

December 7, 2010

RE: Withholding Student Union Membership Fees

Dear Dr. Runte:

We are writing to voice our strong and collective opposition to Carleton's administrative decision to withhold membership fees from the Carleton University Students' Association (CUSA) and the Carleton University Graduate Students' Association (GSA).

Democratically established *by students*, the fees collected by Carleton University are held in trust for students' unions. Without them, student unions will find themselves unable to fulfill their mandate, namely to provide the services and support that are paid by students, for students. As a direct consequence of your decision, such important programs as the food bank, safe walk program, and health and dental plans are currently at risk. In addition to ensuring a satisfactory student experience, the availability of these services is vital to many students' success as learners, teachers, and researchers. As such, we find it unacceptable that you would use membership fees as a means of leveraging concessions from students.

In addition to refusing to remit fees, your administration and the Carleton University Board of Governors voted in a public meeting to continue to withhold fees until the students' unions agree to sign new fee agreements that are not in the interests of their members. By putting students under duress and attempting to use that duress as leverage in negotiations, your administration has taken an unprincipled approach which calls into question the very autonomy of student unions.

In solidarity with our sister locals, we strongly urge your administration to reverse its stance on membership fees, to immediately release any fees withheld from CUSA and the GSA, and to negotiate new fee agreements on good faith.

Respectfully yours,

Anne-Marie Grondin, VP Campaigns & Community Affairs
On behalf of the Council of the Society of Graduate and Professional Students
at Queen's University (SGPS)
Kingston, ON

Cc: Giselle Samson-Verreault, Chair of the Board of Governors
Alex Sirois, President, Carleton University Students' Association
Kimalee Phillip, President, Graduate Student Association

1. Why has there been a change in the registration process as of next year, where the entire tuition will be due on one day, and the minimum registration payment will be eliminated?

First of all, there are a number of clarifying points that need to be mentioned that help inform the discussion.

- A. Some programs (Medicine, some education programs) have had admissions deposits in the past. This will not change.
- B. Not all fees will be due September 1st. Tuition fees for fall-winter will be due in full on September 1st. Residence and student activity fees will be due September 30th.
- C. OSAP-eligible students who have an OSAP entitlement by a certain date will be granted deferrals.
- D. Awards administered by the Office of the University Registrar (Student Awards) such as the admissions awards and upper year scholarships will be added to student accounts by the 1st of August.
- E. Students that current receive tuition deferrals will continue to be able to do so. These include:
 - a. Students whose tuition is being paid by a third party (e.g. by an embassy, consulate or sponsoring corporation), who provide proof of the third party payee. Note that this includes both domestic and international students.
 - b. Graduate students eligible for the monthly payment plan, who select the monthly payment plan as an option by the September 1st due date
 - c. Students that currently have unique payment plan arrangements with the university (e.g. MD students, MBA students)
 - d. International graduate students on the monthly payment plan
 - e. International undergraduate students, who can apply to defer half of their fall-winter tuition until January

Other groups of students who will be able to apply for tuition deferrals are:

- f. Out-of-province students who can provide proof of government assistance
- g. Students who can demonstrate exceptional circumstances limiting their ability to pay by the deadline, along with a commitment to pay all fees owing by September 30th will be given the opportunity to apply for an exemption to the deadline

Current process

Our current registration process affords students the opportunity to pick courses without any financial commitment to the university¹. Fees are not automatically applied to the account. They do not appear until early to mid-August. The fee statements in QCARD have been described by some students as “confusing” and “hard to understand”.

We require an August 1st minimum payment for most programs (\$1,000 for domestic students, \$3,000 for international students). The remainder of the fees is due September 30th. At present, students are either automatically deferred from the minimum payment requirement (see item C, page 1), or can apply to the Student Awards office to defer the minimum payment. By making the minimum payment or making deferral arrangements, students secure registrations in courses. Students who do not make the minimum payment are assessed a late payment fee of \$150 shortly after August 1st.

¹ with the exception of students in programs that have an admission deposit

Once add-drop opens, students who have not made a minimum payment or deferral arrangements run the risk of losing the courses they chose in registration. This happens when another student who has paid (or deferred) selects the same course, and essentially ‘bumps’ the other student out of it. Once the due date is past, students with outstanding balances are assessed a service charge added to the student account starting in October at an annual interest rate of prime plus 3%. These are added monthly until the full balance is paid.

New process

Students will be allowed to pick courses without any financial commitment to the university². Charges for those courses will be immediately applied to the student accounts³. Fee statements will show in Student Self-Service in a simple-to-understand format, with clearly displayed due dates.

Students will be required to pay tuition and fees by September 1st. OSAP-eligible students who have an OSAP entitlement by the deadline will receive an automatic deferral. Other students who are either eligible for a deferral or who cannot make the payment by September 1st must submit a ‘commitment to pay’ by the September 1st deadline. This is a new process that is being developed. More details will be available in December on how the process will work and who will be required to use it.

² with the exception of students in programs that have an admission deposit

³ “immediately” means within 24 hours

Students who have not either paid fees in full or completed the ‘commitment to pay’ process will face three sanctions:

1. They will be assessed the \$150 late registration fee
2. They will be blocked from adding courses during the add-drop period
3. They will not have their student cards validated

Once they have either paid fees or completed the commitment process, their enrolment restrictions will be removed immediately.

Students who continue to carry an outstanding balance on their student accounts past September 30th will be assessed interest charges exactly as they are assessed today.

The three major changes are:

1. No minimum payment August 1st
2. Late registration fee sanction moved from August 1st to September 1st
3. Tuition fees or “commitment to pay” due by September 1st

The removal of the required minimum payment means that students will not be required to pay anything to the university until at least one month after the current deadline. Student invoices will be updated automatically after courses are selected. Students and their families will have a simple online invoice available almost immediately after course selection, or after students’ courses are loaded automatically (e.g. Commerce, Applied Science, School of Graduate Studies). This means that for most students, there will be a period of approximately six weeks knowing exactly what is due on the 1st of September. In the old system, monies owing did not appear on student accounts until mid-August, with payment due approximately six weeks after (September 30th).

2. Is this what has happened at other universities?

Most universities have fee dues dates either in the beginning of September or earlier in the summer. Some universities (e.g. the University of Toronto) remove registrations from students who have not either paid their accounts or received a deferral to pay fees later. Queen's is one of a small number of universities across the country with fee due dates in late September. Colleges in Ontario require full payment of fees months prior to the start of classes.

3. What are some of the reasons behind this change? Who (which group) suggested this idea?

This discussion was proposed by the Office of the University Registrar in consultation with the QUASR Student Advisory Team. This team has student representation.

4. Was this idea proposed in front of a student body?

This issue has been mentioned during a number of student assemblies.

5. Is this final, or will there be consultations with students?

This is a final decision.

6. What are some of the effects it will have on students?

A very high proportion of students at Queen's pay their fees on time, and in full. Those students may have access to additional spaces in courses during the add-drop period over students who have chosen not to either pay in full or failed to complete the "commitment to pay" process.

All students will have better financial information (how much is owing, due dates, etc), and will have that information earlier than ever, in an easier-to-read format.

Some students will have to make deferral arrangements based on their unique circumstances. We expect that this will be a small number of students.

7. Will this affect students with OSAP?

See page 1, question 1, item C – the short answer is “no”.

Note that students receiving government financial assistance will receive an automatic deferral of fees due for the amount equal to their OSAP entitlement. They are not required to remit fees directly from their government financial assistance. This is different from the practice of many universities and colleges.

8. How will this change Queen's registration process for the better?

Students and families will have more complete financial information earlier than ever before.

Students who take care of their responsibilities with respect to fees may be rewarded with access to courses during add-drop.

Students will still be given the freedom to fully administer the cost of their educations, as all available funds (e.g. OSAP, other government assistance) will be given directly to them.

9. Does this affect all faculties, as well as both undergraduate and graduate students?

Yes, with some exceptions (as stated on page 1).

10. How will this affect international students?

International students pay using a variety of methods. Many choose to use payment fulfillment services (e.g. Western Union) to send fees, and send their full amounts in one transfer. The new system will make processing those fees much simpler to identify, and will better demonstrate receipt of payment to students regardless of their location in the world.

Some international students are funded by a third party. Processing of these students' fees will remain the same.

	<i>Current State</i>	<i>Proposed Changes</i>
<i>First payment due</i>	Minimum Registration payment August 1	Tuition payment, or promissary note, Sept 1
<i>Consequence of non payment</i>	Late Registration charge \$150 if min pay't not made, Aug 1st	Late Registration Charge \$150 if no pay't or promissary note, Sept 1
<i>Deferrals</i>	Deferrals available based on certain conditions	Promissary note process will account for deferrals
<i>Course-related consequences</i>	Courses lost in add/drop (pending demand)	No access to open enrolment (add/drop)
<i>Student card</i>	Student Card not validated	Student Card not validated
<i>All fees - due date</i>	Balance of tuition and fees due Sept 30	Balance of fees and residence, due Sept 30
<i>Service charges</i>	Service charge accrues on unpd balances	Service Charge accrues on unpd balances