25% response rate). Questions are ranked based on increasing number of ‘yes’ responses.

(a) Without the fee waiver would you still have worked as a TA?	8 yes	9 don’t know	2 no
(b) Do your career plans include teaching or academics?	12 yes	5 don’t know	2 no
(c) Without the fee waiver would you have had to work off campus?	13 yes		6 no
If so, about how much (more)?: 8 to 20 hrs (mean = 15.7 hrs)			
(d) Has working as a TA improved your performance in your courses?	15 yes	2 don’t know	2 no
(e) Are you involved in research or other thesis work on campus?	16 yes		3 no
(f) Has receiving the fee waiver helped you remain in your program?	17 yes	1 don’t know	1 no
(g) Working as a TA, do you feel a stronger connection with SJSU?	18 yes	1 don’t know	
(h) Working as a TA, do you feel more committed to your acad. field?	19 yes		

³ The C&R committee’s “Survey on the Teaching Associate Fee Waiver Program”, November 20, 2002.

⁴ The C&R committee’s “Survey of Teaching Associates receiving the TA fee waiver”, March 26, 2004.

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Many Teaching Associates responded to the invitation for comment on the program. Eight expressed appreciation for the program, especially in the face of rising student fees, and the hope that the program continues. Two were unhappy that it can take until the end of the semester for the reimbursement check for the waived fees to arrive. Two suggested that the program also cover the non-resident portion of fees.

Feedback from Chairs of departments that do use Teaching Associates (2004 survey)

A survey was made for those Chairs whose departments *do* use Teaching Associates⁵ Chairs were asked a similar set of questions as in the 2002 survey about their agreement or disagreement with various statements about Teaching Associates or the fee waiver program with (1) indicating strong disagreement, (3) indicating neutrality, and (5) indicating strong agreement. The statements are ranked below by increasing agreement (with the mean numerical reply given in parentheses afterward):. Fourteen Chairs responded to the survey of 23 departments that use Teaching Associates (61% response rate).

Having fee waivers for graduate Teaching Associates...

- (a) has allowed you to appoint TAs who increase the diversity of your teaching staff (3.5)
- (b) has allowed us greater flexibility in managing faculty workload and release time (3.7)
- (c) has **NOT** been a significant administrative burden for my department or me (4.2)
- (d) has allowed our TAs to work fewer hours off campus (4.3)
- (e) has helped us recruit and/or retain high quality graduate students who otherwise might not have been able to afford to join or remain in our graduate program (4.3)
- (f) has enhanced the educational experience of students in our department (4.3)
- (g) is an appropriate acknowledgement of the contribution TAs make (4.8)

These responses are all above 'neutral' on average, and aside from the first question (which wasn't asked on the 2002 survey) are all about 0.3 points higher two years into the program while maintaining exactly the same order (based on strength of agreement). This could be interpreted as an overall satisfaction with the program and a recognition that the program is serving the purpose it was established to accomplish.

Two additional questions with yes / no answers received about twice as many Chairs agreeing with them as not. Asked whether the TAFW program has allowed their department to offer course sections that otherwise would not be possible to offer, 12 agreed, 5 disagreed and 1 did not answer. Asked whether the TAFW program had allowed them to hire better-qualified Teaching Associates, eight agreed, four disagreed, and two did not answer.

As the intentions of Chairs to increase their use of Teaching Associates in the future is of interest, Chairs were asked with three saying they would, eight saying they wouldn't, and three saying they didn't know.

Asked about the impact the elimination of the TAFW program would likely have on their department, seven Chairs said they would have fewer or less capable students enroll in their masters program or those students in the program would likely be less involved in research due to off-campus commitments. Five Chairs indicated that they would need to reduce the number of course sections offered. Two said there would be no impact. One Chair didn't know what the impact would be.

Asked about how they would prefer a limited number of fee waivers to be allocated if their number had to be capped, six Chairs indicated a preference for ranking of Teaching Associates by Chairs, four believed in using the Teaching Associates' GPA, two believed financial need should be taken into account, 1 that seniority among Teaching Associates and one each said none of the above or didn't respond.

Comments by Chairs reiterated the points made above and occasionally called for the expansion of the program to include the additional fees paid by out-of-state or international students which are not currently waived. Others expressed an interest in the fee waivers be applicable to research students as well.

⁵ The C&R committee's "Survey of Chairs of departments that use Teaching Associates", March 26, 2004. Cover letter and informed consent material was included and approved by IRB, 4/16/04.

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Feedback from Chairs in departments that *don't* use Teaching Associates (2004 survey)

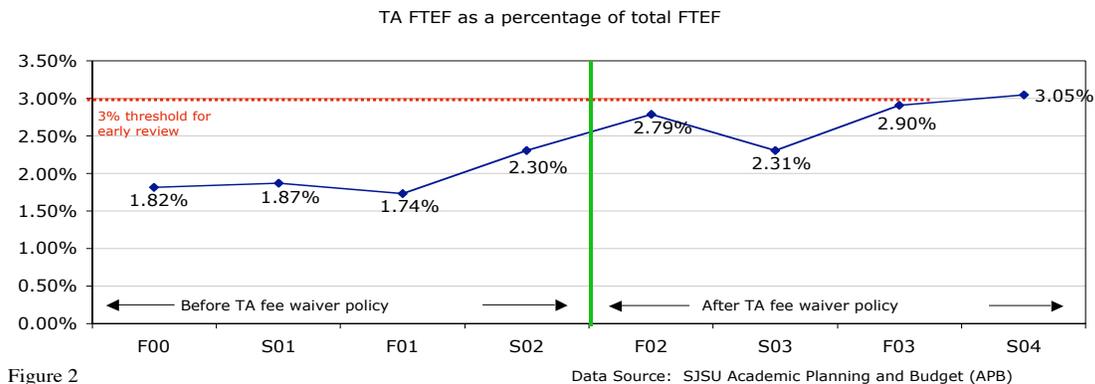
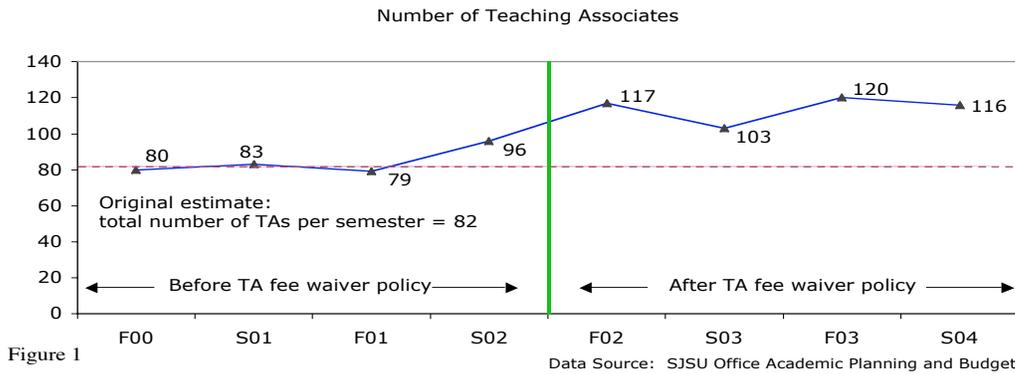
A separate survey was made particularly for those Chairs whose department's *don't* use TAs⁶. Chairs were asked to rank from most important to least important the reasons that explain why their department doesn't use Teaching Associates (1 = most important reason). They were asked also to cross out or leave unranked any reasons that don't factor into their decision not to use Teaching Associates. Twenty Chairs responded to the survey (of 38 departments that don't use Teaching Associates (39% response rate).

(a) We don't have funds to pay TA salaries:	10 first/second, 1 third+, 9 not a factor
(b) We prefer to use Lecturers:	8 first/second, 3 third+, 9 not a factor
(c) We have no courses for which a TA would be appropriate:	7 first/second, 1 third+, 12 not a factor
(d) We have no graduate students:	3 first/second, 17 not a factor
(e) We have accreditation rules that disallow the use of TAs:	2 first/second, 2 third+, 16 not a factor
(f) We believe the use of TAs is inappropriate	1 first/second, 3 third+, 16 not a factor

An open request for anything else they would like to say about the TA fee waiver program received the following opinions: (a) the waiver program should cover Graduate Assistants and Student Assistants as well, (b) the fee waiver program should cover all graduate students, (c) we offer grant-funded tutoring, and (d) it is inappropriate for graduate students who are not PhD. candidates to teach courses at SJSU.

Changes in Teaching Associate usage over last four years

During both the Fall 2000 and Spring 2001 semesters there were 80 and 83 Teaching Associates on record with the Office of Faculty Affairs at SJSU⁷. During the first four semesters of the fee waiver program the numbers rose to between 103 and 120 with an average of 114 (a 35% increase; Figure 1). The proportion of Teaching Associate FTEF as a fraction of total campus FTEF has increased accordingly, reaching the threshold set in the policy for review of the TAFW program in Spring 2004 (Figure 2).



⁶ The C&R committee's "Survey of Chairs of departments that *don't* use Teaching Associates, March 26, 2004. Cover letter and informed consent material was included and approved by IRB, 4/16/04.

⁷ Office of Academic Planning and Budget (APB)

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To put this in perspective, at the peak usage (Fall 2003) 2.7% of all matriculated graduate students served as Teaching Associates⁸. During that same semester Teaching Associates consisted of 2.90% of the total FTEF at SJSU (Figure 2).

The rise in Teaching Associates comes from several sources. Some Departments that didn't use Teaching Associates before have begun to use them. Some Departments have begun to use more. And some Departments may have 'upgraded' positions that formerly called for a Graduate Assistant to those that now call for a Teaching Associate. It may also be that with the Department budget cuts that coincided with the first two years of the fee waiver program, hiring Teaching Associates helped some Chairs to maintain their FTES on their more limited budgets.

Cost of Teaching Associate Fee Waiver program

The original estimates of costs for the cost of the program (not considering any compensatory savings or FTES revenue) were based on the assumptions of constant number of Teaching Associates each year (82 with up to a 0.2 appointment, 53 with a greater than 0.2 appointment) and the mandatory state and miscellaneous fees charged to California state residents the 2000-01 academic year (\$678 for 1.0-6.0 units; \$993 for 6.1 or more units). The program was calculated to reduce fee revenues by \$107,293 per year.

Actual costs to date are higher due to the increase in number of Teaching Associates (Figure 1), the number of Teaching Associate fee waivers granted (Figure 3), the increase in percentage of Teaching Associates applying for waivers (Figure 4), and the increase in student fees (Figure 5). The confluence of these factors has meant that the total cost of the program has risen (Figure 6).

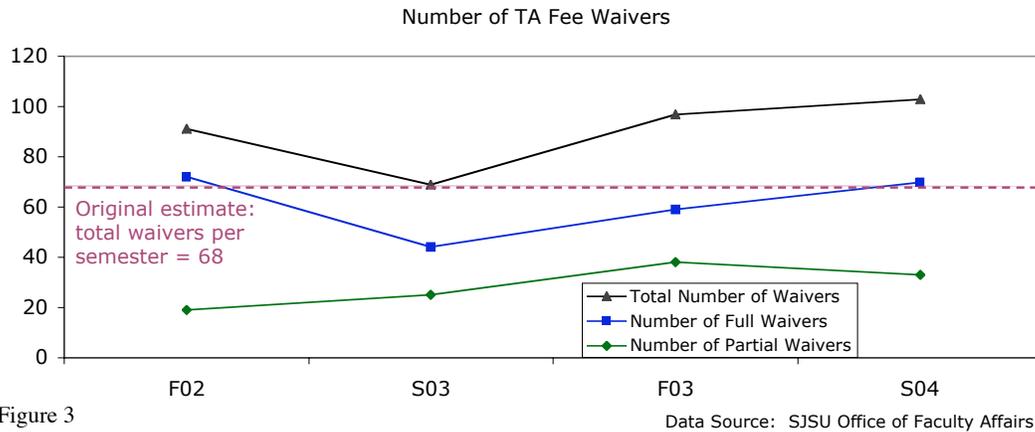


Figure 3

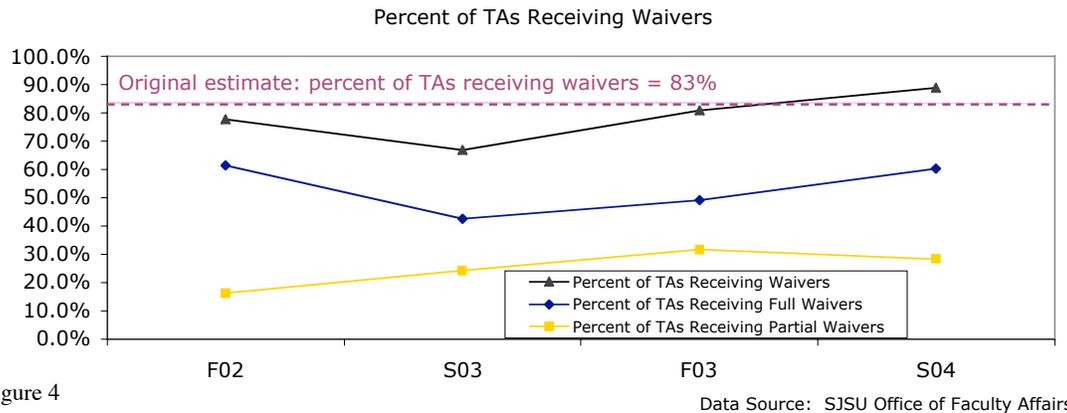


Figure 4

⁸ Office of Academic Planning and Budget: Total number of graduate students Spring 2004 = 6225. For comparison, there were 4256 graduate students in Fall 2000.

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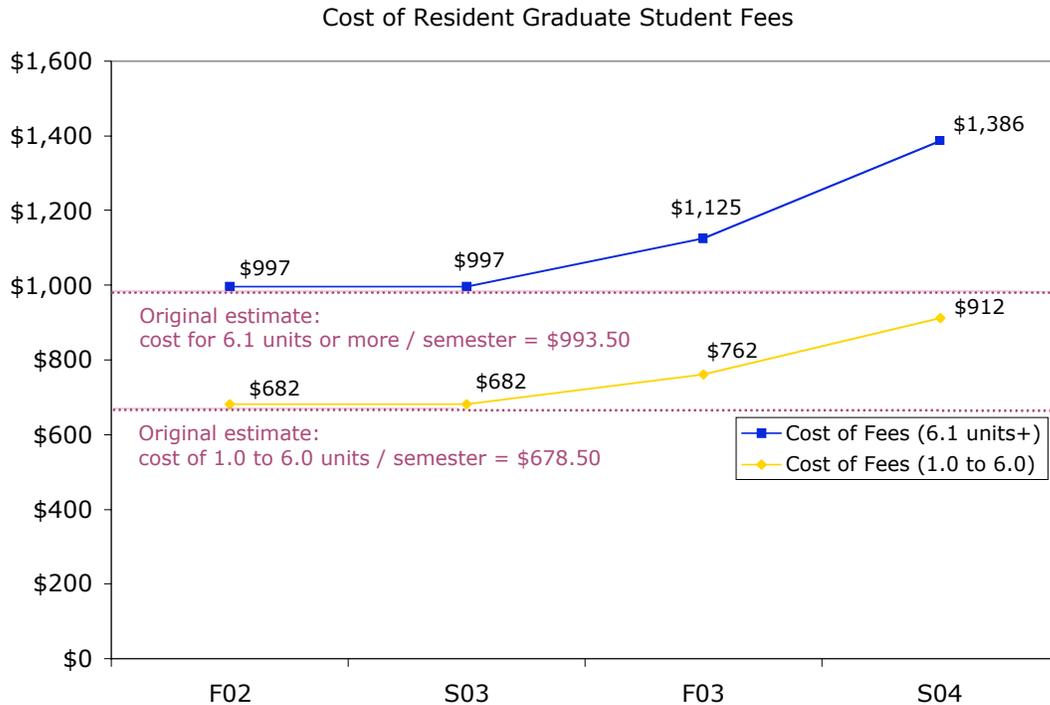


Figure 5

Data Source: SJSU Office of Faculty Affairs

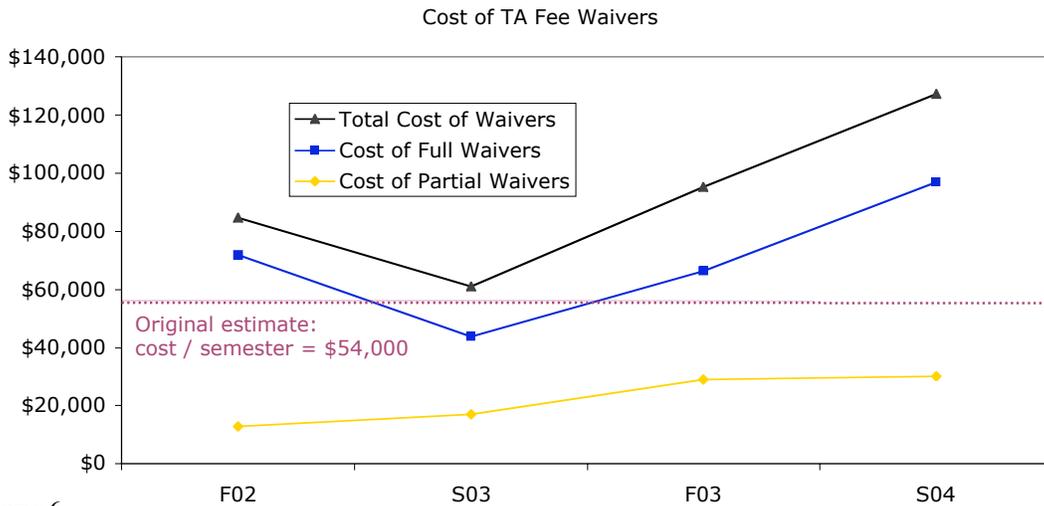


Figure 6

Data Source: SJSU Office of Faculty Affairs

To put these costs in perspective, during the semester of peak cost (Spring 2004), the TAFW program was 0.28% of the Faculty/Librarian salaries fraction of the Academic Affairs budget⁹. While it might be preferable to express the cost of the TAFW program as a fraction of the campus “discretionary” budget, the determination of the latter is very difficult and, in any case, seems to vary substantially from year to year.

⁹ Office of Academic Planning and Budget: Average annual cost of TAFW program, '02-'03 to '03-'04 (\$184,040) / Average annual faculty/librarian salary budget in Academic Affairs division (\$65,927,525), '00-'01 to '03-'04 budget years.

Compensatory revenue and savings brought by the Teaching Associate Fee Waiver program

Though the TAFW program was understood at its inception to be a program that would entail costs and that the costs were balanced by the many benefits the program would provide to SJSU, primarily in advancing the institution’s primary mission and particularly in enhancing its graduate programs, the program does bring compensatory revenue and cost savings that should be acknowledged in an accounting of the net costs of the program. To the extent that the program increases the number of graduate students recruited and retained by SJSU, these graduate students bring FTES reimbursements to the campus. Moreover, to the extent that these Teaching Associates allow sections of courses to be offered that would not otherwise be taught, they are responsible for helping the university reach its enrollment targets and the FTES-derived funding that accompanies that. Finally, to the extent that the course sections lead by Teaching Associates would otherwise need to be covered by a Lecturer or T/TT faculty member, the costs of offering the same course sections would be significantly higher assuming replacement costs of approximately \$4600 for a 3 unit course (Figure 7)¹⁰.

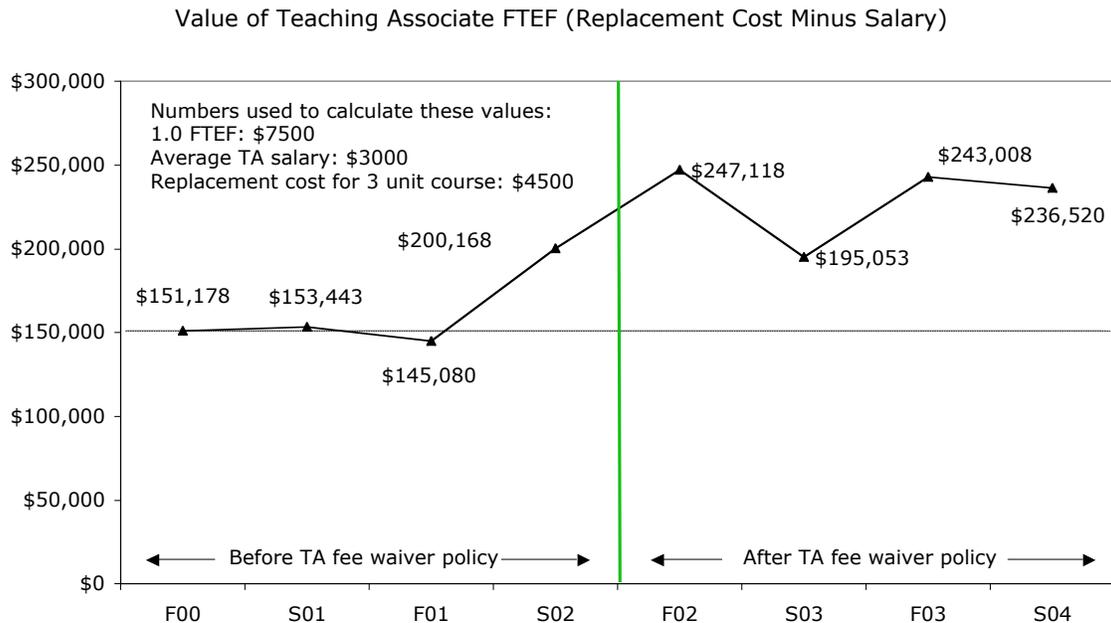


Figure 7

Data Source: SJSU Academic Planning & Budget (APR)

Teaching by Teaching Associates at SJSU, while unlikely to ever approach the prevalence seen at doctorate-granting institutions, is acknowledged and sanctioned by SJSU Policy Resolution S99-2 and recognized as a valuable contribution to the university by Policy Resolution F01-3. Whatever off-setting financial benefits the TAFW program may have, though, it is solely to the extent that the program supports the mission of the University that it should be supported.

Projected Future Costs of the Teaching Associate Fee Waiver program

While fees have risen sharply in recent years, there are no reliable projections for how much fees will rise in the years ahead. The cost of the TAFW program is expected to increase as mandatory state and miscellaneous fees increase. The number of Teaching Associates has been reasonably stable since the establishment of the waiver program (Figure 1) but could also increase as the value of the fee waiver increases. The number of waivers granted each year could be capped though this would be accompanied by administrative challenges and expenses as waivers would need to be allocated on one basis or another. The rise in number of waivers granted could be slowed by increasing the eligibility requirements for the waiver. Finally, while the percentage of Teaching Associates applying for the waiver seems to have leveled off, it could increase by up to 17% (Figure 6) which would increase the cost of the program.

¹⁰ Replacement cost is set by the Chancellor’s office.