

Designated program, technology, and laboratory fee charges  
to students with multiple majors.

Recommendation from the Senate Fiscal Committee, 9 October 2007

CDS Recommendation:

Once the SIS is implemented, students pursuing multiple majors with designated program, technology, and/or laboratory fees should be charged for all fees designated by their declared majors. The committee felt strongly that students subject to multiple designated fees be notified of this policy change well in advance of the implementation of the Student Information System (SIS).

Background and Rationale:

The Central Distributions Subcommittee (CDS) of the Senate Fiscal Committee considered this issue in 2003 as part of a broader consideration of undergraduate program fees. The subcommittee felt that students should pay only a single program fee, no matter how many majors the student declared. Although no rationale for this recommendation was given in their report of 1 April 2003, a member of that subcommittee indicated that the rationale for a single program fee for double majors was based on the existing university policy stipulating that students pursuing multiple professional degrees (e.g. MBA and JD) pay only the higher of the two fees. In addition, an administrator involved in the discussion indicated that the rationale was “an issue of managing upper limits on student fees and limitations within the legacy student information system.”

Under the current legacy systems employed by the Office of the University Registrar, students are charged designated fees for the first major they declare, but not for second or subsequent majors. According to the Office of the University Registrar, this “first in – first assessed” approach was much more manageable within the limitations of the current software system, and was also aligned with the recommendation of CDS at the time.

As designated program, technology, and laboratory fees have been instituted only in cases where there has developed a clear, demonstrated gap between the resources needed to supply the students with the appropriate learning experiences and the income from tuition/fees and state subsidy, the failure to charge students the designated fees for each of their multiple majors means that current software limitations can, therefore, compromise the ability of designated fees to adequately close that resource gap.

Another unintended result of the “first in – first assessed” approach is that deans cannot estimate their projected annual income from designated fees with any reasonable degree of accuracy, as an unknown proportion of their majors in any given quarter will be second majors to whom those fees are not charged. This is inconsistent with the principles of predictability and transparency upon which budget restructuring was based.

The committee felt it was important to estimate how many students would be affected by multiple designated fees. Enrollment data from the Office of the University Registrar indicate that approximately 4.5% of undergraduates enrolled have declared two or more majors, and that this number has remained relatively constant since the 2002-2003 academic year. Of those Autumn 2006 students with two or more declared majors, approximately 26% had at least one major in a college in which some of the programs have designated fees. If all of those double-major students are in programs within those colleges that have designated fees (and that seems unlikely), a maximum of approximately 0.6% of the undergraduate students (and probably considerably fewer) might be subject to designated fees from more than one major given the current suite of approved fees.

The current CDS could develop no logical rationale for failing to charge students the designated fees for each of their declared majors. As students may not use any single course to satisfy requirements for two majors, the resources necessary to present the courses of study in two majors do not overlap, and thus economy of scale in terms of major course resource costs are not available. Although there may be some overlap in GEC advising when the two majors are in the same cluster of colleges (e.g. arts & sciences), there will still need to be independent major advisors, career counseling services, and the like. By way of example: if programs A and B each have 100 majors, the resource cost to each program is the same no matter whether those 200 majors represent 100, 150, or 200 individuals. In the opinion of the subcommittee, if a student wishes to take upon themselves the additional coursework required for two majors, he/she should also assume the costs associated with those two majors.

The same argument may apply to laboratory fees charged by individual departments. The resources necessary to conduct two different and independent lab courses do not allow for economy of scale. Students who wish to take two such lab courses in one quarter should be assessed both lab fees; however, when designing lab fees academic units should be mindful that, to the extent possible, students taking labs in the intended sequence of courses not face multiple fees in one quarter.

The committee was concerned about the effect of such a recommendation on students who are dependent upon financial aid, as the University Registrar indicates that the current financial aid system is likely not capable of incorporating multiple designated fees in financial aid calculations. We are assuming that this operational issue will be resolved with the implementation of the SIS and will not hinder the implementation of what we feel is a logical and rational recommendation.