**Western Washington University**

**Services and Activities Fee Committee
Meeting Minutes**

**Friday, April 30, 2021; 2:00-3:00 pm**

**Teams Virtual Meeting**

**Present:** Kurt Willis, Debbie Curry (recorder), Eric Alexander, Noemi Bueno, Ranulfo Molina, Raquel Vigil, Steve Card, Emma Duff, Adam Leonard, Danil Sonjaya, Caitlin Summers, Travis Cram, Kevin Harris, Ichi Kwon, Rebecca McLean, Evan Shuster

**Guest:** Megan McGinnis, Michael Sledge

**Agenda Items:** 1) Approval of Minutes, 2) Enrollment update, 3) State budget, cost of living, wage increases, 4) Fee formula, 5) Enrollment & fee rates open discussion

Evan Shuster called the meeting to order at 2:03 pm.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Evan asked if there were questions or amendments to the minutes of the April 23, 2021 meeting. There were no amendments requested to these minutes. Danil Sonjaya made the motion to approve the minutes as presented. Emma Duff seconded the motion. The motion to approve passed unanimously.

**Enrollment Update:**

Kurt indicated early next week the university should have a better idea of where the numbers will rest, but in the meantime, Shelli Soto had indicated that a good guess would be approximately 14,077 fee paying students for fall. This reflects a reduction of about 1,100 students from fall 2019 – a 7% reduction in headcount. These estimates could go up or down; Kurt adding that a 7% reduction is a considerable amount of money for each constituent. Michael confirmed we should have the final numbers from Shelli, hopefully by Thursday of next week.

Noemi asked if these numbers were for only the main campus and Kurt confirmed it was only Bellingham, not any of the satellite campuses are included in that number.

Reflecting on recent budget announcements, Michael suggested to the committee that salary increases for 2021 and staff Cost of Living (COLA) increases should probably be factored into the constituent’s S&A Fee budgets, if not already done so.

Evan agreed with Kurt’s point that enrollment numbers and rates do affect the amount of distribution. Using Kurt’s *Enrollment Estimate\_Fall 2021* worksheet the committee was able to see, with a 7% reduction in headcount, the result is an approximately short fall of $811,000. Increasing the fee by 4% (the highest allowable increase) leaves a shortfall of approximately $634,000. Kurt added that a COLA increase is very likely (1-3% is possible) and really needs to be a consideration.

Evan asked for questions. There were none. Kurt indicated he would upload his spreadsheet into Teams so the committee members can play with the numbers.

**Enrollment & Fee Rates Open Discussion:**

Evan opened conversation regarding a possible fee percentage increase as well as adding COL increases to the budgets asking the voting members and advisors for their thoughts, opinions, and recommendations.

Danil asked if students received a COLA increase as well. Kurt responded that he believed the minimum wage increases addressed that. Eric confirmed that minimum wage increases were state mandated increases and had been added to the AS budgets. Students hourly pay has increased to $15+ which is where students’ increases are recognized, and these increases should have been included in all constituents’ budgets. DRAC confirmed they had included minimum wage increases and mandated step increases for classified staff. Athletics and Campus Rec confirmed they had as well. There were no further questions or comments from students.

Kurt reminded the committee that not having enough money isn’t a new issue and didn’t want the student representatives to panic. Rebecca shared that DRAC typically prepares their budgets knowing they may not get all they ask for; the distribution may be a percentage of what comes in, and that percentage will be handed down throughout each constituent group within DRAC, and from there each area determines what cuts they will make to adapt to the loss of revenue.

Eric added he felt all constituents had been conservative constructing their budgets and we all would do what we need to deal with the short fall. The financial managers will use the information we have, consider where we think we might land as a result of a decrease, and will have to inform our groups what can be done or cannot.

Emma asked if the shortfall amount was typical as in past years or if it was higher or lower. Kurt responded that that’s a difficult question to answer because we don’t normally have this type of decrease in enrollment. Steve responded that we have not seen an enrollment decline and this kind of impact on money for this committee in 30+ years. The discrepancy is more about the request this year. Adam agreed with Steve, adding that this is a unique and impactful situation for Campus Rec; this will set Campus Rec behind if this is our reality. Adam also stated that he felt it important to look at how we can help each other; determine the percentage, and go from there.

Noemi shared with the committee that she isn’t comfortable at all increasing the fee; considering people are experiencing financial difficulties during this time, it’s not something she can recommend. Steve responded that a 4% increase represents $7.68 per quarter increase; Even indicated that he didn’t feel that $7 would be a huge impact on student’s budgets (in most cases) versus how it will benefit students within each of our constituencies by making the minor increase.

Travis asked the voting reps to please consider what this committee is trying to accomplish and who they serve here; what is best for Western students? It’s not just an economic calculation. We are a community and we need to understand the experiences and services we provide and what makes western the university we all love. Don’t be afraid to consider what value means beyond a spreadsheet, and also consider how we can set students up to best deal with a year full of uncertainty. The value at the end of the day is worth a whole lot more than just $7; and while keeping our students’ financial situations in mind, let’s be sure it’s a holistic perspective of that value.

Ranulfo thanked Noemi for stating her point of view and agreed that he also struggled with putting more financial burden on students and families, some who are losing jobs and having a hard time making ends meet. He feels very confused with the discussion of increases when we’ve seen how this crisis has affected our students and their families trying to get back on their feet. He encouraged the committee to consider NOT raising the fee, but work with the surplus budget and adjusting for a more equitable ask and supporting our students as we try to return to a more normal way of life. Ranulfo shared that this has been heavy on his heart and on his mind. He understands that money for programming is needed, but at the same time struggles with the financial struggles of students and their families.

Evan thanked Ranulfo for his perspective and shared his own personal feelings of what losses he has experienced during the pandemic; this pandemic has affected students in many more ways than just financially; agreeing we need to be considerate of how students and families have been financially impacted, but we also need to balance between priorities of finances with students abilities to interact and grow themselves in the programs they came to Western to engage with. We need to support students to live, but also to grow.

Emma agreed with Evan’s perspective, sharing from a position of (what she considers) privilege gives her pause; it’s hard to know or understand what students would be willing to pay to have things go back to normal – she understands both sides and feels confused on which way to go.

Evan felt this wasn’t a conversation to be resolved today, asking Kurt if the end of next Friday’s meeting would be a good goal to have determined the fee increase or decrease and allocation recommendations. Kurt agreed that by next week we should know more about enrollment and we should be able to decide next Friday, but for sure by May 21st.

Eric suggested the committee continue to collect more information about enrollment numbers and to tend towards being conservative in our estimates; Eric also reminded Ranulfo that not all constituent groups have reserve funds. Steve added that if enrollment declines, we will all need to use any new dollars to fund the proposed salary increases at our current operational level; we will be unable to fund any new initiatives.

Evan asked the committee to be prepared to further discuss and make a decision regarding the fee next Friday; suggested spending next week doing further research and having conversations within our constituencies. Eric suggested not solidifying any direction just yet but being open to flexibility either way until we meet and further discuss week.

Travis shared a parting thought: “As a person who studies communication for a living, this overall deliberation has been excellent, with our student reps showing some real depth of thought and consideration for the challenging choices they have to make. Student reps: stop saying you aren’t articulate!”

Today’s meeting adjourned at 2:52 pm.

Next meeting: Friday, May 7, 2021, 2:00-3:00 pm, Teams Virtual