Resolution in Opposition to Allowing UW System Students the Option to Decline to Pay Allocable Segregated Fees

Whereas: In the 2017-2019 Executive Budget, Governor Walker recommended students be given the option to decline to pay allocable segregated fees at the time the student pays tuition;

Whereas: Allocable segregated fees are an integral funding source for a wide variety of services, programs, and facilities on all 26 University of Wisconsin Campuses, that support the mission of the University of Wisconsin System;

Whereas: Without this funding source, many of these necessary student services would no longer be able to be provided, causing a decrease in enrollment, retention, and graduating students on every University of Wisconsin Campus;

Whereas: In accordance with Wisconsin Statute, these funds are allocated through a committee of approved students, representing the entirety of the student body, called the Student University Fee Allocations Committee (SUFAC);

Whereas: Under current law, SUFAC and all other public institution fee allocation committees are required to maintain viewpoint neutrality, as established by US Supreme Court decision “Southworth v. The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System”;

Whereas: Viewpoint Neutrality requires SUFAC to allocate these fees in a neutral manner, meaning they cannot take into consideration the point of view or opinion of each organization, or discriminate against specific organizations due to their viewpoints;

Whereas: If the current system for segregated fees were changed to include an option for students to decline to pay allocable segregated fees, viewpoint neutrality may no longer apply to allocation of these fees;

Whereas: If viewpoint neutrality no longer applied to decisions made, certain opinions or viewpoints would no longer be protected and funding for services or organizations may no longer be provided;

Whereas: To not jeopardize viewpoint neutrality, the current system should remain in place to protect equal funding opportunity;

Whereas: All students should have an equal ability to access services and opportunities provided by segregated fees;

Whereas: If segregated fees were to become an optional cost, Federal Post 9/11 GI Bill and some Financial Aid sources could not be used by any student to pay the allocable segregated fee because these funding sources cannot be used for optional student fees;

Whereas: Without being able to utilize these various funding sources, many students would not have the ability to pay for allocable segregated fees even if they wished to;
Whereas: Many services provided to all students through allocable segregated fees are impractical or impossible to provide solely to those who have paid fees under a system where students have the option to decline to pay;

Whereas: UW-Eau Claire’s Student Senate stated that the “[current] system put in place to allocate these allocable segregated fees provides students the resources and opportunities to gain valuable knowledge and experience that will better prepare them for the Wisconsin workforce” and that an ‘opt-out’ would “would eliminate programs and activities essential to a University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire education”;

Whereas: the UW-La Crosse Student Association stated that the opt-out will create “major funding losses and budget uncertainties from year to year” and that this “goes against the needed steps to stay fiscally responsible” while also stating that “services and opportunities that would be negatively impacted by this proposal include student bus and safe ride services, varsity athletics, multicultural programs, music programs, theatre, campus radio, student government, and many other student organizations”;

Whereas: UW-Madison’s ASM has stated that “the transportation budget is one example of where problems may occur [with an ‘opt-out’]. Sixty-eight percent of students at UW-Madison picked up a bus pass last semester. Students depend on access to transportation on our 936-acre campus, and would struggle to get to classes” if the ‘opt-out’ were to pass;

Whereas: a UW-Manitowoc student government press release stated that “our small campus would face severe restrictions on programs” such as “an athletic program which has successfully attracted students from as far as Milwaukee [and] a very successful theater that has attracted considerable community support and participation”;

Whereas: a UW-Marshfield/Wood County student government press release stated that “student organizations and activities that would be adversely affected by this proposal include Student Ambassadors, The Peer Tutor Club, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, the Art Gallery, Student Government, Student Activities, The Villas Council, The International Club, and any future student organizations” and “departments that would be adversely affected by this proposal include Drama Production, Music Production, the Success Center Tutoring Services, Athletics, and Continuing Education”;

Whereas: UW-Milwaukee’s Student Association stated that the allocable fees “are allocated to vital campus resources such as the Military and Veterans Resource Center and Transportation Services” and that “UWM serves more veterans than any school in the six-state region. We would be unable to meet their unique needs if we did not do our best to serve them, as they did and continue to do for us” with UWM veterans writing an open letter to the legislature in conjunction with these sentiments;
Whereas: A UW-River Falls student government press release stated that the ‘opt-out’ would “likely result in the termination of many student oriented programs and services, therefore jeopardizing the success and wellbeing of the nearly six thousand student of UW-River Falls”;

Whereas: UW-Stout’s Student Senate stated that “allocable student fees provide event and activity support for the majority of UW-Stout’s 158 student organizations”, and that “the structural changes suggested in the Executive Budget would cause considerable financial uncertainty and would seriously impact [the] budget model”;

Whereas: UW-Washington County’s student government has stated that “allowing students to ‘opt-out’ of their allocable student segregated fees will not only devastate, but potentially eliminate [programs] that our students utilize on campus”; 

Whereas: UW-Waukesha’s Student Association states that “we are honored to help fund different student services such as Veteran’s Organization, theatre, athletics, Diversity and Pre-College Center, and over thirty clubs and organizations” and that an ‘opt-out’ would create a situation where “the continuation of beneficial services would be affected and possibly be cut altogether”; 

Whereas: UW-Whitewater’s committee responsible for allocating the fees has stated that “these fees are an absolute necessity to not only our campus, but to all other UW campuses in the state, and it would be doing a disservice to students to allow them to opt out of paying them”, as well as the fact that the fees “provide a home for veteran students on campus, allow students with disabilities to do things they love, create important leadership opportunities where students can grow as individuals” among many other opportunities;

Therefore be it resolved: The University of Wisconsin System Student Representatives strongly opposes the recommendation to allow UW System Students to have the option to decline to pay allocable segregated fees;

Therefore be it further resolved: The University of Wisconsin System Student Representatives requests the members of the Joint Committee on Finance to remove this recommendation from the final budget proposal;

Therefore be it further resolved: The University of Wisconsin System Student Representatives requests all members of the Wisconsin State Senate and Assembly to oppose any provision allowing students the option to pay allocable segregated fees and removing this section from the final budget before passage;

Therefore be it finally resolved: Upon approval, this resolution shall be forwarded on to Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, Wisconsin Joint Committee on Finance, Senate Chief Clerk Jeff Renk, Assembly Chief Clerk Patrick Fuller, University of Wisconsin System State Relations Director Jeff Buhrandt, University of Wisconsin System State Relations Director Jeff Schoenfeldt, University of Wisconsin System President Ray Cross, and the Chancellors of all 14 UW System Institutions.

PASSAGE: Passed by voice vote 4/1/2017 at UW-La Crosse