

Tuition Advisory Council

Friday, April 9th, 2021

Council Members (✓ indicates the member was present)

Leslie Eldridge – Faculty Member

- ✓ Sarah Grulikowski – Student
- ✓ Niko Hatch – Student
- ✓ Stasia Maxwell – Student
- ✓ Dennis Slattery – Faculty Member
- ✓ Matt Stillman – Administrator
- ✓ Susan Walsh – (Chair) Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Quinn Youngs - Student

Guests Present

Greg Perkinson, Josh Lovern

The meeting started at 9:30am.

Minutes

Grulikowski/Maxwell moved to approve the minutes from the March 19th meeting; the motion passed, 7Y/0N/0A.

Walsh said this is probably the Council's final meeting this year; we're at the point where we can put together the recommendation for President Schott. She said she would like to start by mentioning President Schott's announcement yesterday at the State of the University that she will be retiring at the end of this calendar year. Among President Schott's achievements is her commitment to keep costs down for students. Walsh said on behalf of President Schott and the rest of the administration she wants to again express thanks to this group for their great work and conversations.

Walsh noted that the Council voted unanimously electronically (via email) to raise tuition 2.99% for resident undergraduate, with the exception of Youngs, who has not voted yet. Walsh said Youngs can still vote or submit a minority opinion that would be shared with President Schott. Walsh said there are still a few more things to vote on.

Stillman said he would like to talk about tuition rounding. Walsh said this issue was discussed yesterday and there were good arguments on both sides. She said her philosophical position is that this Council voted on 2.99%. She said it causes her a little heartburn that it would roll up to slightly more than 2.99% (3.06%). Lovern explained that rounding up every category to the nearest whole dollar takes 2.99% and makes it 3.06%. He said we can stick with 2.99% exactly if we don't mind keeping pennies. Perkinson said he would not want to create more work, but

asked what it would look like if we rounded down instead of up. Walsh said she worried that it might be perceived as a bait and switch if we were to round up, which gives her a little heartburn. Perkinson said he agrees completely on the philosophical stance that rounding up might feel disingenuous. (Several others nodded agreement). Lovern said he did the math on rounding down and that would change the increase to 2.55%. Stillman said functionally he can program whatever we want, but from a student optics and billing standpoint he loathes things like \$ 0.32. Perkinson said even though the TAC has voted and communicated to the President, that recommendation could be augmented with rounding down. He said he doesn't think President Schott would skip a beat if that were suggested, or the Board. Walsh said she's agnostic about rounding down, but she really feels strongly about rounding up; that would send the wrong message. She said she agrees with Stillman that it may appear that we're nickel-and-diming students if we have amounts ending in things like \$0.32. Slattery asked if he was understanding correctly that Stillman would rather round down or up rather than going with an exact 2.99% raise. Stillman said yes, he would prefer whole dollars. Walsh said she would have no problem making a secondary recommendation about rounding, and she agrees with Perkinson that it doesn't sound likely to be a problem as the recommendation goes forward.

Grulikowski said she appreciates Stillman's comments about wanting to have more conversation around the issue. She said as a student she feels that the conversation around this has been a little lacking. She said she agrees that it would not be in our best interest to send the recommendation without the final number, and she definitely wouldn't want to round up. She said she personally thinks that rounding down would be preferable. She said people are probably not sitting around with a calculator, but as a regional institution SOU has a self-stated commitment to serving regional students, and college is already too expensive. Not all of our students are sitting around with their calculators, but some are. She said she remembers a student fee conversation where a student said a fee is the cost of buying groceries and that is the choice that the student would have to make. Grulikowski said that if the options are to keep the current recommendation without rounding, to round up, or round down, she think it's best to round down. Maxwell agreed and said she doesn't have anything to add beyond saying that she appreciates Grulikowski bringing in the impact rising costs have on students. Stillman said he would agree with rounding down. He said technically he doesn't think we can round the WUE number, that has to be 150% the resident undergrad rate. Lovern said rounding down would mean we can talk about a \$5 per SCH increase to resident undergraduate tuition. Also, non-resident would be a 4.83% increase, which may look a little better than 4.99%.

Stillman asked if there should be a conversation about Academic Partnerships and the discrepancy between rates in Academic Partnerships programs and other programs. Walsh said we would have to look at the MOU with Academic Partnerships and would also have to have a conversation with the Division Directors in those programs. She said the Tuition Advisory Council was not involved in the initial conversations about these programs or the more recent conversations, but we could look at having that conversation. Stillman said it's a published rate so he thinks it's definitely something that would be in the purview of this Council. Walsh said that would be a conversation we'd want to introduce to Cabinet and bring through the proper channels. She said we've had differential tuitions in graduate programs forever, it's just

different in this case because it involves an external partner, so it's not just an internal decision. She said we can put it on the list for a future discussion.

Grulikowski said she would be interested in having a conversation about non-resident tuition. She said it looks like that was set to increase 4.8%, but with our conversation about resident tuition being between 0 and 3%, she would be curious about having a conversation around non-resident tuition. Walsh said in her email she was just referring to what we've done historically: in the 6 or so years that she's been chairing this committee, the focus has tended to be more on resident undergraduate tuition and WUE, which tracks that resident undergraduate tuition at 150%, but we can definitely talk about non-resident tuition. Lovern referred to the pro forma and showed that with fees and other cost increases non-resident undergraduate tuition would be going up 5.91%. Grulikowski said she understands that non-resident tuition is more expensive than resident tuition, but said she knows many more students from other states than from Oregon--California, Washington, and Idaho, for example—and it seems like there is a more nuanced discussion to be had around tuition for those students. Walsh said the students from those states would be paying the WUE rate. Lovern said non-resident is more like people from the east coast, and is a small portion of our total SCH. For comparison, he said we have 1,566 SCH this year in non-resident undergraduate students, and 1,454 SCH for non-resident graduate students. Our total SCH is around 158,000.

Hatch agreed that he would feel uncomfortable raising tuition more for non-resident students. Slattery said it's a good thought and a consistent thought. He said showing consistency and fairness is important and he would want to hear someone make an argument for that out of state increase. Walsh asked Lovern to look at the scenario on the pro forma if we were to round down to whole dollars and raise non-resident undergraduate tuition the same percent as resident undergraduate tuition. Lovern showed that with a non-resident undergraduate tuition increase of 2.99% rounded down to the nearest whole dollar, it would be \$17 more per SCH, whereas with an increase of 5% rounded down to the nearest whole dollar it would go up to \$28 per SCH. Walsh said she would go with the will of the group if there's a strong feeling that the \$11 difference per SCH sends the wrong message. Perkinson said he agrees with Slattery's comments with regard to consistency and also the simplicity of messaging if we were to keep the increase in resident and non-resident tuition in the same ballpark. He added that it's not going to break the bank.

Walsh brought up graduate tuition rates. She said we don't have as many graduate students as undergraduate students, but the bulk of what we do is in the online graduate programs and the Master of Arts in Teaching program. Stillman agreed that the vast majority of graduate enrollment is not at the base level but mostly through Academic Partnerships programs. Walsh asked how people feel about that rate. She said the standard has been raising it around 5% and asked if people feel strongly about deviating from that.

Perkinson noted that historically, we model non-resident and graduate increases at 5%, but with the conversation around the non-resident rate and coming out of the pandemic, we could go with 2.99% for both, rounding down to whole dollars. Walsh invited others to weigh in and

said that we do have differential tuition and that has been the case for many years, so it's not unusual in graduate programs.

Slattery advocated keeping things simple and consistent. He said when we take the recommendation to the Board of Trustees someone is bound to ask about the total dollar amount of the differential. Lovern said the graduate differential comes out to around \$164,000 difference. Perkinson encouraged the group to think about broader issues around consistency and said now is the time when we could do that because of the special circumstances; the difference would be nominal. Walsh said she would agree but noted that this might make increases in future seem bigger. Lovern said we've also seen some indications that we may not have as big an enrollment dip as modeled, so it may not be as much of a hit. Stasie asked if the price difference would be likely to matter much to prospective students. Maxwell said she's a McNair scholar, and they're encouraged to apply to 12-14 programs. She said she found a program that really speaks to her, so she's not taking comparative pricing into consideration very much as she makes her decision, but some students may put more emphasis on that.

Walsh said she would try to summarize what she's hearing from the Council members and asked to be corrected if she's misunderstanding or misstating anything. She said it sounds like the Council would recommend keeping the non-resident undergraduate tuition rate increase consistent with the resident undergraduate tuition rate increase and maintain that consistency when it comes to graduate tuition as well, knowing that there may be some challenges in the future when increases might become a greater reality for us. Grulikowski said that for her the recurring theme has been wanting to make good on the priority we've said we have to keep school affordable and fair, and she feels that keeping the increases in the 3% range accomplishes that. She said cost is the dominant factor in her graduate school search. She said she didn't apply this year because of costs. She said it makes the most sense to her to keep the graduate tuition increase close to our 2.99% goal. She said she understands the financial picture, and survivability of the institution is big for her, but it sounds like that is not an issue at the moment. Walsh said it sounds like people feel there's not a compelling reason not to keep consistent with the 2.99%. Slattery said he likes that we are getting stimulus dollars, and this is giving us something of a break and helping us keep things low during this period. He said having had the experience of sitting on the TAC when we had to increase tuition by 10%, it was agonizing. This feels like the right thing to do. Walsh thanked Slattery for mentioning the stimulus and said that this is a real opportunity for us to support students, not just with the student portion of the stimulus money. She said it sounds like we've got our recommendation. Lovern said it sounds like the Council is opting to recommend a 2.99% base increase rounded down to the nearest whole dollar for both resident and non-resident rates for the upcoming year for undergraduate and graduate students.

Maxwell/Slattery moved to recommend tuition increases for resident undergraduate, non-resident undergraduate, resident graduate, and non-resident graduate students of 2.99%, rounding down to the nearest whole dollar; the motion passed, 6Y/0N/0A.

Feedback on the Process

Walsh said she really appreciated that conversation. She said it would be helpful to get closure after so much thoughtful discussion, so she asked how the Council members feel about the process and invited them to share thoughts for moving forward, lessons learned, observations, etc.

Perkinson said it's been a great group, and commended the Council for doing a good job talking through tough issues while maintaining a high level of honesty and authenticity. Lovern said he would echo that. He added that looking at the difference in total cost of attendance, it comes to an increase of only 2.69%, including composite fees, housing, and tuition, which is something to be pleased about.

Slattery said that speaking as someone who does budgeting on multiple levels, teaches it, and sees it happen across the spectrum, he's always taken by this group. He said the Council had a reputation of being a tough run when we started, but every year it has been outstanding and this year is no exception. It makes a professor very proud to have that interaction and have these decisions made in that manner; it's a job well done, and not an easy job, but always a good, thoughtful experience.

Walsh thanked Maxwell for joining us a little later and jumping in 100%. She said it was like Maxwell had been with the Council since January and didn't miss a beat. She thanked Maxwell for adding so much in such a short period of time.

Gruikowski said she does feel good about this process. Like anything, there are ways to make it better. She said her favorite and most exciting things discussed were about OERs and other things that might not be under umbrella of tuition, but allow us to have a more cyclical and rounded view of things impacting cost of attendance. She said the question about how to make school more affordable continues to be important, and finding more ways to bring in partners can only help. In years to come, one thing she would like to see improved is attendance to the webinars. She said it may help to go into an ASSOU Senate meeting or consider partnering with OSPiRG or other groups; be more direct, not wait for them to come to us. She said at the same time, it's great to be able to talk about what we can do even better rather than what went terribly wrong. Walsh said she really missed being able to go into those other groups; it's a big part of what we've done other years and she really missed it this year.

Walsh said she would like to clarify what we're talking about with regard to Academic Partnerships and graduate tuition rates. She said we have a contract with Academic Partnerships so they go out and do marketing for our programs, allowing us to attract students that wouldn't probably choose SOU otherwise. We don't have the scale to market our programs the way they can, which includes marketing to people well outside our region. The courses are taught by our faculty and the way we stay competitive is by keeping our tuition point lower than some other programs that are face-to-face on our campus. We keep 50% of the tuition and give 50% to them. She said it sounds like Stillman is suggesting that it may be time to talk about increasing the price point for our programs. She said she will talk to President

Schott about that; it's a different model than our other offerings, and if we're too high we may drive ourselves out of the competitive environment, but it's worth discussing. Lovern added that it's really hard to model. Walsh said much of the growth we've seen in our graduate enrollment recently has been in our MBA online program and our MEd online program, which have been helpful.

Walsh thanked the Council members again for all their good work and said she hoped they will tune in next week for the Board meetings to hear the discussion about tuition there.

The meeting ended at 10:14am.