



November 18, 2010

The Honourable Doug Horner, MLA
Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology
324 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
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Dear Deputy Premier:

Last spring, our councils raised united concern that two of Alberta's institutions, the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, created new substantial non-instructional mandatory fees. These fees were proposed and subsequently implemented without sufficient consultation or approval from the student body.

In both cases, the new fees did not provide a new service to students, but helped cover operating deficits of their respective institutions. This violated the spirit and intent of *Tuition Fee Policy Guide*, which provides clear guidance that non-instructional fees can only be used to cover costs of providing services outside the *Public Post-Secondary Institutions' Tuition Fees Regulation*.

In effect, these new fees are tuition fee increases by another name. These fee increases were the largest in Canada, and saw Alberta undergraduate students paying an average of \$183 more and graduate students paying \$166 more than the previous year.

There exists a legal loophole through which institutions can easily increase fees in this manner, so long as they do not identify them as instructional. Institutions may increase fees in this manner without limit and without consulting students or their representative associations. Today, all three of our organizations are calling on you to close the loophole and regulate non-instructional fees.

First, it is essential that the *Public Post-Secondary Institutions' Tuition Fees Regulation* clearly reference and define its two primary components: what constitutes a non-instructional fee, and what constitutes tuition. Clarity on these matters ensure that all parties know where the boundaries between the tuition fee policy and non-instructional fee regulation.

We believe that the best way of approving new non-instructional fees is through consultation with and approval from the affected students. This impacts existing fees and new fees differently. Wherever possible, increases to existing non-instructional fees should not exceed inflation. Student negotiations, as well as referenda are already the established norm for raising fees other than tuition and we feel entrenching this practice would offer the proper balance you, as Minister, requested: they ensure new and existing fees have a method of increasing and that students are the final judges of the value these fees offer.

In an effort to ensure accountability and legitimacy surrounding fees charged to students, it is imperative that any new fee or fee increase would be subject to student approval. Our recommendation would allow this to be done in one of two ways. First, should an institution wish to implement a fee or increase it beyond a previously negotiated amount, the administration of that institution and the Students' Council (or delegates) would negotiate and ultimately implement a mutually agreeable decision. Should these negotiations break down, or the Students' Council not wish to make the decision, the proposal would be deferred to a referendum vote. The combination of these methods would ensure not only much needed flexibility but also it would encourage a collaborative working relationship between students and institutions.

We understand that fees may need to increase, due to inflationary pressure or other foreseeable reasons. As such, it is imperative that future increases to new and existing fees be clearly articulated at the point of approval. If such increases will exceed CPI, the proposal for the fee must clearly outline the reason for the fee, the duration of the fee and the year-to-year increases in the fee. A consistent, fair fee escalator must be included in the policy to ensure equity based on a student's program duration and status as a full or part-time student.

Any regulation must also ensure that collaborative students are treated fairly and are not levied similar fees from multiple institutions. The agreements governing the collaborative programs should make clear which fees from each institution will be applied and under no circumstances should a student pay similar non-instructional fees twice.

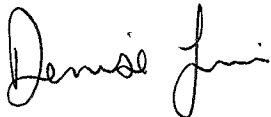
Minister Horner, you clearly stated that any regulation governing non-instructional fees should also govern the fees our students' associations levy on our members. We concur and believe that student body approval through referenda is the best way to regulate our fees. By always going to referenda for increases beyond CPI or the establishment of new fees our constituents would have the ultimate say in what our council can levy. This would also uphold the spirit of collegiality and the precedent of student approval for fees outside of tuition.

In summary, AGC, ASEC and CAUS jointly request that you regulate non-instructional mandatory fees at Alberta's public institutions, and that the regulation:

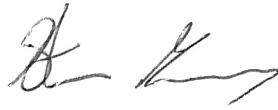
- Clearly identify what fees are non-instructional and considered outside of the framework established in the *Public Post-Secondary Institutions' Tuition Fees Regulation*;
- Require any new non-instructional mandatory fee to be presented to the Students' Council for either approval or to be deferred to referendum of affected students;
- Require increases beyond the consumer price index of existing non-instructional mandatory fee be approved by the affected students' council or deferred to a referendum of affected students;
- Require that any new fee articulate the reason for the fee, the duration of the fee and the year-to-year increases of the fee; and
- Ensure collaborative students are not levied similar fees from multiple institutions.

We look forward to your response and to a regulation covering non-instructional mandatory fees at our institutions.

Yours Sincerely,



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