

Historically, Alberta's research universities have levied comparatively low non-instructional fees and focused those fees on additional services that are beyond the normal campus experience. These fees were implemented after consultation with students and a student referendum. That accountability is in jeopardy as these universities are moving to levy unjustified mandatory fees that add no value to the student experience, taking advantage of the legal loophole the present regulation and guidelines have left open.

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) believes the Government of Alberta should immediately pass a regulation that covers non-instructional fees, providing limits and collegial mechanisms to govern the creation and increase of those fees, as well as a clear delineation between fees governed by the Tuition Fee Policy and those that are not.

## What should be a non-instructional fee?

Either within the present *Tuition Fees Regulation* or a new non-instructional fees regulation, the definition of both tuition and non-instructional fees should be clearly established. CAUS believes the present, vague guidelines - fees for services or materials beyond that for instruction should be considered a non-instructional fee - provide a base direction for the future policy:

- Tuition and operating funding should provide for a learning environment on campus;
- Non-instructional fees should be levied on non-instruction items;
- Fees for work placements for which provincial funding has not been provided; and
- Non-instructional fees should adhere strictly to a cost-recovery model
- Non-instructional fees should only be levied following consultation with the students' council and a campus-wide student referendum.

## TUITION AND OPERATING FUNDS SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Academic faculty and the support staff to academic departments;
- Construction, maintenance, operation and staff for classrooms, laboratories, libraries, study space and other academic buildings and spaces;
- Information technology equipment, computer labs, internet access, local network access and e-mail;
- Academic advice, support and counseling;
- Any equipment, material and instrument used during instruction but is not retained by the student; and
- Basic safety, risk management and insurance for the academic activities of the campus and campus community.

## NON-INSTRUCTIONAL FEES MAY INCLUDE:

- Students' union and association fees;
- Equipment and materials retained by the student including breakage fees;
- Fees for work placements for which provincial funding has not been provided;
- Travel costs for field trips and/or practicums;
- Visa student differential fees charged to international students;
- Recreation and athletic activities;
- Institutional health and/or dental coverage fees;
- Universal transit passes;
- Graduation, parchment replacement and/or transcript fees;
- Student card and/or yearbook fees;
- Prior learning assessment fees; and
- Construction and operation of students' centres and other non-academic buildings that is managed or fully or partially owned by a students' council.

These items are materials or services beyond the provision of a safe and productive academic environment. New non-instructional fees should be levied for new non-instructional materials or services, not as a backdoor tuition increase.

A reasonable case should be made on what new services or materials will be provided by a new non-instructional fee, and that case forwarded to students to vote on.

### Establishing and increasing non-instructional fees

Non-instructional fees have all been best served by being joint or student-led initiatives, culminating in a campus-wide referendum or with students involved.

CAUS believes that this tradition should be formalized within regulation, proposing that all new fees and increases beyond CPI go to a campus-wide referendum.

Such a referendum could come as a question approved by the council of the student organization or by a student petition as specified by the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, and would typically come following consultation and negotiation by the students' union or association, the institution and the party providing the service or materials, if applicable. This process has provided the framework for dozens of new services on our campuses and has showcased the student bodies on our campuses as being reasonable and able to make wise decisions that have an impact not just on their cohort, but beyond.

Inflationary increases to non-instructional fees would not be subject to the same standard. Increases measured against the consumer price index could bypass a referendum or students' council vote and be approved directly by an institution's board of governors, depending on the governing authority of the fee.

Past practices prior to the 2010/11 academic year have been done with the spirit, if not the letter, of our proposals in mind. As long as they meet the standard of being a non-instructional fee, existing fees should be considered exempt from a referendum to re-establish the fee, although increases above CPI should still be subject to a referendum.

### Students' union fees under the regulation

The *Post-Secondary Learning Act* states the council of a student organization may make bylaws governing the maintenance of the association by the levy of membership fees on its members. A regulation clarifying powers for a board of governors to levy non-instructional fees could provide clarification to fees administered by students' unions and associations as well.

All three of CAUS' members as well as the graduate students' associations on our campuses already apply a standard equal to or more rigorous than the one detailed above. Harmonizing practices would be appropriate, as long as the regulation allowed the autonomy for more rigorous standards.

### Amending the Tuition Fees Regulation and Post-Secondary Learning Act to ensure clarity and affordability

Requests from Alberta's institutions to look at tuition and non-instructional fees has forced the Government of Alberta to look at the legislation, regulations and policies around revenue at our institutions, however these rules are being revisited only to increase the cost of education in Alberta.

CAUS has been concerned over the rising cost of education despite the renewed government commitment to keep the cost from becoming a barrier. Tuition in Alberta remains the third highest in the country and the proposals to increase tuition in specific programs and introduce dramatically high non-instructional fees will only exacerbate the problem.

CAUS believes it is an ideal time to place the CPI limit on tuition increases in the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, as well as to keep the principle of keeping the total cost of university education affordable for Albertans. Technical details of both tuition and non-instructional fees can and should be put into regulation, but the principle of the *Tuition Fee Regulation* should be firmly put into legislation.

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