

Tuition Policy Advisory Council
Meeting Notes
September 17, 2004

The Tuition Policy Advisory Council met on Friday, September 17, 2004 in 707 Rudder Tower. The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m.

Guest: President Robert M. Gates.

Dr. Gates thanked the committee for agreeing to serve and stated that the majority of the council consists of students, former students and parents. The Tuition Policy Advisory Council has two primary goals which intersect:

1. Structure tuition to advance academic goals. A premium has been placed on moving students toward achieving graduation closer to the four-year rate, rather than the current six-year rate.
2. Structure tuition to achieve financial goal for next biennium. Much depends upon the upcoming legislative session and with the University's commitment to faculty reinvestment and pay increases, as well as rising insurance costs, Texas A&M University is currently facing a \$19 million shortfall.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has recalculated the formula funding for weighted semester credit hours. This recalculation shows that Agricultural programs are under funded. If the Texas Legislature approves the revised formula funding calculations, a tuition increase may not be necessary. Nonetheless, financial incentives may be necessary in order to reduce the graduation year rate. Suggested methods include flat tuition for a to-be-determined number of semester credit hours; frozen or fixed tuition, in which tuition would be the same rate for four years—tuition rates beyond the fourth year would become prohibitively expensive. Exceptions would have to be made for programs that require a longer graduation timeframe; differential tuition could be charged based upon the time of day a class is taken (this would enhance classroom utilization), by course or college (other universities charge a premium for popular programs), or discounting summer school tuition (summer school would need to be restructured to offer a better selection of courses in order to further students' degree plans); increase tuition while eliminating course fees (to make tuition statements more straightforward).

The Tuition Policy Advisory Council will need to advise the President by the end of the year so that he can discuss the recommendations with the Legislature in January.

Faculty will be required to write Graduate Assistant tuition into research proposals. This is a practice many universities utilize.

Flat-rate tuition would accomplish both goals mentioned previously: it would allow the University to meet its financial obligations and it would encourage increased student

loads per semester. However, many questions would need to be answered, such as: How many hours should the rate be based on? Would the flat rate be for four years and then greatly increase at five years? Would summer be included or what rate would summer sessions be at? Would the flat rate increase incrementally from year to year? Would graduate students and professional programs be included? How would part-time students and Blinn-team students be affected? Would an upper limit need to be set as to the number of hours a student could take each semester and what would the criteria be? On average, the University generates about 1.1 million semester credit hours per year. Does the University have the capacity to increase generated semester credit hours by 25%? Is there enough classroom availability? Would retention and graduation rates be reduced? Increasing allowed Q-drops may be necessary, as students may take more of a class load than they can manage.

Fixed tuition allows financial predictability for students and parents for a set timeframe. Incremental increases may be necessary, but they would be predetermined. Perhaps the Council should consider a combination of fixed and flat rate tuition.

Differential tuition could be based upon student classification, course, college or degree plan. Course fees could be folded into tuition to simplify costs.

Other topics that the Council may wish to examine are open to discussion.

The tuition recommendations made by President Larry Faulkner to the University of Texas System were distributed to TPAC. The University of Texas implemented these tuition recommendations as pilot programs in Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences. The Council should read this document and look at other universities to examine what they are doing regarding tuition and the effectiveness of those programs.

Work groups consisting of three or four people in each group will be appointed to look at different tuition models and interim reports will be given to the full Council at regular meetings. The working groups are flat tuition, differential tuition and fixed tuition.

These subcommittees should meet before the next meeting, which will be October 1, and then be prepared to give a preliminary report to the Council on October 1.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 p.m.