



UtahStateUniversity™

STUDENT ASSOCIATION

FEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES

February 18, 2021 | 4:00 PM | TSC Ballroom

WELCOME

VP Lucas Stevens: Thank you for coming to this unprecedented meeting and thank you to our fee board and administration. Thank you to those of you joining us virtually streaming live on Youtube. As well I would add thank you for the participation and interest in our student fees. As the Chair of the student fee board it's encouraging to know that people care and that people have a vested interest and seek to be informed. This will be a largely informative meeting. There are a lot of changes resulting in an audit from the state. There will be an opportunity to submit questions. Those of you from fee board. Each table has received a paper with a QR code to submit questions. I will turn the time over to our Presidents, Sami Ahmed and Noelle Cockett.

CHANGES TO STUDENT FEES DISCUSSION

President Sami Ahmed: We are happy to be here. It's important that you submit those questions. Lucas will be able to read those. I will point out this is only an hour so we are pressed on time. If any questions don't get answered we will review the bank of questions. With that make sure if you have anything that comes to your mind that you are submitting those questions as you go. We are here to discuss a proposal here and we are going to largely focus on that. We will be looking at the different aspects and the impact it has on students and the university as a whole. I will turn the time over to President Cockett.

President Noelle Cockett: I want to give you a little history. The process of which tuition and student fees are reviewed and requested. I can tell you that I have never seen student fees or tuition lowered in all the decades I've been here. It's always increased or remaining flat. That is beginning to be a major problem for stakeholders, legislators, parents, students, the board of trustees that governs our university as well as the board that governs the higher education in the system. This year the presidents were charged to keep as much as possible tuition and fees flat. In the past the student fees have been done very disconnected from the discussion of tuition. But last year two things happened. The first was that state audit that reviewed student fees and all 8 public higher ed institutions. It was done by the state audit office. And the recommendation was there shouldn't be student fees as they currently exist. The state auditor interpreted student fees as a tax. It was taxing students for services. Instead we either provide those out of tuition if it's essential for education, or the people using the service should be the ones to pay. Well, quickly you can realize that over decades of adding to student fees and now being at \$536 for a full time undergraduate resident student per semester, to try and figure out a way for everyone to pay for what they're getting would make certain things so expensive nobody can afford to do it. Instead what our

board of trustees said is try to keep student fees flat. We do have to raise tuition because of something the state didn't fund us, but we're just talking student fees today. The audit was the first thing. The second thing was that feedback from a lot of different groups that the higher education universities in Utah need to stop raising student fees and tuition. The third thing was the process that they wanted us to go through. We were audited. This student fee board was held up to the other institutions as the model. There are other institutions in the state that do not have any hearing on student fees. The administration decides and next year that's what they publish. There were a lot of changes that had to happen across the system. What they wanted us to do is not hold fee board conversations separately from tuition. It's clear why you have to do that. Our meeting here is a follow up on a second meeting on a previous meeting you had. This student fee board recommended a net increase of \$4.90. We increased the ARC fee by \$6.50 and the technology fee by \$1.60, for a net \$4.90. Two days after that Sami and I were in the Board of Trustees meeting and our Board of Trustees said we would like not to raise student fees. You can fluctuate them, and change them across but the net amount should stay the same. What's odd is we have no process at Utah State to actually decrease fees. We have never done that before. It's always been increase or the unit itself will close down a lab so we can lower that fee. So Sami and I talked and we thought you folks should be involved and aware of the process to hold our student fees flat. That's what this whole conversation has come down to. What I'm hoping is that we can show you a plan. Yes it stinks, if we are going to raise the net amount by \$4.90. It doesn't sound like much, but that's not the problem. If you add that across 27,000 students that's 20 million dollars. People say what are these things you're doing. Who's paying for it. Does it really impact education? How much are you charging this student to get a college certificate. I'm ready to defend what we want to do, but in the back of my head, I don't believe any other institution will have an increase in student fees this year. That's how strong it is to hold things flat. Again, what's changed here is twofold. 1 I need to bring the student fees together with the tuition. When we do truth in tuition it will now be truth in tuition and fees so people can see what the total change is. The average student does not notice I pay this much for fees, and I pay this much in tuition and here's what I get. They look at the bottom line. Because that's a common way that's why the system of higher ed said we had to stop doing it separately. All this, we are still on the recommendation stages. I don't make the decision. It's actually the Utah Board of Higher Education that has final approval of what will happen with student fees and tuition. We get a recommendation from you, we will have truth in tuition on March 3rd. We are getting recommendations from the Statewide Campus Fee Board, the tuition committee, the executive council. I get recommendations from various groups. We take them to the trustees as a recommendation and they decide what they are going to recommend and they take it to the board of higher education for the state. I appreciate you guys giving all this input, time, and it's making a huge difference. Remember that 27,000 students in the system. That's what you're representing.

President Sami Ahmed: With that background history we'll get into the fee increases and recommendations. Part of the fees that we are discussing here some of the funding is going to go to tuition, but this is currently dealing with the \$4.90 problem that we have. I will walk you through kind of how we got to this point. Initially when we were looking at our fees we decided that some of the things would be more appropriate on tuition and from a guaranteed source instead of relying on students alone. We looked at things like salaries that are attached to fees, should that be tuition, and if we agreed on that we would transition that over to tuition and that would allow the fees to remain stable. A good example is athletics, there might be a component attached to salaries, so by transitioning the salary portion to tuition that would allow the fee to remain stable so it won't raise from year to year. Others like activities it's dealing with the involvement office and those that have direct involvement with students, those kind of

salaries could remain on student fees. We looked at that and after we made the transition to tuition, we still had that \$4.90 to reduce. The proposal you see in front of you is the decrease amount in each fee and how much that would be. I will go through all of them and kind of tell you how they're being funded and where some of that is going to come from. The activity fee will decrease by 21 cents, the building fee will be \$1.21 and that will come off some other buildings. Athletics will have a reduction in 80 cents. The associated revenue amounts are on the right hand side. Same with aggie shuttle. You'll notice with health and services that will transition to tuition. That will remain untouched and will be fully funded and nothing will happen. The technology fee already decreased by \$1.60 but a further 39 cent decrease will be associated with that and same with campus rec, library and music and theatre. We will get into Aggie Bikes and Blue Goes Green. Counseling services will also transition to tuition and remain untouched because it is a critical resource for those aggies that might be struggling in those areas. Now let's talk about the aggie bike program and the blue goes green program. The aggie blue bikes we are proposing that that is no longer a student fee, but a portion of it transitions to tuition. You'll see that 1.11. that's the amount associated with salaries. If that goes over to tuition they are also guaranteed that leaves us with that 1.67. that's what you've been hearing about. That's what it's implicating. Here is the proposal with that. President Cockett, Dave, James and I met and we discussed possible solutions to that 1.67. How can we help the Blue bikes program but still have them share the burden of some of the associated cuts that other areas are receiving. Right now there are students who buy parking passes and staff and faculty that buy parking passes. We can fund the majority of that revenue amount through a surcharge on those parking passes. The cost wouldn't be very much when its dispersed among the different individuals who are buying parking passes, but it will allow the blue bikes program to receive a good amount of their funding. The majority of it will be funded through a small surcharge once you purchase a pass. In addition to that there will still be a certain amount that Aggie Blue bikes will have to find for the first year. That is 10,000. The surcharge would pick up the majority of the cost, but there will be a portion that will be cut. They will just have to find an additional resource. Blue Goes Green there is a surcharge on airfare travel and that will be a source of funding. It will still have an associated cut of 2 cents, but that's where funding will come from. You can see the \$4.90 being raised is being matched with the \$4.90 being cut.

President Noelle Cockett: I got a lot of emails about this, and I appreciate the sentiment. A couple of people said we would like to keep this on student fees because it's guaranteed. I need to explain that. That amount for every student taking 12-18 credits per semester, that amount is constant, but the total dollars collected is completely variable and it is dependent on the number of students who enroll. If you want a steady source of funding for one of these, you put them over on tuition because we collect tuition plus a bunch of stuff and we use that to pay the budget. So if a salary is on tuition we pay that salary. We don't have the enrollment, they may not have the money to pay it. When you get to the revenue reduction it is rounded off because we are estimating how many students will be paying that amount of money. If enrollment drops, it will be less, if it increases it will be more. That's why so much of this is focused on the dollars and cents rather than the total amount that was needed.

President Sami Ahmed: We will now proceed with questions.

VP Lucas Stevens: There are a few questions I grouped together. Why does the sustainability program seem to bear the brunt of this decrease? Carbon neutrality 2050 and as well, also can you comment on the impact this will have on low income and international students.

President Noelle Cockett: If there was no other funding coming in I would say that's what's happening. What we're trying to do is move the programs that students have supported to other funding so it's more

secure. Again, it comes back to this idea that student fees are dependent on the number of students that are enrolled and how many credits they are taking. WE are currently seeing a drop. These programs as they are now, are going to have to absorb a reduction in their budget. WE are trying to shift them to other things where we can sustain their funding. So for instance, the blue goes green is going to move. I am putting other hard funding in there. So it is not being shrunk, it is not disappearing. I am trying to shift it to something that is more secure. I would totally in the sustainability. This will again, how blue goes green works, will be up to that council. They are going to have that surcharge on the airfare. That's a new allotment and we're shifting this money over to them as well. In the grand scheme of things they are going to have double the money than what they once had. Again, you guys have made it very clear, bikes are important for low income people. I feel so bad that it got out there that this is being cut. We are shifting it to other forms except those revenue cuts in those parentheses. The person over this program is really thinking he can do grants. I will do a fundraiser for him. Your passion about those bikes tells me people would be willing to help us keep it at that level. I am ready to go on making sure we can cover that \$10,000.

President Sami Ahmed: Right now the cut is only going to be \$10,000. It's being transitioned to another funding source. It's a portion of that \$1.67 which is still small. The majority will find a new source of funding. The proposal is maybe a small surcharge. Around \$10.

VP Lucas Stevens: There were several questions about a re-vote on the ARC fee. There were several questions about the possibility of re-voting on the increase.

President Sami Ahmed: One thing to remember, again this is a recommendation, so even the ARC fee going up was a recommendation. That can still be scrutinized later. The bigger question is that that will come later. We are just delaying it now to move it to later. It's not necessarily because we decreased it and it won't come back again.

VP Lucas Stevens: There were several concerns about the control or lack thereof that students might have over monies being transferred over to tuition. So a concern about maybe a loss of student influence there.

President Noelle Cockett: Again, I return to. There's a feeling like student fees, we own that. And I get that. It signals to me what you think is important. Aggie Blue Bikes, the OER at the library. CAPS. Health Services. Once I have confidence that it's something you want. That's the plan. WE move it over to tuition so those salaries will be in the budget. It's a crazy time, we are doing a swap but that's because of the audit. I was told under no circumstances I have to get this in better alignment. This year has been a lot of work. After this I think in the future every student fee that's up here has to be absolutely scrutinized and reviewed every five years. That's where we realized the state had no process of reviewing these and saying is this still of value now. That's what the state has done. Five years from this year we will be doing this and asking are these ok. We had to do that and get it in alignment now.

VP Lucas Stevens: Can we review how much the parking charge will increase and how that works with blue bikes.

Dave Cowley: That \$1.67 on the blue bikes would reduce that budget by 60,000. Because we are going to add the fee to the parking passes we will be able to cover about 50,000 of that aggie blue bike program. That's why you see their net cut is 10,000. What that means is over the number of parking passes, all parking passes we need to increase those to recover 50,000 additional dollars. We will take a look and see

if that will be a per pass basis. Just to make the math easy if there were 5,000 passes issues each one would need to go up by 10.00 a year. Or maybe we look at proportion. We will evaluate all of those options. Parking passes will go up slightly to replace the greater portion of what is being lost on this aggie blue bike decrease.

President Noelle Cockett: Again this was Sami and Dexton Lake. I think it's great. The idea of the bikes is reduce carbon, and increase that sustainability. And instead of charging every student wherever they might be, put it back on a car. A car that's parked on campus. To me that sends a good message. I just love the idea. WE keep Blue bikes going and we make people a little more conscious about driving and parking on campus.

VP Lucas Stevens; How long to you suspect this increase to last?

Noelle Cockett: Indefinitely. I really think there is a lot of concern about increasing tuitions. I can't say, but it will definitely keep on for a couple of years. I know that.

VP Lucas Stevens: Why was athletics only cut by .5% why Aggie Blue Bikes is cut by 60%. Why are we cutting the smallest fee?

President Sami Ahmed: The concept of other funds will replace some of these costs. I want to highlight to the fee board and other students. It's not apples to apples. It's not looking at this fee versus this fee. Some fees do more for the university than others. We need to recognize there is a hierarchy of fees. When possible, shifting the cost to other funds and making the same things sustainable, but if we do have to make cuts we have to look at the things that have the most impact to the least impact and make the decision accordingly. The voice of students has been heard. The first proposal was to get rid of it completely, then \$1.67, and now we are looking at a parking source. People are feeling strongly enough that we are looking toward ways to preserve it. If we are talking about not touching anything at all because we like it, but we want other fees because we like that better To me that doesn't make any sense. If you follow through the process and the recommendation process you can clearly see that every time pushback has been brought back, students have been listened to but it's still a compromise.

President Noelle Cockett: We're doing ticket sales. It was one of those things where you say which one are we more likely to find alternative funding. Again to me, the car and the parking permit seems like a great idea. Now we could charge the parking fee for 50,000 and give that back to athletics, but it doesn't make as much sense. So we are trying to match up the alternative funding to the program as well. It does seem like the parking fee fits aggie blue bikes. We are trying to match this alternative funding with the fee.

VP Lucas Stevens: At the risk of seeming redundant, is that parking pass surcharge guaranteed for years?

President Noelle Cockett: Yes. Have we ever lowered a parking fee?

VP Lucas Stevens: Again, could you explain the long-term nature of this proposal and explain more about the sustainability of aggie blue bikes receiving funding for years to come?

President Noelle Cockett: Keep letting us know. I was going to tell you that OER for the library. People really like that. They think that will lower their cost of books, so we are pulling that out and putting it on another source of tuition. Think of this as more of a rolling process. We have to get it down, every five years we look at it, so your Aggie Bikes have more likelihood of sustainment on a tuition. It's not in James'

Morales' staff budget. It's not contingent on enrollment numbers. That's the thing you have to keep remembering about student fees. That's not an automatic every year we will get that much.

VP Lucas Stevens: Sami's comment about how fees are more important than others. Can we talk about that?

President Sami Ahmed: Obviously the easiest line is the impact and number of students it has. For example, since people keep talking about athletics, it generates revenue, and a lot of students are impacted by that. We talk about athletics is already receiving so much funding from alternative sources, further cuts in athletics, yes it might seem small but an impact could have a bigger impact than a bike program. The number we looked at was 2,000. There are ways to compare it that way. The way it affects the university revenue-wise or the impact it has on each individual student. You can see it pretty clearly if you look at health. It's important. CAPS is more important. If push comes to shove and we have to get rid of one, as most people and they're not going to pick Aggie Blue Bikes over counseling and I think most of you agree with that.

President Noelle Cockett: Now that we implemented it. I remember the ARC. It's \$75 per semester, it was led by the presidents at that time and James over a couple of years. The students we talked to this was very exciting. The people that passed that are long gone, and you guys are still paying that. That worries me a lot when we keep putting stuff on students. I hope you guys realize how we are representing the 20,000. You are representing the future students as well. I can't tell you how pleased I am with the 5 year review because we will be able to look and see if it's still needed and relevant.

VP Lucas Stevens: The questions are getting very redundant and they have already been addressed. This might be for Vice President Cowley, but there have been questions about parking. Isn't it also dependent on enrollment? There are concerns about the details of the parking fee.

Dave Cowley: Certainly, anything that generates money from students will fluctuate with enrollment. There's not a lot of fluctuating in faculty and staff. It is pretty stable, but the bottom line is they have long-term planning of not only the cost they need to raise, but also the maintenance on the lawns. WE are also looking forward many years in the future, understanding that we will need more structured parking as the campus continues to grow. You can't continue to do that without replacing parking. We have long-term plans. Every single year there is a little bit of an increase. What that is, is trying to make sure we are on pace to make sure we prepare for an update. We did have to bond for that parking terrace

VP Lucas Stevens: I want to thank everyone for answering these tough questions. AS well I want to thank you and let the board know that this meeting didn't have to happen. I would say this shows a commitment from our administration to hear student voices. The fact that we're here shows that commitment. I will turn the time over to President Ahmed and President Cockett for final statements.

President Noelle Cockett: Thank you so much for making us realize how important those two programs are. Blue Goes Green and Aggie Blue Bikes. I did not realize that but now I do. Let's look forward to next year. I think again you guys need to be really careful that the net increase is flat. The net amount remains flat. You will have problems trying to get approval of higher if we are increasing student fees. Again the weirdness of this is tenfold. We have to move the fees to other funds. WE have to come up with a zero net increase. But the whole process will continue and so next year maybe I can come to the first meeting as well.

President Sami Ahmed: Personally in these meetings I have been involved in I don't have ulterior motives or nefarious intentions. I hope you can see that President Cockett does really value your voice to the point that the proposal went from complete elimination to a small decrease. Let's just keep that in mind. With the strengths that we have, student voice was listened to. The students I represented and the voices I expressed were clear. If you have questions I am happy to meet with you. Just realize this is where the recommendation stage is at. My office is always open and I am happy to take any further questions.

VP Lucas Stevens: Thank you again to the student fee board and for being prepared for all these meetings. These were great questions. Thank you to those who tuned in virtually and for all those who made their voices heard. We will conclude our meeting.

IN ATTENDANCE: Linda Zimmerman, James Morales, Eric Olsen, Whitney Pugh, Sophia May

Officers: VP Lucas Stevens, President Sami Ahmed, Senator Alex Braeger, VP Jenn Ha, Director Rachel Arner, Senator Cooper Karras, VP Porter Casdorff, VP Trevor Wilkey, Senator Ryker Marble, Senator Maria Catalano, Senator Elizabeth Drake, Senator Olivia Hoge, Senator Noah Braeger, VP Oscar Diaz, Senator Brock Hardcastle, Senator Austin Flitton

Jonathan Ashdown, Niyonta Chowdhury-Magana, Hailey Darrow, Braden Morrill, Andrea Cumming, Clark Rawson, Chad Withers