

U of T eyes flat-rate tuition

“Basically I’d just be getting shafted by paying for five when I’m only taking three”

By Joe Howell -

CUP Ontario Bureau Chief

TORONTO (CUP) – Can you take a full course load and still get involved on campus? That’s the question many are asking in the wake of a strong recommendation that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of Toronto move to a fixed-fee system that would see students paying for five courses whether they take three, four, five, or even six classes.

A recent report by a “Program Fee Working Group,” struck by Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences Meric Gertler, proposed that FAS do away with per-course charges.

Instead, it would adopt a yearly price “equivalent to five times the per-course fee” to be “applied to all full-time students . . . starting [their studies] in Fall, 2009.”

A full-time student at U of T is anyone taking three full-course equivalents or more.

The document projected that the shift would garner FAS “an additional \$10M in base funding” and result in “course intensification,” as students enrol in more classes to get the most out of their program fee.

Colum Grove-White, president of the Arts and Science Students’ Union, called the recommendation a “band-aid solution” to an estimated “\$9 million structural deficit” caused chiefly by the recession.

He claims the change is being “pushed through” U of T’s various levels of government without proper student and staff consultation, and that ASSU is “trying to stop it from happening.”

“If I took the five courses I would definitely have to give up a lot of my involvement. It takes a lot of time up as it is, but if I added more courses I would be really suffering,” said Tam Siwak, a four-class student who plays two varsity and two intramural sports.

Her concern runs counter to the report, which says “it was discussed that intensification may result in some students reducing participation in extracurricular activities though there is no evidence, from any of the other UofT divisions with a program fee or from other institutions, to substantiate this.”

“The faculty has had no research into the tangential impact,” said Grove-White. “People take three courses for a reason.”

Jamie Janeiro, president of the Victoria University Students’ Administrative Council, is one such person.

“This year I would have no choice but to still take three courses, because there’s no way you could be VUSAC president and still take a full course load. It’s impossible,” Janeiro said.

He says he would not want to drop to part-time status, because the majority of the students he represents are full-time.

“Basically I’d just be getting shafted by paying for five when I’m only taking three,” said Janeiro.

Adam Awad, University of Toronto Students’ Union VP of university affairs and co-founder of U of T’s Ginger Magazine, said: “The more I got involved, the less time I had for school.”

Awad called the report’s assertion that course intensification likely would not impact campus involvement “total garbage.”

“If I had to be paying for five courses throughout my time here, I wouldn’t have the time to get involved – I’d have to work my ass off to pay an extra \$1,000,” he said.

Siwak agrees.

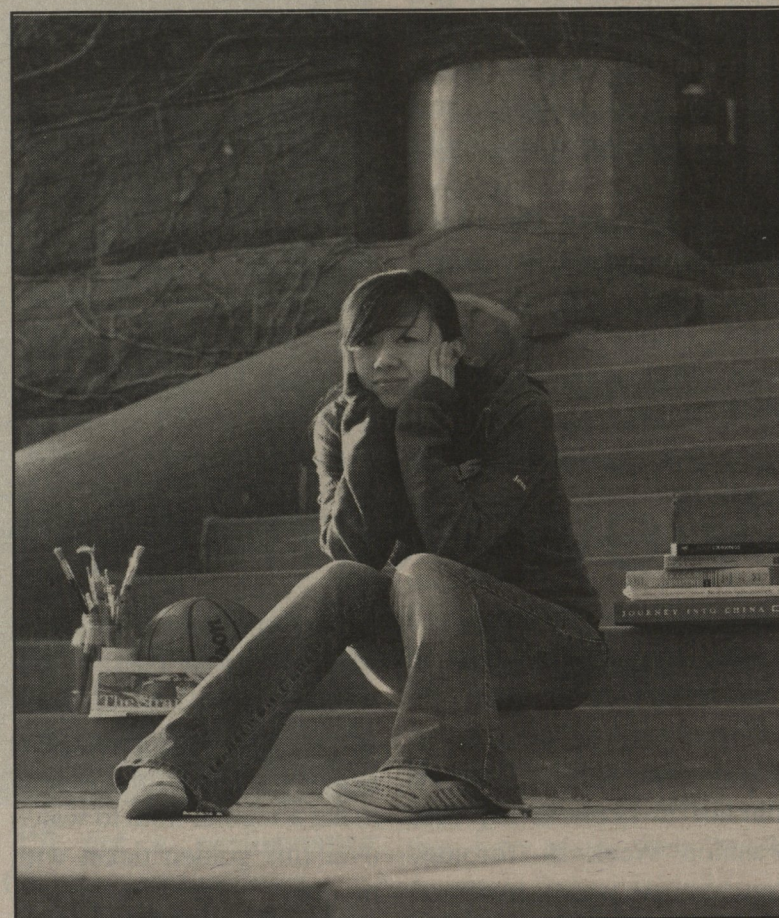
“If it were possible, I would definitely just suck up the lost \$1,000, only take four courses, and continue to play all my sports, but financially, it wouldn’t be feasible,” he said.

There are those who balance involvement with a full course schedule, though. VUSAC Commuter Commissioner Catherine Brown is taking 5.5 full-course equivalents this year, and took six when she was the co-manager of the Caffiends shop on campus.

“You make your agenda your Bible and you plan your life. You should see my to-do list,” said Brown.

But, not everyone boasts such organizational skills.

“I don’t know many involved students who take



Can students juggle a full course load and extra-curriculars? U of T thinks they can. Joshua Freedman/the Strand

five,” said UTSU President Sandy Hudson. “I think that they’re kidding themselves – absolutely it will affect involvement.”

Hudson says UTSU planned to meet with ASSU and some college presidents, but that the Students’ Union is “in opposition to the idea.”

FAS Director of Communications Kim Luke says that she has “heard people speculate that having a more intense course load could have people cutting back on their engagement,” but that “it’s really hard to correlate or establish a relationship.”

Like says that while most of the professional faculties here are already on a program-fee system, it does not

seem to prevent them from getting involved.

Indeed, flat-rate tuition is not uncommon in Ontario or Canada, but it seems to be favoured by smaller programs and institutions.

The majority of professional programs with limited, competitive enrollment – like engineering or pharmacy – seem to use the system, along with small universities like Waterloo’s Wilfred Laurier, Nova Scotia’s St. Francis Xavier, and New Brunswick’s Mount Allison.

Luke adds that most of the money would go back into the classroom experience in the form of more TAs, a smaller faculty-to-student ratio, and other benefits.