Student Assembly

Resolution 14: Promoting Transparency in Additional Course Material Costs

Abstract: This resolution urges the Faculty Senate and the Office of the Dean of Faculty to amend Section 6.1 of the Faculty Handbook so that instructors disclose, in course descriptions and syllabi before pre-enrollment, the estimated cost of required materials that students must buy out of pocket and that are not covered by course fees or the Cornell Academic Materials Program (CAMP). The change extends existing textbook-cost transparency to laboratory, studio, software, and similar expenses so students can make informed registration decisions.

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Type of Action: Recommendation

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Current Status: Third Reading Calendar

Whereas, the student assembly is charged by its Charter with examining matters that concern the welfare of the student community and making proposals concerning those issues to the appropriate officers and decision-making bodies of the University;

Whereas, the cost of required course materials can exceed the course fees a student expects to pay

Whereas, the Faculty Handbook, in Section 6.1 under “Building a Syllabus,” already identifies materials among the essential course elements a syllabus should communicate, and encourages instructors to post syllabi to the Cornell Class Roster so that students can make informed registration decisions;

Whereas, the Cornell Academic Materials Program (CAMP) provides undergraduates with required textbooks and coursepacks for a flat fee, but does not cover other required purchases such as laboratory and studio supplies, art materials, software and subscription licenses, personal equipment, clickers, streaming-service subscriptions or one-time tickets for required film viewings, and field-trip costs;

Whereas, students often learn of these additional costs only after enrolling, when adjusting a schedule is difficult, which defeats the Handbook's own stated purpose of informed registration;

Whereas, federal law already treats cost transparency at registration as a baseline expectation, in that Section 133 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 directs institutions, "to the maximum extent practicable," to disclose the price of required and recommended textbooks and supplemental materials on the course schedule used for registration, for the stated purpose of ensuring that students have access to affordable course materials;

Be it therefore resolved, that the Student Assembly urges the Faculty Senate and the Office of the Dean of Faculty to amend Section 6.1 of the Faculty Handbook, under "Building a Syllabus," to add the following language:

> "When a course requires materials that students must purchase out-of-pocket and that are not covered by course fees or the Cornell Academic Materials Program (CAMP), including but not limited to laboratory and studio supplies, art materials, software and subscription licenses, required personal equipment, clickers, streaming-service subscriptions or one-time tickets for required film viewings and field-trip costs, instructors are required to list those materials and a good-faith estimate of their cost in the course description and syllabus prior to pre-enrollment, so that students can make informed registration decisions. Where an exact cost is not yet known, an estimated range or a designation of 'to be determined' should be provided."

Be it therefore resolved, that the Student Assembly requests the Office of the University Registrar to add a materials-cost field to the Class Roster and Courses of Study entry for each course, so that estimated out-of-pocket costs appear alongside the course description at the point of pre-enrollment;

Be it further resolved, that this disclosure is intended as guidance consistent with instructor authority over course content and with the academic freedom affirmed in the Faculty Handbook, and does not restrict any instructor's selection of course materials;

Be it finally resolved, that the Faculty Senate continues to look at policies to promote financial transparency for all students.

Respectfully Submitted,

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