Holub attempts to clarify fee increase confusion

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Published: Thursday, February 26, 2009
Updated: Thursday, February 26, 2009

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In the midst of several, student-run events this week protesting a proposed $1,500 increase to student fees next semester, Chancellor Robert Holub sent a campus-wide e-mail Wednesday intended to clarify confusion over the fee increase and other budget-related issues.

University of Massachusetts spokesman Ed Blaguszewski said the e-mail "[had] been in the works for a couple of days," and is not in direct response to the on-going student demonstrations.

Holub expressed a hopeful, yet sobering message that detailed how the potential fee increases will impact students, how the University is taking the federal stimulus package into account and reiterated his plans to work with the Budget Planning Task Force as UMass' future fiscal issues unfold.

"There has been speculation and assertions made about the budget plans that, frankly, aren't accurate," began Holub's e-mail.

Outlining how undergraduate students will be affected, Holub said the fee increase will also come with about $7 million of additional financial-aid funding, and roughly one-third of the money raised by the increased fees will go directly back to students.

Most graduate students will not see their mandatory fees or tuition rise, he said. About 90 percent will not have to pay the proposed $520 per year increase in curriculum fees for full-time, in-state graduate students, or $1,020, for full-time, out-of-state graduate students.

"No one likes raising fees, I certainly don't, but our current fiscal realities, and our commitment to maintaining the quality of a UMass Amherst education, make this unavoidable," wrote Holub.

"Opponents of the fee increase aren't taking into account the fiscal realities," he continued. "We're still facing serious budget cuts even with the fee increase, and disastrous cuts if we don't see this increase."

The University is hoping that stimulus funding can ease budget cuts.

"We are also very closely monitoring the federal stimulus package, and have worked very hard with our federal delegation and now with state officials to ensure that UMass Amherst receives as much support from the stimulus plan as possible," said Holub.

For now, however, 50 faculty positions, 30 lecturers, and 150 teaching assistants will likely be cut in the next fiscal year even with the fee increase, he said.

"These cuts would come with painful reductions in everything from student life programs to maintenance," said Holub "Without the fee increase, things will be even bleaker."

To those who oppose fee increases, he said, "I understand that view, and join these people in not wanting to raise the costs of an education. But where we part company is in what we are willing to do to achieve that goal."

"I stand with those students, faculty, and staff who have urged me to do all I can to defend and protect the quality of the education that we offer," he continued. "I agree with them that doing grave damage to our institution in this time of great economic uncertainty is the wrong answer now, and the wrong answer for students and for our future."

Those in opposition of the fee increase, he said, have offered no "viable alternative," other than demanding for state funding – a strategy Holub said is not likely to become a reality with the current state of the economy.

But, he said, "I encourage those of you who love UMass Amherst and value your education to get in

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But, he said, "I encourage those of you who love UMass Amherst and value your education to get in touch with your state and federal representatives and urge them to support UMass. And I encourage you to talk to others on campus that oppose the fee increase, and urge them to take a more reasoned approach to the reality we face."

Holub said he has continued to work closely with the Budget Planning Task Force and expects the group to provide him with further recommendations soon, which will be announced to the campus in addition to any decisions made concerning the budget.

"Personally, I do not want to see a large increase in fees; I agree philosophically that the University is a public good and should be better supported by the citizens of the Commonwealth," said Holub. "But I also have to face the reality of our economic crisis, while at the same time trying to preserve the quality educational experience that our students want and deserve."

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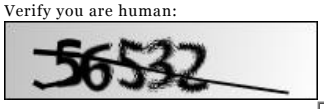

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