

New University Advancement Fee streamlines student statements

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Act, a federal law that established the nation's land-grant college system as a means of providing accessible and affordable higher educational opportunities for all. As we considered the needs of our students and how to maintain a high value educational experience for them in the next fiscal year, the issues of accessibility and affordability were paramount.

Ultimately, we made a decision to forgo a request for raising designated tuition for the 2012-13 academic year. We instead directed our focus on how to best utilize existing resources and provide maximum flexibility in managing the application of mandatory student fees. As we learned in responding to the recent state budget reductions, it was extremely difficult to reallocate fee dollars under their current structure to assist in mitigating state-directed budget reductions in a manner that maintains the educational quality we have historically delivered to our students.

The Board of Regents recently approved the establishment of a mandatory "student success fee," provided that it was only collected if we eliminated an equivalent amount of existing fees – or, in other words, was cost-neutral to students. For this fall, we have eliminated 13 current mandatory student fees and created this new fee, which we will call the "University Advancement Fee." The Student Health Center fee, the Student Center fee, and the Student Recreation Sports Center fee will remain as mandatory fees as in the past. This action is very important for Texas A&M, particularly during these tough economic times in which state appropriations are strained and tuition increases may impede access to higher education.

The establishment of the University Advancement Fee will not immediately affect divisions and units that receive funding from mandatory student fees in the current fiscal year. We will soon establish a Strategic Operations Council to evaluate our current resources, including state appropriations, tuition and fees, to recommend any necessary reallocations of fee revenues.

The representation on the Strategic Operations Council will be similar to the Reallocation Working Group of a couple of years ago, and its structure and operations will be similar to the Council on the Built Environment, which has been extremely successful in prioritizing our campus infrastructure needs for many years. Student representation and voice will be an important component of the council. I expect the Strategic Operations Council to be very active this fall, as I will charge the group to provide recommendations by early next year.

We have many tough decisions ahead, and we need additional flexibility to meet the demands of these difficult budgetary times under our existing financial structures. My commitment is that we will move forward strategically and cautiously with the University Advancement Fee, as well as work creatively to identify new funding sources for the future. If we do not strategically invest for the future, Texas A&M runs a significant risk of losing our national trajectory and devaluing the high-quality education of our students.

As always, thank you for your dedication and service to Texas A&M University. I appreciate your sacrifices as we respond to these challenging budgetary times. I look forward to working with you during the upcoming academic year.

R. Bowen Loftin '71
President