

Faculty Senate Resolution on Differential Tuition at James Madison University

Resolved: Essential to preserving the purpose and identity of James Madison University is the implementation of the following policy.

Policy: Tuition costs across all disciplines, academic programs, and courses are assessed at the same rate.

A policy rejecting differential tuition does not prohibit the levying of surcharges for the purposes of recovering of expenses of durable equipment or consumables necessary to meet pedagogical objectives. The proposed policy does prohibit the collection of tuition and/or fees from students for the purpose of benefitting the salaries of particular faculty because of their academic discipline, program, or courses that they teach.

Purpose:

James Madison University's Mission and Defining Characteristics are at the core of what makes JMU one of the nation's outstanding comprehensive institutions of higher learning. The policy proposed here requires that with respect to tuition costs/fees JMU's actions are in line with its' Mission and Defining Characteristics. To do otherwise, jeopardizes the very things that make us unique and extraordinary.

Beginning with the Mission Statement:

*We are a **community** committed to preparing students to be educated and enlightened citizens who will lead meaningful and productive lives.*

JMU has long interpreted the term "community" to mean each and all of the community's members are essential and of great worth to accomplishing the University's educational and research objectives. The proposal to implement a system of differential/surcharge tuitions unarguably threatens the cohesiveness of the JMU community. The explicitly stated goal of differential tuition is to attract and retain talented faculty in the College of Business. But each and every one of the University's academic programs is currently disadvantaged in attracting and maintaining the most talented faculty in their disciplines. When very few of JMU faculty have received any sort of salary adjustment over the past six years, and when current proposals for adjusting faculty salaries fall far short of positioning JMU at the sixtieth percentile among its peer institutions, implementing a program explicitly intended to benefit certain segments of the faculty over others is threatening the sense of community among faculty.

Equity among faculty notwithstanding, it is the last half of the mission statement that is most assaulted by proposals for differential tuitions/surcharges. Here, the concern is for

the impact of differential tuition on the perceptions of students and parents. The mission statement well states the purpose and fundamental educational purpose of JMU: *“preparing students to be educated and enlightened citizens who will lead meaningful and productive lives.”* The inherent worth of our particular mission explains why all of the University’s professional trade programs, and their accrediting agencies, understand that to be educationally successful requires more than mere minimal exposure to the content of what is understood as “general education.” Simply put, universities thrive on the diversity of their programs. With that in mind, it is not difficult to realize the incongruity differential tuition/surcharges creates in the minds of students, as well as their parents as they expect the promise of the mission statement to be fulfilled.

Justifying the disparities in tuition costs depends on students and their parents accepting the following assumption: The basis for higher educational costs is the extent that paying those costs results in more valuable careers and ensuing lifestyles. Acceptance of that premise is what, after all, permits parents, and students who bear their own costs, to willingly pay for higher priced degrees such as a business degree. For those who accept that implication that “you pay for what you get” there likely is no problem. But again, the diversity of Universities is in place to prepare students for more than the best paying careers. Configuring universities to allow for tuition/surcharges perpetuates, rather than corrects, the devaluation of the economic worth of a host of very important careers such as K-12 teaching, counseling and social work, outcomes which slap at our notions that Universities are nobler institutions with very important purposes. JMU’s mission statement should not, indeed cannot, be understood to endorse a proposition that people who are drawn to careers not in the purview of majors such as in business programs, are of lesser importance, or are in such programs because they are students with less capable minds, or suffering from some other dire condition.

The argument so far is appropriately summarized by the first defining characteristic for JMU’s academic programs.

The university will offer a wide variety of quality programs: general education core, liberal arts, professional programs, and graduate programs of distinction.

While it is understandable that some programs of a university will, at various times, be recognized as worthy of more praise, it is at the same time an institutional ambition of this university for all academic programs to be capable of providing programs of distinction. Valuing some majors over others through differential tuition corrodes the perception that JMU provides a comprehensive range of quality programs. If for no other reason, the goal expressed in JMU’s first defining characteristic is in place for parents and their students to understand that JMU never intends for only some students to be educated well enough to live *“meaningful and productive lives.”*

A policy to prohibit differential/surcharge tuitions is warranted by other commitments that distinguish James Madison University. One particularly relevant commitment is the

University's promotion of diversity, specifically its role in providing opportunities to students from families that lack the personal wealth necessary to fund an education at JMU. Within mentions of the differential tuition system proposal there is the promise of a specific percentage of the additional fees set aside for scholarships to assist poorer students who seek a degree from one of the benefitted programs. But whatever percentage is set aside, since the bulk of the additional fees is used for faculty salaries there is a real limit to the number of students who will receive tuition assistance if they seek admission into the more expensive programs. Students who have the resources to pay additional "costs" will thereby have greater access to some majors than those who do not have the resources. The consequence is likely that differential tuition reinstitutes a system of privilege that is already in place on many too many fronts.

JMU's commitment to promoting its academic culture has been a major focus of the University over the last several years. While perhaps there may be some financial gain to the funding of JMU's academic activities as a windfall from selecting some programs for increases in tuition costs, those gains invite the students excluded from the explicitly identified "life making" majors to further resign from serious academic pursuits. And, sadly, those risks to students are made at a time when there has been an expansion of investment in non-academic co-curricular programs, most notably in athletics. As investment into the football program increases without any substantial financial returns, and the funding of money-losing football programs occurs through increases in student fees, it is not surprising that some schools ill-advisedly seek revenues from differential tuitions. If indeed JMU's commitment to its academic culture is a serious matter, then the elegant solution is to allow non-academic programs to downsize to self-sustaining levels. Doing so allows aligning tuition/fee ratios to match other Virginia universities and the peer institutions in other states.

Taking these statements together, we feel it is clear that any action that threatens the academic community, discourages collaboration across divisions, and gives preferential treatment to any program will be damaging to the core of what makes JMU JMU. "Why Madison?" is the question that President Alger has spent the last year asking. An honest reflection on the answers he was given should make it clear that implementing differential tuition is not in keeping with the core values and character of our community.