

B. Board Goals

- 1. Board Goal – Receive Information on the State Universities’ Fee Structures and Evaluate Whether a Different Configuration should be Considered** **Elaine Frisbie
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Summary

Board Goal Seven for 2016-17, adopted at the August 2016 Board retreat, states “The Board will receive a briefing on the state universities’ fee structures and evaluate whether a different configuration should be considered.” This paper describes fees at the state universities.

Background

As published in the Board’s State University Databook for FY 2007, the average required fees for an undergraduate resident student at the six state universities was \$357. The average required undergraduate resident fees for FY 2017 is \$598. Heavier reliance on fee revenue has followed a path similar to tuition revenue as the Legislature has provided an ever-decreasing share of what is required to finance the operation of the state universities. A recent article⁵ noted public anger has traditionally been focused on tuition, while frustration is now growing over added fees for student activities, athletics, building maintenance and libraries. This is not a phenomenon unique to Kansas.

Tuition and fee structures vary for each of the state universities and may also vary within the institution by academic program or College. Within this Board agenda are current tuition and fee proposals by the state universities for FY 2018 that include, for the programs with the highest enrollment, the total mandatory tuition and fee costs to be borne by the student.

One reason for this variety are the mission and academic program differences among the universities. They offer lower and upper division as well as graduate-level instruction. Costs to provide this instruction vary widely. Physical plant needs can be affected by the academic program mix. Instructional space needs for technical programs differ from instructional space needs for liberal arts programs. On a per student basis, expenses in instruction would tend to be higher at an institution with predominately technical programs (high-cost, lower faculty-student ratios) compared to liberal arts/sciences (lower-cost, higher faculty-student ratios). Physical plant expenses, on a per student basis, would also tend to be higher at an institution with predominately technical programs.

The University of Kansas offers incoming freshmen the compact tuition option to select a higher tuition rate the first year, but then that rate is held flat year to year. At Emporia State University, students enrolled in ten hours or more pay a flat rate per semester, rather than a per credit hour fee. Similarly, full-time students at Pittsburg State University pay a flat tuition amount, regardless of credit hours. The additional layer of costs for student fees carries additional variances, particularly when comparing Colleges within the university. Engineering students at Wichita State University and Kansas State University pay program fees to finance additional faculty and equipment costs.

⁵ “Students, feeling nickel-and-dimed, force new scrutiny of college fees,” The Hechinger Report, January 3, 2017, Jon Marcus.

Conclusion

With the heavier reliance on student fee revenues and greater complexity of fee structures, it is recommended the Comprehensive State University Fee Schedule be reformatted to promote greater transparency for the public. The Board's DegreeStats website is a new tool the public has for understanding students' costs for attendance, but the Schedule offers a tangible source of information. Another option for the Board to address would be to include measures of affordability for Kansas students within the Board's long-term strategic plan.