UMass students protest possible fee increases

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A coalition of undergraduate and graduate students continued a series of protests yesterday speaking out against a proposed $1,500 fee increase for students at the University of Massachusetts next semester.

The protests are part of an effort to convince the University's Board of Trustees to hold off on voting on the fee increase until funds from the federal stimulus package are allocated to higher education.

The Board of Trustees will vote on the fee increase this Friday at UMass-Dartmouth.

Dozens of members of the UMass Student Action group, composed of members from the Graduate Employee Organization (GEO), the Student Government Association (SGA), and the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) stood on the steps of Machmer Hall onon Wednesday at around noon.

The group held up signs, chanting, giving speeches through megaphones and passing out flyers while, hundreds passing through the busy area across from the W.E.B. Du Bois library and near the Student Union.

Boone Shear, a member of the GEO, said the coalition hopes "to get word out and get the University to admit that there is money out there is the stimulus package."

"We feel it is a false promise that the University has no choice but to raise fees," he said.

Student trustee and senior anthropology major Lindsay McCluskey described the group's main focus.

"We want the [Board of] Trustees to postpone the vote until the governor knows how much money he can give the University," she said,.

Christopher Sweetapple, a graduate student and department steward for the anthropology department organized the event and had originally only planned for it to be anthropology faculty and students.

"It started as a small gathering, then mushroomed into this," he said.

Chancellor Robert Holub sent a campus-wide e-mail intended to clarify confusion over the fee increase and other budget-related concerns.

However, the e-mail was not directly in response to yesterday's protest, according to University spokesman Ed Blaguszewski, who said the idea for the e-mail began several days ago.

The rally was not only intended to make other students aware of the fee increases, but also to rally support for events planned for the rest of the week.

UMass Student Action is teaming up with the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM) for a "statewide call-in day" from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. today in the Cape Cod Lounge of the Student Union.

Students will be calling Gov. Patrick to demand stimulus funding be given to the UMass to prevent layoffs and fee increases.

On Friday, the group is offering free bus rides to Dartmouth to protest the board of trustees' meeting in person. Buses will leave at around 5 a.m. from the Haigis Mall, where free coffee and donuts will be

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person. Buses will leave at around 5 a.m. from the Haigis Mall, where free coffee and donuts will be provided.

The cost of the trip is being split by the three Registered Student Organizations (RSO) that make up UMass Student Action – the GEO, SGA and the GSS, said GEO Vice President Tim Sutton.

Protesters hope to assemble in the hundreds at Dartmouth with representatives from each of the five campuses, including at least 100 from Amherst, said McCluskey.

Those traveling by bus will meet up with five GSS students who left Amherst on Monday are walking 107 miles from Amherst to Dartmouth, which kicked off this week's events protesting the fee increase.

"UMass Student Action formed on the UMass-Amherst campus this month in response to the proposal to hike student fees, general trend of dwindling state and federal support for public higher education, and privatization of the University," said a statement from the coalition.

The group has been working with students from the other University campuses in hopes of creating a statewide coalition.

For more information on the bus rides to Dartmouth, call the GEO at 413-545-0705 or e-mail them at departmental@geouaw.org, or visit www.umassstudentaction.org.

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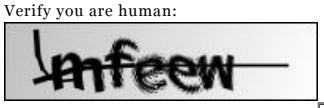

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