A Thesis

Entitled

Students’ awareness and perceptions of the activity fee at the University of Toledo: A descriptive research study

By

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Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Master of Education in Higher Education

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May 2009
An Abstract of

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Mandatory student activity fees have been funding extracurricular activities, a hallmark of American higher education, since the turn of the century. During the 1960s, activity fees came under fire from students questioning the legality of their dollars subsidizing organizations not supported or utilized by the entire student body. From many court cases judicial guidelines emerged on the collection, control, and allocation of mandatory student activity fees. Little research investigates if students are aware they pay a student activity fee and the value students place on activities and organizations funded through the activity fees. This quantitative study utilized an online survey to determine if University of Toledo full-time undergraduate and professional students were aware they paid an activity fee, the degree to which students could identify organizations and activities funded through the activity fee, and students’ views of the importance of organizations and activities funded through the activity fee.
Acknowledgements

For their constant love and support, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my parents and brother.

I would like to thank my sister Molly for her friendship, unfailing support, and willingness to drop everything and proofread my papers.

Finally, thanks to Dr. Meabon, my advisor, mentor, and role model. I have benefited greatly from his teaching and kindheartedness.

“One can pay back the loan of gold, but one dies forever in debt to those who are kind.”

~Mayan Proverb
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Chapter One

Introduction

In recent decades rapidly increasing student activity fees have outpaced the rate of inflation (Glatner, 2007). Minimal scholarship considers the impact of student activity fees on students, and the research located in a review of literature for this study was contradicted by other sources. This chapter presents the background of the problem by detailing the rise in student activity fees and consequent implications for states, colleges, and students. Chapter one explains the purpose of this study and the need for further research on the effect of mandatory student activity fees on students. Additionally, this chapter provides operational definitions of key terms specific to this study. Finally, chapter one outlines the assumptions of the researcher and limitations that may be placed on the conclusions of the study.

Background

No matter the vantage point of the constituency writing the check, colleges and universities are costly. From the student perspective, the cost of tuition and fees can be daunting. Public four year institutions raised tuition and fees for the 2007-08 school year an average of 6.6 percent as compared to the previous school year (Sander, 2007). In the last ten years, student aid has increased by 82 percent. During the 2006-07 school year, students were given $130 billion in grants, loans, work study funds, and education tax credits and deductions from the federal government. Students borrowed an additional $18 billion from state and private lenders (Sander, 2007).
The increase in student costs may be attributed in part to the financial pressures faced by colleges themselves. Less funding has been made available to institutions from the states while at the same time the institutional cost to educate a student has increased. From the 1995-96 school year to the 2005-06 school year, the institutional cost to educate a full-time student rose by 50 percent when adjusted for inflation (College Board, 2008). The cost to educate a student at a public doctorate-granting institution, such as the University of Toledo, rose more than 30% in inflation-adjusted dollars from 1995-96 to 2005-06.

A College Board table from October 2008 (Table 1) further illustrates the increasing institutional cost to educate a full-time student:
Additionally, many state legislatures are faced with budget crises of their own, leaving them unable to pass legislation approving additional appropriations for colleges or in some cases cutting the levels of existing appropriations. In 2006, the states combined provided $75 billion to higher education (Alexander, 2006).

The pervasive combination of ever rising operating costs, growing enrollments, and a reduced amount of funding have forced public institutions to raise tuition and fees. According to the College Board, the average cost to attend a four-year public institution has risen 47 percent from 2000 to 2007 after adjusting for inflation (Pickert, 2008). In Ohio tuition to attend a four-year public institution has risen a constant nine percent a
year on average from 1996 through 2007. Ohio tuition is estimated to be 47 percent
higher for in-state undergraduate students than the national average (Weaver, 2007).

In 2007, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland took actions intended to make college
more affordable and lower the cost of Ohio undergraduate tuition closer to the national
average. Ohio increased funding to public institutions by five percent while
simultaneously mandating a three-year tuition freeze (Weaver, 2007). Some Ohio
institutions found the five percent increase in state funding not enough to cover budget
deficits and increasing costs (Glatner, 2007).

The Ohio tuition freeze marked the first time in 33 years tuition did not increase at
the University of Toledo. The freeze presented financial challenges for UT, “for every
one percent the university decides not to raise tuition, the institution loses approximately
$1 million - depending on actual enrollment numbers” (Ankney, 2007, ¶8).

Some colleges have found a loophole of sorts, or a conduit to increase revenue by
raising student fees. For example, fees at the University of Massachusetts Amherst have
gone up by 134.6 percent since 1999 while tuition remained unchanged (Lipka, 2007).
Student fee rates are instituted by individual campuses and remain exempt from tuition
freezes (Glatner, 2007).

Left largely unregulated is how high mandatory fees can be raised. Recently the
growth rate of fees has outpaced the rate of inflation. Mandatory student fees have been
dubbed by some as “the back door tuition increase” (Glatner, 2007). During the 2006-07
school year, fees at public institutions rose an average of eight percent while tuition
increased six percent. 2006-07 was the first year that fees increased more than tuition
(Pickert, 2008).
In Ohio, full-time undergraduate fees have steadily increased at all major public institutions from 2000 through 2008. Chart 1 (below) demonstrates the growth rate of mandatory fees in Ohio for full-time students. Chart 1 was created by comparing Ohio Board of Regents data collected from public institutions in the state of Ohio during September 2000 and September 2008. All mandatory undergraduate fees are depicted in the aggregate, including general fees, facility fees, technology fees, parking fees, and any other fees uniformly assessed to all students. Though useful in examining mandatory fees, the data fails to separate out each individual fee, leaving the reader unable to determine the exact amount of the student activity fee. Despite its shortcomings, this data was the best example available of the breakdown of mandatory student fees at the state level (Ohio Board of Regents, 2000 and 2008).
Various studies suggest a negative relationship between increased tuition and fees and higher education enrollment. A 1996 study found that a $100 increase in tuition and fees results in an enrollment decline of between .05 and 1.0 percent (Heller, 1996). Heller, author of the 1996 study, believes the inverse relationship between fees and enrollment was evident at California State University in the 1990s. CSU increased student fees an average of 10 percent per year from 1990-91 until 1994-95. Enrollment decreased by more than 13 percent from fall 1990 through fall 1994, resulting in a loss of an estimated 49,865 students (CFA Research Brief #2).

But a rise in mandatory student fees cannot conclusively be traced to a decrease
in enrollment. Several institutions anecdotally report little reaction from students upon raising fees. According to Jonathan Ducote, President of the UNC-System Association of Student Government, “If it’s a (fee) increase of less than $10, then not many people are going to work up a sweat about it” (Sleep, 2003, ¶10) Shirley Ort, UNC-Chapel Hill Director of Scholarships and Financial Aid took Ducote’s comment a step further, saying, “it’s more likely that if it’s just a small (fee increase) of $50 compared to a (tuition hike) of three, four, or five hundred dollars, then it isn’t going to be perceived by students as harmful” (Sleep, 2003, ¶9).

Some administrators believe students are open to paying higher fees when additional tangible benefits come with the fees. The University of Oregon charged students mandatory fees for the 2007-08 school year that accounted for 40 percent of the cost of tuition. Among the mandatory fees included an energy surcharge fee, a technology fee, a fee for the campus health center, a building maintenance fee, and a student activity fee. When questioned about rising fees and their affect on students, the President of the University of Oregon replied, “there’s a particular appeal for the students who pay it, because they see it and they see the benefit” (Glatner, 2007, p. 2).

As the single institution and anecdotal nature of the studies and views cited above suggests, the effect of mandatory fees on students is an area of higher education that is often contradicted and disputed. Relatively little research has been employed to study the effect of mandatory fees on students. For example, for the last decade, the College Board has annually released *Trends in College Pricing*, a report detailing current tuition and fees along with room and board. The report provides valuable
information on costs at more than 3,500 institutions nationwide (Baum & Ma, 2008). However, *Trends in College Pricing* fails to separate tuition from fees, leaving the reader unclear of the ratio of tuition to fees.

All research examined for this study followed the seemingly ubiquitous trend of *Trends in College Pricing*. An exhaustive search of library databases as well as searches of the Integrated Postsecondary Data System, the Chronicle of Higher Education, the Education Resources Information Center, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Ohio Board of Regents revealed a gap in the literature. Information on mandatory student fees is aggregated and rarely separated from tuition. On occasions fees are separated from tuition, an example at the state level by the Ohio Board of Regents was depicted in Chart 1, a lump sum for all mandatory fees assessed is given. The numbers are not further broken down into each individual mandatory fee. The tendency to report aggregate data presents researchers with great difficulty in tracking the student activity fee even at an institutional level and makes it nearly impossible to track the growth rate of the student activity fee on a national or state level.

**Purpose of the Study**

This quantitative study will augment the current body of student activity fee knowledge by determining full-time students’ level of awareness of the mandatory general fee at the University of Toledo using an online survey. Though the term general fee is specific to Ohio institutions, general fee and student activity fee are tantamount in definition.

The purpose of the study is to find out if University of Toledo full-time students
are aware they pay a general fee. This study will discern if UT students are conscious they pay a general fee each semester, the degree to which students can identify the dollar amount of the general fee, how accurately students can identify where funds from the general fee are allocated, and finally how students perceive the importance of organizations and activities receiving funds from the general fee.

The study will shed light on the gap in the literature and provide more information on student awareness of the existence of activity fees at one institution. A search of dissertations and theses at the University of Toledo library found no research has been conducted to examine UT student awareness of the University of Toledo’s version of the mandatory student activity fee, the general fee. To examine this, students at the University of Toledo will be measured on their knowledge and perceptions of the general fee.

This study will provide answers to four research questions pertaining to student awareness of the UT general fee: (1) Are students aware they pay a general fee each semester? (2) Can participants accurately determine the dollar amount of the general fee for one semester? (3) Are respondents able to determine which organizations and activities receive funding through the general fee? (4) How important are organizations and activities receiving funding through the general fee to respondents?

As chapter two discusses in more detail, primitive forms of student fees have existed since the turn of the century (Alexander, 2006). Students in the 1960s began to want more from the college experience and assessed themselves a mandatory student activity fee to cover ancillary services. Soon activity fee funds were distributed to a variety of organizations and causes, some morally and politically
controversial. Disputes over the collection, control, and distribution of student activity fees reached as high as the Supreme Court. Slowly, case by case, from nebulous uncertainty emerged clear guidelines regulating the rights of students and their student activity fee funds. Students have legally staked a claim to police nearly all aspects relating to student activity fees (Lorence, 2003).

Definition of terms

1. General Fee Committee – The University of Toledo organization that determines how student activity fee monies are distributed to campus organizations and activities.
2. Student Activity Fee- A mandatory fee assessed by a college to students, used to fund campus organizations and programs.
3. General fee- A mandatory fee assessed by an Ohio college to students, used to fund campus organizations and programs.
4. University of Toledo full-time student - A student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits, 12 or more quarter credits, or 24 or more contact hours a week each term.
5. Larimer Team Facility – A training complex receiving general fee funding and reserved for use by UT athletic teams.
6. HSC – Nursing and Physical Therapy – Programs on the Health Science campus which receive funding through the general fee.
7. Morse Center YMCA – YMCA available for student use located on the UT Health Science campus which receives funding through the general fee.
Assumptions

The researcher is a second year graduate student at the University of Toledo. The researcher’s status as a student at the institution being researched could influence the instrument.

Limitations

As stated, the researcher is a graduate student at the institution being studied. The researcher pays the general fee each semester and may have predisposed views towards the general fee which are inadvertently woven into the survey and report. Results will be reported in descriptive terms only. No causal claims may be made about the relationship between the institution’s fees and students’ views or background. Additional limitations stem from the institution at which the survey is being administered. The University of Toledo is a large public open-enrollment municipal university. Findings generated from this study may not be applicable to other institutions.

Moreover, delimitations limited the scope of the study. The study was only administered at a single institution. An online survey method was utilized to reach participants. Online survey methods present a number of sampling obstacles. When a survey invitation successfully reached participants’ inboxes, the email could have been diverted by the system filter. Some respondents may not check email and others may not have access to the internet (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

An additional delimitation arose when the researcher denied access to a listserv of all full-time students. Rather than forgo the survey, an invitation was
sent to all students listed in a public email address book. Due to this institutional limitation, the sample was a sample of convenience.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter will describe key historical developments surrounding the implementation of the student activity fee in American higher education. In the latter half of the 21st century, disagreements over the assessment, administration, and collection of mandatory activity fees led to a number of court cases that clarified the university’s position where fees were concerned. Chapter two will highlight the key judicial decisions that inform the current status of student activity fees. Finally, this section will focus on student activity fees at the University of Toledo. Included in this chapter will be changes in how student activity fees were implemented at the University of Toledo over time and the steady growth in services provided through activity fees as well as in the cost itself that is assessed to students.

A History of Student Activity Fees

American colleges in the 19th century often teetered on the precipice of bankruptcy. The foundation of benevolence and Christian beliefs upon which American colleges were built did little to ensure financial solvency. To American colonists, the pursuit of knowledge was irreversibly fused with morality. Institutions took seriously their responsibilities to the community, the student body, and the future. In the early 1800s a college did not deny an education to a student with academic potential but limited economic means. Not surprisingly, the tuition monies that were collected from students
oftentimes did not cover the bills. Though no-frills operations, colonial colleges were nevertheless expensive ventures. Thus, institutions relied heavily on the support of wealthy alums and community members who felt that giving was their Christian duty (Rudolph, 1962).

By the mid-1800s, the generous philanthropy of single donors had built institutions such as Vassar, Smith, and Stanford. Some colleges stroked affluent egos, hinting to philanthropists that a specific sum of money would warrant their name on the college. From this practice emerged colleges including Dennison, Rutgers, and Bowdoin.

Another creative method of soliciting funds was through the sales of subscriptions. Colleges would ask citizens to pledge whatever amount of aid they could afford. Citizens who pledged subscriptions were often of the working class. Though many of these citizens did not have college education themselves, they did possess the foresight to recognize what was to become the ubiquitous value of higher education. They gave out of pride for their local college, or they gave to a religiously affiliated institution to ensure the advancement of their faith into future generations. It was not unheard of for the payment of subscriptions to arrive at a college in bushel baskets. During poor harvest seasons, the subscriptions might not arrive at all (Rudolph, 1962).

In 1815, funding for colleges and universities took a new turn when the American Education Society was founded by Congregational and Presbyterian laymen. The society raised funds at churches throughout the country which were used to send promising students for professions of the faith to college. From 1845-1854, between seventeen and thirty-one percent of the total college student population was funded through these primitive scholarships. In 1836, half of the student body at Amherst was funded through
the American Education Society. The society remained the largest patron for higher education in the United States until the Civil War (Rudolph, 1977).

State aid also allowed some colleges make ends meet during the dark economic times of the colonial era. But though states were bastions of higher education, they could not shoulder the burden of underwriting the burgeoning number of colleges throughout the country. Secular institutions were given financial priority for state aid over religiously-affiliated institutions. As a result, denominational colleges and smaller institutions were forced to come up with creative money making ideas to keep from going under. Some sold perpetual scholarships guaranteeing a buyer unlimited education for a lifetime. This zany scheme quickly unraveled when the money from the perpetual scholarships was promised to bill collectors even before it was collected. Come fall term campuses were faced with record enrollment but little or no revenue. In 1873, DePauw took steps to stem the difficulties caused by perpetual scholarships. To stymie the financial hemorrhaging, the college implemented free tuition for all students, accompanied by mandatory fees for all students. Still other institutions successfully implemented money-making ventures, such as state-authorized lotteries, to raise the necessary funds to stay afloat. Princeton successfully ran a state lottery in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania (Rudolph, 1962).

The financial burdens of an institution trying to stay out of the red took a toll on everyone within its walls. Professors were often the first to bear the brunt of lack of funds. When a professor died, his courses were divided amongst the remaining faculty members in lieu of hiring an additional faculty member to replace him. The salaries of faculty members were divided up at the end of the year from funds leftover after bills
were paid. At the University of Toledo, “The Directors were always several months behind with bills and salaries. President Raymond, Dean Tisdel, Professor Blair, and Professor Lanier had to wait more than three years to collect the full amount of their salaries for 1909-1910” (Hickerson, 1972, p. 126). When suggesting salary cuts for professors in 1874, the Iowa legislature expressed that, “Those who labor in the work of education, to be successful, must be endowed with such love of their profession as will make them content with less remuneration than can be obtained in ordinary business” (Rudolph, 1962, p. 196). The legislature’s words likely provided little justification or comfort to struggling professors. Low salaries took a toll on professors’ dignity and alienated them from mainstream society. When faced with the choice of raising salaries or keeping the cost of tuition low, colleges always went with the latter. Universities had no choice but to maintain low tuition to sustain their competitiveness and keep their doors open (Rudolph, 1962).

Perhaps due in part to budget deficits, few extracurricular activities were offered to students in antebellum colleges. Administrators, for their part, discouraged student activities. The strict religious atmosphere did not leave much time for fraternizing or activities, though by the early nineteenth century, extracurricular activities were spun off of the more formal coursework. Students took the matter into their own hands, organizing extracurricular activities independent of administrators and professors. Though typical extracurricular activities still focused on matters of intellect, they afforded students the freedom to explore subjects outside of the traditional curriculum and away from strict and fastidious professors. For example, newly formed debate clubs were liberated to argue the merits and faults of slavery or the pros and cons of the Louisiana Purchase. Similarly,
literary societies examined contemporary works that piqued their interest. With time, college administrators recognized the value of student-led extracurriculars. Literary societies and debate clubs honed skills in students such as leadership and imagination that were difficult to teach in the classroom (Rudolph, 1977).

The late nineteenth century also brought the introduction of collegiate athletics. Football spread like wildfire across college campuses nationwide, due in part to sponsorships and media coverage. Institutions quickly learned a good football team was good for the bottom line. Football stadiums were packed with paying fans. The more coverage a college received for their football team, the more popular the institution became with the public. Support for the home team, in turn, led to additional applicants and translated to an increase in endowments and alumni donations (Veysey, 1965). From 1890 through 1910 colleges began to polish their athletic images. Mascots and school colors were assumed, and college fight songs and college hymns were written (Thelin, 1976).

New stadiums became a status symbol of sorts on college campuses. But not everyone saw college athletics through rose-colored glasses. In October of 1929, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) released the results of a three-year study examining intercollegiate athletics. The CFAT report alleged athletics had taken precedence over academics. The report also found athletics to be fraught with abuse. Coaches were given great clout on campuses while local businesses profited from the commercial side of athletics (Thelin, 2004). Student opposition was also palpable. Malcolm K. Gordon wrote his thoughts on college athletics in an article in The Yale News. Malcolm said,
The commercialism which has been built up within and without our colleges, the money made by the college athletic associations directly and indirectly from the muscular prowess of a few athletes, together with the agreements with the vendors of athletic goods whereby both parties again make profits, these and similar conditions where commercialism has overshadowed not only sportsmanship but even the amateur standard of your college athletics, are the pernicious elements that have put our college athletics in a bad light. When a college reduces athletics to a business proposition and then makes enormous sums thereby, certainly, to any true sportsman and amateur, athletics have gone to excess in that particular. (Gordon, 1913, ¶3)

The first part of the twentieth century marked the start of a balancing act of the lucrative business of athletics and academics on college campuses nationwide. The CFAT report, along with the stock market crash of 1929 and resulting Great Depression, temporarily slowed the momentum of college athletics. Americans had less discretionary income to spend on frivolities such as tickets to athletic events. Despite the lull in interest, university officials continued to funnel money, including mandatory student activity fees, into athletics, believing the returns would be much greater than the investment. In 1931, Southern Methodist University administrators chose to cut faculty salaries in order to pay off debts for a football stadium (Thelin, 2004).

In addition to athletics, students began to want even more from the college experience during the 1900s. At many colleges students started collecting
voluntary fees to provide services and activities that would improve the quality of their education and experience as a student. These precursors to student activity fees did not provide the same luxuries of the student activity fees of the twenty-first century. For example, in 1875 the student activity fee at the University of Wisconsin was employed in part to heat public rooms and university hallways (Lorence, 2003).

Some professors became concerned students were focusing too much on the frivolities of extracurricular activities at the expense of their studies. Faculty perceived a divide forming between the academic pursuit of higher education and the social pursuits driven by student desire. Woodrow Wilson noted with some degree of scorn in 1910,

The work of the college, the work of its classrooms and laboratories, has become the merely formal and compulsory side of its life, and … a score of other things, lumped under the term ‘undergraduate activities,’ have become the vital, spontaneous, absorbing realities for nine out of every ten men who go to college. (Veysey, 1965, p. 294)

After World War I, student activities came to be viewed by both sides of the divide as an integral part of a student’s education. According to Rudolph (1962), “The extracurriculum was also an agency of the collegiate emphasis on fellowship, on character, on well-roundedness, and as such, it was a powerful instrument in the 1920s in bringing the university ideal into accommodation with the collegiate ideal” (Rudolph, 1962, p. 464). A holistic, student-centered approach to learning became the norm. Both in class and out of class, learning
experiences were valued. A plethora of student activities funded largely through mandatory student activity fees came to be expected on college campuses (Meabon, Alexander, & Hunter, 1979).

Until the 1960s, the student activity fee was designated for funding activities that every member of the student body could take part in. Incited by nuclear testing, segregation, and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the Vietnam era began more than a decade of student protests, marches, teach-ins, and rallies. As the war escalated so too did student anger and campus instability. A poignant example of student protest occurred in 1968 at Columbia University. Students, angry about Columbia’s relationship with the Institute for Defense Analysis and the perception of racial discrimination, protested en masse (Goodchild & Wechsle, 1989). Columbia responded by severing ties with the Institute for Defense Analysis.

Many states took an offensive stance following the Columbia protest, legislating laws to counter campus unrest (Goodchild & Wechsle, 1989). As student activism became prevalent on college campuses, the purpose of the student activity fee shifted to reflect this broader social trend. More and more students began to fight battles for rights and freedoms and college campuses served as ground zero (Meabon, et al., 1979).

In the 1970s, Ralph Nader formed Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) on campuses across the United States. PIRGs often work on behalf of students, taking on textbook publishers for price increases or loan agencies for exorbitant rates. Additionally, PIRGs lobby Congress on various environmental
and consumer issues. Though the PIRGs stood up to both Democrats and Republicans, the organization tended to lean politically to the left. PIRGs passed a referendum at many institutions to stake a claim in a portion of the mandatory student activity fee funds to be used for their lobbying interests (Jaschik, 2007).

Taking note of the funds allocated to PIRGs, other student groups began to clamor for a piece of the student activity fee fund. In an attempt to be nondiscriminatory, institutions began to dole out the mandatory student activity fee funds to many controversial and often one-sided organizations, including vegetarians, LGBT groups, atheists, Muslims, feminists, anarchists, conservatives, liberals, and Evangelical Christians (Lorence, 2003).

But some students objected; they did not want their fees to support the lobbying efforts of PIRGs, nor other equally controversial groups, when their views and values contradicted those of the organizations’. A dichotomy emerged between colleges and offended students. The court system was called upon to clarify the legal boundaries of mandatory student activity fee funds.

**Legal Boundaries on the Collection, Control, and Distribution of Student Activity Fees**

Citing a violation of their First Amendment rights, students filed lawsuits against institutions for the right to opt out of funding controversial student organizations (Lorence, 2003). From the mounting court case verdicts a central theme emerged: “viewpoint neutrality.” The Constitution mandates that an institution cannot discriminate based upon an organization’s message (United States of America, 1789). An institution cannot arbitrarily favor one viewpoint
over another. This resounding theme repeated itself throughout student activity fee discrimination court cases on the basis of religion, politics, and beliefs (Lorence, 2003).

Three often overlapping themes materialized from the court rulings on mandatory student activity fees: collection, control, and distribution of funds. Central to the collection of mandatory activity fees is the question of who has the authority to collect the fee. Why the student should be required to pay the mandatory activity fee and whether the allocation and use of the fee in fact affects its legality are likewise critical to understanding the issue of collection (Meabon et al., 1979).

*Collection*

There are three main ways a university collects student activity fee funds: (1) in a lump sum collected with tuition, (2) using a check system whereby a student checks the services they wish to pay for, (3) a method in which the fee is collected but students are given the opportunity to be reimbursed in full for any activities they object to or are not willing to support (Meabon, Krehbiel, & Suddick, 1996).

The legalities of the collection of mandatory student activity fees came to be questioned by students who wanted a clear definition of their rights. In 1993 a group of students filed a lawsuit against the University of California for the method CALPIRG was using mandatory student activity fees. In *Smith v. Regents of the University of California* the California Supreme Court ruled that the university violated the rights of students whose views were in opposition to those
represented by the political lobbyists. Additionally the court declared that even if
the university made student activity fee funds available to all student
organizations, a student had the right to insist his money not be used to fund an
organization with which he disagreed. Consequently, the university was required
to issue refunds to any student who objected to the views of CALPIRG (Lorence,
2003).

The University of Minnesota, noting the controversies surrounding PIRGs,
took a proactive approach to the funding of MPIRG. The university allows
students to opt out of the MPIRG fee. According to the university’s website, the
2008-09 MPIRG fee amounts to $4.82 per semester. The university explains that,
“…MPIRG gives the students the opportunity to speak out on public issues and
work for social change. The fee supports a professional staff for lobbying,
litigation, organizing, and research. To request a refund of this fee, contact One
Stop Student Services” (University of Minnesota, 2009).

Other institutions have not been so cautious when dealing with the
collection of student activity fee money. The University of California guaranteed
a fee freeze through graduation for students enrolled in professional degree
programs. Prompted by a budget crisis, the university raised the fees of
professional students in 2003. The California Court of Appeals in San Francisco
ruled a breach of contract and required the university return more than $33
million to students (Evangelauf, 2007).

Control

Control of mandatory student activity fees has come to be clearly defined by the
court systems. When a student government is given control by the institution to govern the allocation of funds, the legal responsibility of the distribution ultimately falls back on the institution. Once the university willingly authorizes the student organization the power to control the student activity funds, the university’s interests are represented by the student government. Some institutions have taken preemptive measures to ensure student governments abide by viewpoint neutrality in the allocation of funds. In Florida, for example, the legislature and Board of Regents have developed detailed guidelines for the control and allocation of student activity fee funds by student government (Meabon et al., 1979).

Despite these measures, some remain skeptical of the ability for student governments to maintain a viewpoint neutral stance. Jordan Lorence who has represented students in lawsuits in Minnesota and Wisconsin said that “At every campus I have looked at, at most thirty per cent of the student organizations receive any money at all. And usually there’s only a dozen or fewer groups that receive significant amounts” (Lederman, 1998, p. 3). Mr. Lorence believes student governments tend to be liberal, thus be more inclined to fund liberal campus organizations (Lederman, 1998).

Clarification regarding the control of student activity funds was defined in Southworth v. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. In 1996, three University of Wisconsin law students filed suit against the University of Wisconsin claiming that their mandatory student activity fees were funding organizations that offended their Christian beliefs. Specifically, the students targeted the Campus Women’s Center, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Center, the International Socialist Organization, the Wisconsin PIRG, the Progressive Student Network, Amnesty
International, Community Action on Latin America, La Collectiva Cultural de Aztlan, the Treaty Rights Support Group, and the U.S. Student Association (Messer-Davidow, 2001). The student activity fee for the 1995-96 school year totaled $331.50 (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System v. Southworth et al., 2000). The university was accused of discriminating with its allocation of funds; only thirty percent of the 480 student groups on campus received student activity fee generated funds (Lorence, 1999).

Funds were administered to registered student organizations (RSOs) through the student government. To qualify for RSO status, an organization needed to have membership base primarily composed of students, be a non-profit organization, and host events related to student life. Typical RSO activities ranged from political lobbying to hosting guest speakers on campus to publishing newspapers from a specific viewpoint. The university argued that a varied group of campus organizations contributed to the mission of the university. The university claimed an even hand in the administration of funds (Lorence, 1999).

The Supreme Court ruled that, unlike Rosenberger, the university did not violate the plaintiff’s First Amendment Rights. Institutions are entitled to fund campus organizations representing diverse and often controversial viewpoints. However, in this case, the university was not demonstrating viewpoint neutrality in the distribution of activity fee funds. The Court ruled that students have the right to opt out of paying student activity fees when they are used to fund organizations that they find to be objectionable (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System v. Southworth et al., 2000).

Southworth v. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System set
guidelines that defined the use of student activity fees by public institutions. As decided in *Rosenberger*, colleges must maintain viewpoint neutrality and cannot arbitrarily dole out the mandatory student activity fee funds. An institution cannot determine fund allotments based upon opinions represented by organizations. When a college practices viewpoint neutrality in allotting student activity funds, a student is under an obligation to pay the student activity fee. However, when a college does in fact discriminate based upon viewpoints, students can opt out of paying the student activity fee and are legally justified in claiming discrimination. Additionally, this court case cleared the way for campus organizations denied student activity fee money to file litigation against an institution claiming discrimination (*Lorence*, 2003).

Building upon the ruling in *Southworth*, the implications for the control of student activity fee funds were furthered in a 2007 U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit ruling in Albany, New York. The fund allocation system set in place by the State University of New York guidelines holds a referendum every four years in which students vote the amount awarded to NYPIRG. In 2003, a student group founded their own lobbying organization similar to NYPIRG. But the student association refused to hold a referendum to determine funding for the newly formed organization. The court ruled student votes are not viewpoint neutral. A referendum is therefore not a constitutional means by which to allocate student activity fee funds in the state of New York. The lawyer for the students applauded the ruling, “When people are forced to give their money to fund other people’s speech, it must be done in a way that is fair and equitable. You can’t give out other people’s money based on an up or down vote” (*Jaschik*, 2007, p. 2).
During a 2009 activity fee increase dispute in Ohio, a referendum by the student body overrode the control of the student government. At Bowling Green State University, as at many institutions, the control of general fee funds is placed in the hands of the student government. In 2009, the BGSU student government voted to increase the general fee $60 per semester to raise funds to build a new arena (Gilbert, 2009). In response, a group of students calling themselves the Coalition for Undergraduate Student Government Reform, began a petition to put the activity fee increase to a student body vote (Ouriel, 2009). The Coalition collected nearly twice the number of required signatures required for a referendum, and the fee increase was put to a student vote in March of 2009. Around 28% of undergraduate students participated in the referendum, with 2,630 in favor of the fee, and 1,182 against. The collection of the fee will begin in 2011 (“BGSU undergrads approve fee”, 2009).

Distribution

Closely intertwined with the control and collection of funds is the issue of distribution, or the utilization of mandatory student activity fee funds. Recent court case rulings have honed in on the proper allocation of student activity fee funds, causing states and universities to clearly define and put in place legal provisions to govern the allocation of funds. Nonetheless colleges continue to walk a fine line. One case in Virginia illustrates this situation.

In 1990, a group of undergraduates at the University of Virginia formed Wide Awake Productions, a conservative Christian organization. Wide Awake Productions began publishing and distributing to students free of charge a Christian newspaper entitled Wide Awake: A Christian Perspective at the University of Virginia. Wide Awake
Productions requested student activity funds from the Student Activity Appropriations Subcommittee to pay for printing costs associated with the newspaper. The request was refused on the grounds that the organization was religiously affiliated. The University of Virginia believed by denying the request they were upholding separation of church and state as defined by the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause. Paradoxically, the student organization alleged their First Amendment rights to free exercise of religion and freedom of speech were being violated by the university’s decision (Messer-Davidow, 2001).

After several failed appeal attempts at the university level, Wide Awake Productions filed suit against the University of Virginia. In June of 1995 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Rosenberger v. Rectors of the University of Virginia* that the university acted unconstitutionally, in fact violating the First Amendment and the organization’s right to freedom of speech (Messer-Davidow, 2001). According to the First Amendment, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or the press; or the right of the people peaceable to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances” (Messer-Davidow, 2001, p.872). The Supreme Court found administrators governing the University of Virginia to be akin to Congress and the government of the United States. Those granted responsibility for allocating the money cannot use their personal discretion when deciding which organizations receive funds. The student activity fund was public money and required to be distributed with an even hand to secular and religiously-affiliated organizations alike (*Rosenberger v. University of Virginia* et al., 1995).
The court also ruled that funds collected through student activity fee were designated specifically for student activities. The funds did not belong to the university; rather they belonged to the students. A student who disagreed with the allocation of her or his student activity fee had the right to ask for a refund for that portion of the activity fee. According to Justice O’Connor, “Finally, although the question is not presented here, I note the possibility that the student fee is susceptible to a free speech challenge by an objecting student that she should not be compelled to pay for speech with which she disagrees” (Messer-Davidow, 2001, p. 883). A few months after the court ruling, the university amicably offered students a refund of any student activity fee money that is allocated to religious or politically affiliated groups, an amount totaling $0.25 of the $32.00 annual fee (Lederman, 1998).

Yet some institutions still allocate student activity funds with an uneven hand. Wellesley College’s *Wellesley News* is a student run newspaper funded wholly by student activity fees. The newspaper actively snubs conservative organizations, refusing to publish upcoming events and going so far as to deny conservative groups paid advertising (Feder, 1999).

As demonstrated by the court cases and incidents outlined above, the allocation, collection, and control of student activity fees varies widely from institution to institution. This particular study examines the general fee at the University of Toledo. Before examining student awareness of the general fee at UT, it is important to discuss the history, allocation, collection, and control of the general fee at UT.

*Student Activity Fees in Ohio*

Many states have issued policies and legislation directing the collection, control,
and allocation of student activity fee funds at public institutions. Ohio has not enacted legislation regarding the general fee, though Ohio does enforce administrative policies at public institutions. In 1969, the Ohio Board of Regents changed the title of the student activity fee from “student services fee” to “general fee” at the request of university presidents. That same year, the Board issued a memorandum to presidents and directors of state-assisted institutions explaining a general fee increase does not require authorization by the Board of Regents (Ohio Board of Regents, 1969). Nonetheless, the Board of Regents maintained eight guidelines for which the general fee may be used:

1. Student health services
2. Student social centers
3. Debt service on student personnel service facility
4. Student government or student publications
5. Student recreational programs
6. Student cultural programs including lectures or artists
7. Debt service on convocation, cultural, and general social facilities
8. Intercollegiate athletics (Millett, 1969)

The University of Toledo joined the state university system in 1967, prior to the implementation of the state administrative policies guiding student activity fees (Millett, 1969).

_Student Activity Fees at the University of Toledo_

Student activity fees were not initially assessed to students at the University of Toledo. When the University of Toledo was founded in 1872, students were assessed $3 in tuition (Hickerson, 1972). The 1916-17 University of Toledo Catalog specified a fee
schedule for students, a registration fee of $2.00 and an optional gym fee which varied according to gender. For men, $4.00 provided access to the YMCA and for women $3.00 allowed membership to the YWCA. The gym fees assessed to University of Toledo students provided services that were analogous to those that would be provided in coming years through student activity fee funds. According to the 1922-23 University Catalog, both the YMCA and YWCA were “…interested in developing the social life of its members, giving, during the course of a year, a number of social affairs. Most of these are exclusively for their respective memberships, but others are for the entire university” (University Catalog, 1923, p. 11).

Students were first assessed a mandatory student activity fee of $1.00 per semester during the 1920-21 school year. In exchange, students were provided weekly receipt of the UT student newspaper, “The Teaser,” and membership to the University Athletic Association. The recreational fee for membership to the YMCA and YWCA remained itemized separately from the student activity fee. The university offered a variety of activities for students organized into four categories: athletic, social, educational, and governmental. Highlights from the 1922-23 first semester student activities calendar included a mixer hosted by the Women’s Association, yearbook tryouts, the second annual Armistice Hop, a concert by the Men’s Glee Club at the YMCA, a formal at the Toledo Yacht Club, and gift packs from Santa Claus for all full-time students (University Catalog, 1923).

By the 1927-28 school year, both the mandatory student activity fee and the privileges associated with it had increased. For the student activity fee of $6.25 a semester, “full-time students receive the weekly newspaper, the yearly annual, and
admission to all athletic and literary entertainments” (Catalog of the University of the City of Toledo, 1928, p. 27). The activity fee continued to hover at around $6.00 a semester until 1945 at which point it was eliminated. The 1945-46 Bulletin of the University of Toledo explained that, “Effective January 21, 1945, the Board of Directors of the University of Toledo has ordered a simplification of fees for both full-time and part-time students. This will eliminate any extra charges for Regular Fee, Student Activity Fee, and Library Fee, formerly paid by all students” (Bulletin of the University of Toledo, 1945, p. 5). The student activity fee was once again reinstituted during the 1952-53 school year at a cost of $12.00 a semester.

The trend of rising student activity fees has continued at the University of Toledo until present day. Table 2 was created using UT general fee dollar amounts at decade intervals beginning in 1915. The general fee figures were taken from UT catalogs and finance brochures from the Canaday Center Special Collections in the University of Toledo Carlson Library. The fee was charged three times per year during quarter calendar years and twice during semester calendar years.
Table 2

*Increase of the General Fee at the University of Toledo since 1915*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity Fee Amount</th>
<th>Semester/Quarter</th>
<th>Total amount in dollars per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915-16</td>
<td>No fee assessed</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>$6.50</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>$13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-46</td>
<td>No fee assessed</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-56</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>$24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>$40.00</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>$80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>$44.80</td>
<td>Quarter</td>
<td>$134.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>$88.20</td>
<td>Quarter</td>
<td>$264.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>$249.24</td>
<td>Quarter</td>
<td>$747.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>$524.16</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>$1,048.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>$555.60</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>$1,111.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* University of Toledo Catalogs and Finance Brochures; calculations by the author.

As depicted in Table 2, the general fee has shown a rising trend from 1915 until present day. Chart 2 and Table 3 further illustrates the increase in student activity fees in inflation-adjusted dollars.
Chart 2

*UT General Fee Amount in 2008 Dollars*

Source: University of Toledo Catalogs and Finance Brochures; calculations by the author.
Table 3

*The General Fee at the University of Toledo has Outpaced Inflation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total fee amount in dollars per year</th>
<th>Total fee amount in 2008 dollars per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915-16</td>
<td>No fee assessed</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
<td>$125.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>$13.00</td>
<td>$207.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-46</td>
<td>No fee assessed</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-56</td>
<td>$24.00</td>
<td>$196.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>$80.00</td>
<td>$556.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>$134.40</td>
<td>$547.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>$264.60</td>
<td>$538.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>$747.72</td>
<td>$1,074.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>$1,048.32</td>
<td>$1,176.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>$1,111.20</td>
<td>$1,111.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* University of Toledo Catalogs and Finance Brochures; calculations by the author.

University of Toledo administrators have used a variety of ways to itemize the student activity fee. Students during the 1970-71 school year paid a general fee of $39.00, an athletics fee of $42.50, a student union fee of $34.00, and a general activity fee of $40.50 per quarter (University of Toledo Finance Information Brochure, 1970).

In the University of Toledo Finance Information Brochure for September of 1980 the term “general fee” completely superseded the more specific “student activity fee.” Under the umbrella of general fee, the $189 annual fee was divided amongst intercollegiate athletics, which received $73.50, the Student Union, allotted $64.50, and Student Activities and Services which were allocated $50.10 annually. The general fee
provided students free or reduced admission to activities sponsored by the Student Union and Student Senate, admission to all athletic events, a campus newspaper subscription, intramural sports, and funds to support the radio station. Notably, the general fees also afforded health services to students, which included unlimited emergency care and one free treatment of an illness (University of Toledo Finance Brochure, 1980).

As the general fee increased, the university began to hone in on how exactly general fee funds could be distributed and controlled. Along with President Horton, the Board of Trustees proposed a clear method of allocation in 1993 with the formation of a Student General Fee Committee. According to the Board, the Student General Fee Committee:

…Enables students to make recommendations to the Vice President for Student Affairs about the allocation of student general fees. Increases or decreases in student general fees shall be recommended by the Student General Fee Committee and sent to the Student Senate for approval. The Student Senate may amend the Student General Fee Committee’s recommendations and by majority vote submit its amended recommendations to the Vice President for Student Affairs. The Vice President for Student Affairs may amend the Student Senate recommendations and make his or her own recommendations to the President of the University who shall have final authorization for setting the student general fees to be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for appropriate action” (Board of Trustees Minutes, 1993, p. 76).
The Board of Trustees adopted guidelines directing organizations on how general fee monies could be spent. A student organization must first submit a formal request for funds, activities must benefit registered students, and the organization must document how general fee funds are spent. The Board further explained how exactly funds were to be handled with regards to travel, entertainment and social activities, speakers and workshops, fundraising, telephones, income accounts, charitable contributions, political activities, wage payments, approval for expenditures, and forfeiture of funds (Board of Trustees Minutes, 1993).

The mid-1990s marked a period of great growth for the university. Numerous buildings were constructed, such as the International House Residence Hall, Wolfe Hall, the Student Medical Center, and the Center for the Visual Arts at the Toledo Art Museum. During the late 1980s, student Jeff Cole ran as President for student government on a platform to build a state-of-the-art Student Recreation Center. Once elected, Cole held public forums to listen to concerns and discern what students wanted in the Recreation Center. Students expressed interest in racquetball courts, a golf simulator, and opportunities for passive recreation. All of these suggestions were included in the final plans (personal communication with Jeff Cole, March 25, 2009).

But not all student response to the proposal was positive. Some students did not want to fund a facility they would not use. Cole received death threats and an effigy of him was found hanging in the quad. Cole persisted, believing a new Student Recreation Center would be utilized by most current students and serve as an admissions tool for attracting future students. The 39 sitting members of the Student Senate voted unanimously for the proposal, and construction began. The Recreation Center was
opened in October of 1990, and a student activity fee increase of $50 per quarter went into effect in September of 1990. The 1990 general fee increase can account in part for the spike of the general fee rate from 1985-86 to 1995-96, as depicted in Table 3 (personal communication with Jeff Cole, March 25, 2009).

The mandatory student activity fee increases matched the growth occurring on campus. In 1990, the general fee amounted to $175.00 per quarter. By 1999, the fee had increased to $402.24 per semester. The general fee for the 2008-09 school year amounted to $43.68 per credit hour. The maximum general fee assessed is twelve credit hours times the hourly rate, or $555.60 per semester (personal communication with Dean of Students, January 25, 2009).

Marcia Culling, Business Manager of Student Life, explained, “the general fee is a mandatory fee assessed to all students registered for credit, contract education courses, and distance learning. All student levels are assessed at the same rate” (Reamer, 2006). General fee funds are collected from students along with tuition. The University of Toledo does not allow students to choose which organizations and activities their funds are used towards, nor does UT offer a refund of any portion of the fee.

Benefits provided at no cost to students through the general fee include Student Government Events, Campus Activities Programming, admission to athletic events, escort services, and the UT shuttle service. The Student Union can be reserved free of charge for university affiliated events and at half-price for personal use. Full-time students receive a membership to the Student Recreation Center. Part-time students are allotted fifteen visits to the Student Recreation Center with the option to purchase a full membership or additional visits (personal communication with Dean of Students, January
25, 2009).

In fiscal year 2008, $19,852,592 in general fee funds were allocated to the following offices and organizations on the UT main campus: Study Abroad, HSC-Nursing & Physical Therapy, Student Activities/Dean of Students, Marching Band, Escort Services, General Fee Reserve, Athletics & Cheerleaders, Glass Bowl, Larimer Team Facility, Student Union, Child Care Facility, Student Recreation Center, Student Medical Center, University Transit Services, and Food Services Debt at the Student Union (FY08 Student General Fee Recommendation form). The allocation of general fee funds for the main campus is graphically depicted in Chart 3. A detailed chart of general fee dollars received by Main Campus Organizations is located in Appendix A.
Chart 3

2008 General Fee Allocation Varies Widely on the Main Campus

Source: FY 2008 Student General Fee Recommendation Form; calculations by the author.

In addition to the funds allocated to the Main Campus and depicted in Chart 3, $687,404 in general fee funds were designated for the Health Science campus. Funds went towards Academic Enrichment, Student Life & Student Affairs, Computer Learning Resource Center, General Student Services, HSC – Nursing & Physical Therapy, Morse Center YMCA, Student Health & Pharmacy Plan, and other graduate student support.

The total general fee funds distributed for the 2008 fiscal year for both campuses amounted to $20,539,996 (FY08 Student General Fee Recommendation form).

General fee monies fund operating expenses as well as debt service. Operating
expenses include staff, insurance, utilities, and supplies. Debt service refers to the interest and principal owed on a debt. Debt services and operating expenses combine to provide the budget for an organization. For example, after a referendum was passed by the UT student body approving a new Student Recreation Center, bond covenants were sold to generate cash and construction began. During 2008-09, the Student Recreation Center paid $32,688 in salaries, $45,300 in utilities, and $204,851 in debt services (FY08 General Fee Recommendation Form, 2008).

The general fee funds distributed to Student Activities are still allocated through the Student General Fee Committee. The purpose of the Committee is “to provide a forum for student input as to how general fee dollars will be spent” (personal communication with Dean of Students, January 25, 2009). The Committee is comprised of the Chair (Dean of Students), the Ex-officio (Student Affairs Budget Manager), and the voting members (Student Government President or Vice-President, Chair of the Student Senate Finance Committee, and five student representatives appointed by Student Government). The Committee meets approximately once a week to review requests submitted by student organizations for general fee allocations and to make recommendations for allocations to the Student Senate. The Student General Fee Committee provides guidelines as to how student activity fee funds are distributed. “Top priority” is given to organizations whose program benefits the entire student body, is on-campus, and supports UT traditions. “Low priority” is given to travel requests and activities that benefit a select handful of UT students.

Several steps comprise the UT Student Activities general fee allocation process. First, a lump sum of general fee funds is designated for the Dean of Students Office.
Next, requests for general fee funding are presented to the Student General Fee Committee by campus organizations during the budget development process. After deliberation, the Committee submits suggestions for allocation to the Student Senate. The Student Senate then provides recommendations to the Vice President for Student Life. The Vice President accepts or amends the recommendations and submits them to the President. Finally, the President makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees which approves or rejects the distribution of funds (personal communication with Dean of Students, January 25, 2009).

For Fiscal Year 2009, the Dean of Student’s/Student Activities Office received a total of $1,289,331 in funding from the general fee. The General Fee Committee allocated $358,183 of the lump sum of funding to 59 organizations and activities housed in Student Activities and the Dean of Student’s Office. The “major organizations” (so designated for accounting purposes) which received funding are outlined in Appendix B. The Committee also allocated funds to “other organizations” (so named for accounting purposes). Those organizations and the funds they received in Fiscal Year 2009 are detailed in Appendix C.

Not included in either grouping of organizations is SAO Programming, which received $19,585, and Student Organization Collaborative Programming, which received $24,000. The grand total for all student activities organizations receiving funding through the general fee in fiscal year 2009 added to $401,768 (2008-2009 Budget Summary).

An additional $655,846 in general fee funds allocated to Student Activities and the Dean of Student’s Office were spent on staff salaries and benefits in 2009. Positions in Student Activities funded through the general fee include a Public Inquiries Assistant,
a Secretary, an Accountant, a Project Manager, the Assistant Director for Student Organizations, the Director of Student Involvement, a Graduate Assistant, the Assistant Director of Greek Life, the Assistant Director of Student Activities and Leadership, and the Dean of Students (personal communications with Geni Hofbauer, March 26, 2009).

Programming including Family Weekend and 1st Weeks UT along with office supplies and equipment accounted for $118,096. Further expenses such as printers and office furniture cost $113,621. All Student Activities funding and Dean of Students expenses combined add up to $1,289,331 (Martinez, 2008).
The purpose of the study was to better understand student awareness of the general fee and how students view the general fee – do they welcome the fee and the benefits funded through it, do they object to the fee, would prefer not to pay it, and forfeit the benefits provided through it, or do they fall somewhere in the middle?

The research questions of the study asked: (1) Are respondents aware they pay a general fee each semester? (2) Can participants accurately determine the dollar amount of the general fee for one semester? (3) Are respondents able to determine which organizations and activities receive funding through the general fee? (4) How important are organizations and activities receiving funding through the general fee to respondents?

**Research Method**

A quantitative methodology was implemented in this study. Descriptive statistics were used to identify salient characteristics of the sample and examine possible inferences to the wider population. Descriptive statistics concisely summarize data and allow researchers to easily understand information and determine relevant associations at a specific point in time (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

The questions of the survey instrument were designed from Dillman’s design principles for web-based surveys as well as other techniques recommended by seasoned researchers. Dillman found abandonment is most likely to occur in the beginning of the
“The first question sets the tone for the rest of the questionnaire; if it is lengthy or complicated or presents unfamiliar response scales, respondents may infer that this is indicative of all the questionnaire items and decide not to complete the survey” (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p. 62). Following Dillman’s principle, the first few questions of the survey were basic “choose one response” questions (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Additional research indicates participants are less likely to respond to open-ended questions and were confused by double-barreled questions. Additionally, closed-ended questions provide researchers with the most reliable data. Thus, closed-ended questions with detailed answer choices were used and double-barreled questions were avoided.

Concise and clear wording were implemented throughout the survey (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitiza 2003). The survey displayed only one question at a time on each webpage as opposed to all questions displayed at once. Researchers have found displaying one question per page can cut down on nonresponse (Thorndike, Carlbring, Smyth, Magee, Gonder-Frederick, Ost, & Ritterband, 2009). The survey questions were examined by an outside consultant to eliminate any detectable bias.

Diligence was given to how exactly attitudes should be measured. Alreck & Settle (2004) advise first finding out how much a respondent knows about a topic, “If they’ve never heard of it, there’s no reason to ask about their feelings or actions. People often give an opinion, even though they’ve no notion whatsoever what the thing is” (Alreck & Settle, 2004, p. 14). Alreck & Settle (2004) suggested designing questions with aided recall rather than unaided recall. Several questions on the survey applied this advice by asking for detail from the participant about the general fee.
Research Design

A web-based, self-designed survey method was used by the researcher to examine full-time student awareness of the general fee at the University of Toledo during the spring of 2009. The web-based survey method provided many advantages. Web surveys allow for quick data analysis and simple follow-up. Web surveys often produce greater response rates than traditional pencil and paper survey designs. Survey software programs take measures to protect the data and prevent data losses. Web surveys are also convenient for respondents. The web-based method is cost effective and enables the researcher to require responses from participants (Evans & Mathur, 2005).

Potential limitations to the web-based survey method include privacy concerns by the participant, the survey being filtered, and the respondent not possessing the technological capability to complete the survey (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Another disadvantage to web-based surveys includes limited access to email address lists, thus possible difficulties in isolating the population.

Additionally, Heerwegh & Loosveldt (2008) found respondents in online surveys more likely to respond with nonresponses and differentiate less on Likert-scales than respondents in face-to-face surveys. Such responses could potentially cause decreased data quality in online surveys. Finally, online surveys produce data through convenience sampling rather than probability sampling (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Convenience sampling allows respondents to choose whether or not they participate in the study. Each member of the population does not have an equal probability of being chosen to participate in the study. Certain segments of a population may be excluded in convenience sampling. Thus, respondents who chose to participate may not be
representative of the population being studied (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Subjects

The population for this study was the 17,331 full-time undergraduate, professional, and graduate students at the University of Toledo. A full-time student is defined by the University of Toledo as “a student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits, 12 or more quarter credits, or 24 or more contact hours a week each term” (Common Data Set, 2008-09). During fall of 2009, 22,336 graduate and undergraduate students were enrolled at the University of Toledo. Of that number, 14,199 were full-time undergraduate students and 3,132 were full-time graduate and professional students (Common Data Set, 2008-09).

Instrumentation

The measuring device used in the study was a survey designed by the researcher on the Web using Vovici Survey Software. Vovici is an online software tool that allows for the creation, distribution, and management of the survey online. The survey was created on Vovici and then distributed to the sample through a link placed in an email invitation. Prior to implementation the survey was approved by the University of Toledo Institutional Research Board (IRB). The IRB certified the study was ethical, subjects would not be placed at any risk, and the instrument was scientific.

The survey instrument was an eight-item, closed-ended questionnaire (See Appendix F). Question types included one Likert-scale question, one “choose all that apply” question, and six “choose one response” questions. Three of the “choose one response” questions were demographic questions.

The Likert-scale question asked participants to identify their perceived
importance of 22 University of Toledo organizations and activities which receive funding through the general fee. The “choose all that apply” question examined which of 22 campus organizations and activities students believed received funding from the general fee during 2008-09.

The first “choose one response” question was the Consent Form (see Consent Form Appendix D). An additional two “choose one response” questions examined if participants were aware they paid a general fee each semester and what they believed the dollar amount was for one semester. The final three “choose one response” questions were demographic questions examining whether students were full-time or part-time, current class standing, and gender.

The first and second questions of the survey were conditional logic. The first conditional logic question was the Consent Form. If a respondent chose not to participate in the survey the conditional logic question submitted the survey and the respondent was withdrawn from the study. The second conditional logic question, question 2, asked respondents if they were full-time or part-time students. The study was intended for full-time students only. If a participant responded they were part-time the conditional logic question submitted the survey and the participant was withdrawn from the study.

Field Procedures

The survey was distributed through a link placed in an invitation email sent from the researcher’s university affiliated email account. Recipients were invited to click the survey link which opened the survey in a browser window.

Consent was obtained from each subject at the first question of the online survey. The Consent Form detailed the purpose of the study, a description of procedures,
potential risks, an explanation that participation was voluntary, and an explanation of measures taken to maintain confidentiality. The Consent Form explained subjects were free to cease participation in the survey at any time. Respondents were asked to click Accept, I agree to participate in the survey to indicate they had received a copy of the informed consent form and to indicate their agreement to participate in the study. Respondents that did not agree to the terms outlined in the Consent Form were asked to click No, I choose not to participate in the survey and were withdrawn from the survey.

Only one question was displayed on the screen at a time. Participants moved to the next question by clicking on the next page button. Respondents were able to view previous questions by clicking on the previous page button.

The survey was developed so participants could enter a response by clicking on the answer options. A progress bar placed in a consistent location on the bottom of each page of the survey allowed respondents to view the graphical percentage of questions they had completed.

Completed surveys were submitted to the researcher by clicking on the submit survey button. Upon completion of the survey participants were thanked and directed to the Judith Herb College of Education website. Completed surveys were submitted electronically to Vovici Survey Software.

Data Collection and Recording

The researcher was denied access to a listserv of the population. Due to this institutional limitation, the convenience sample was selected from the population using a public email address book listing of all students at the University of Toledo, the only vehicle available to collect the data. Each University of Toledo student on the address list
received an email message inviting them to participate in the study if they were a full-time student. The survey invitation email also contained a link directing participants to the online survey instrument (see survey invitation Appendix E).

The survey was posted on the Web from March 4 through March 18, 2009. The initial survey invitation was sent out on March 4, 2009. The survey was closed on March 18, 2009. Respondents were offered no form of compensation for their participation in the survey. To maintain privacy and confidentiality, the survey remained anonymous and respondents were not tracked. There were minimal risks to participation in the study.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were submitted anonymously to a database on the Vovici Survey Software website. The data was compiled through the secure Vovici site. No recording identifiers were used to code participants and all information was kept strictly confidential. Data was summarized and reported in the aggregate.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics provide information about the sample and the responses of the sample. Unlike inferential statistics, descriptive statistics cannot be used to make inferences (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Limitations

The main limitations of this methodology arose during the process of conducting the study. The purpose of the study was to gauge student awareness of the general fee. Part-time students are assessed a general fee based upon the number of credit hours they take each semester. Full-time students with 12 credit hours or more pay the same general fee each semester. For research purposes, part-time students were excluded from the study and the population was current full-time University of Toledo students. When the
researcher was denied access to a listserv of the target population, the survey was sent to all University of Toledo students listed in the public address book. Both the body of the email and the Consent Form explained the survey invitation was intended only for full-time students. To ensure part-time students did not participate in the study respondents were again asked if they were currently a full-time or part-time student in question 2, immediately following the Consent Form. If a respondent indicated they were part-time, their survey was submitted and they were withdrawn from the study.

The survey was also restricted in that the public email address book is not kept up to date. Students who graduated last spring are still listed as current students in the address book. Consequently, close to 300 survey invitations were bounced back to the researcher’s inbox with the error message: *Your message did not reach some or all of the intended recipients. The e-mail system was unable to deliver the message, but did not report a specific reason. Check the address and try again. If it still fails, contact your system administrator.*

Other barriers to reaching the population cropped up throughout the survey invitation process. Current UT students have the option of removing their contact information from the public email address book. When the survey invitation successfully reached participants’ inboxes, the email could have been diverted by the system filter. Some respondents may not check their UT email and others may not have access to the internet (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

Based on these potentially confounding factors not every member of the population was reached by the survey and not every full-time UT student had an equal opportunity to participate. Therefore, the sample in this study was a sample of
convenience. Only those members of the population that were obtainable and chose to respond participated.

Respondents chose to participate in the survey, a bias known as volunteerism. Some members of the population may be over-represented while others under-represented. Respondents who feel neutral about the topic of the study are more likely not to respond than those who felt strongly (Alreck & Settle, 2004). Both volunteerism and convenience sampling introduce the possibility for error (Patten, 2005).
Chapter Four
Findings

In this chapter, the author will summarize the findings of the study. Data from the
survey results will be presented along with findings related to the research questions. In
this chapter, the author presents factual information only. Possible conclusions drawn
from the data will be examined in the final chapter.

Sample Results

During the two week period the survey was available, 895 participants responded
to the survey invitation. Of those, 875 (97.8%) agreed to the terms outlined in the
Consent Form while 20 (2.2%) did not agree to the terms of the Consent Form and were
withdrawn from the study. In the second question asking if students were full-time or
part-time, 115 respondents (13.9%) indicated they were a part-time student and were
withdrawn from the study. Thus, the sample consisted of 760 valid responses. Using
Fowler’s Sample Size Table which provides confidence ranges for variability due to
sampling, a sample mean from a sample size of 500 will deviate from the population
mean 4% of the time. With a sample size of 1000, the sample mean will deviate from the
population mean 3% of the time. The study sample of 760 fell between 500 and 1000 on
Fowler’s Table (Creswell, 2008). Given Fowler’s Sample Size Table, the researcher will
venture to say the results of the study have value and can cautiously be generalized to the
population.
**Demographic Information**

The majority of students who participated in the study were female (58.1%). Respondents’ gender is illustrated in Chart 4 below. The gender of respondents in the study varies slightly from the demographic information of the population. During 2008-09, 49.5% of full-time UT students were female while 50.5% were male.

Chart 4

*Gender of Respondents*

![Gender Pie Chart]

**Source:** Author designed survey; calculations by the author.

Participants also largely identified as graduate and professional students, at 33.7%. In comparison, 16.8% of participants identified as freshman, 15.8% as sophomores, 16.4% as juniors, and 17.3% as seniors. These percentages are further detailed in Chart 5. Again, these percentages differ slightly from the population.
demographics. During fall 2008, 20.9% of full-time students enrolled at the University of Toledo were graduate or professional students while 79.1% were undergraduates.

Chart 5

**Respondent Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniors</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman/First Year</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author designed survey; calculations by the author.

**Research Question Results**

The purpose of the study was to determine if University of Toledo full-time students are aware they pay a general fee. Four research questions were utilized: (1) Are students aware they pay a general fee each semester? (2) Can participants accurately determine the dollar amount of the general fee for one semester? (3) Are respondents able to determine which organizations and activities receive funding through the general fee? (4) How important are organizations and activities receiving funding through the general fee to respondents?

Question three was the first research question designed to garner information about the student awareness of the general fee. An overwhelming majority of participants
were cognizant they paid a general fee each semester. As illustrated by Chart 6 below, more than nine out of ten respondents (91.3%) said they were aware they paid a general fee each semester while less than one tenth (8.7%) were not aware they paid a general fee.

Chart 6

*Respondent Awareness of the General Fee*

![Bar Chart]

**Source:** Author designed survey; calculations by the author.

Less than half of participants (42.5%) accurately identified the dollar amount of the general fee for one semester. Few respondents estimated the cost of the fee to be higher than the actual dollar amount (14.5%). A larger number of respondents, 43%, believed the general fee to be less than the actual dollar amount. Chart 7 graphically depicts these percentages.
Research question six asked participants to indicate which university organizations and activities they believed received funding through the general fee in 2008. Respondents were provided a list of activities and organizations including: Study Abroad, HSC - Nursing and Physical Therapy, Student Activities/Dean of Students, Marching Band, Escort Services, Athletics and Cheerleaders, Glass Bowl, Larimer Team Facility, Student Union, Child Care Facility, General Fee Reserve, Student Recreation Center, Student Medical Center, University Transit Services, Food Service Debt - Student Union, Academic Enrichment, Student Life and Student Affairs, Computer Learning Resource Center, General Student Services, Morse Center YMCA, Student Health and Pharmacy Plan, and Other Graduate Student Support. Participants were asked to check a
box next to each organization or activity they believed received funding. In actuality, all organizations and activities on the list received funding through the general fee in 2008.

Nearly half of participants (45.5%) believed the Student Recreation Center received funding through the general fee. Many participants also identified the Student Union (44.0%), General Student Services (41.3%), Student Activities/Dean of Students (38.0%), University Transit Services (37.4%), and Student Life and Student Affairs (34.5%) as receiving general fee funds. A smaller percentage of students chose Marching Band (15.1%), Study Abroad (15.7%), the Child Care Facility (17.5%), Food Service Debt/Student Union (17.6%), Academic Enrichment (24.3%), Athletics and Cheerleading (25.7%), Escort Services (26.4%), the Glass Bowl (29.6%), the Student Medical Center, (30.7%), The least number of students recognized HSC-Nursing and Physical Therapy (9.5%), the Morse Center YMCA (10.8%), Larimer Team Facility (11.3%), and Student Health and Pharmacy Plan (13.0%) as receiving general fee funding. Responses to question 6 in their entirety are displayed in Table 4.
Table 4

Organizations Believed to Receive Funding through the General Fee in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Recreation Center</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fee Reserve</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Union</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Student Services</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Activities/Dean of Students</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Transit Services</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life and Student Affairs</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Medical Center</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Bowl</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Learning Resource Center</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort Services</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics and Cheerleaders</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Enrichment</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student Support</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Service Debt - Student Union</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Facility</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marching Band</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Health and Pharmacy Plan</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larimer Team Facility</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morse Center YMCA</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC - Nursing and Physical Therapy</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author designed survey; calculations by the author.
The final research question asked participants to indicate the importance of activities and organizations funding through the general fee to them. Using a Likert-scale participants were asked to rate the organizations and activities as not important, neutral, or important. The top five responses for each Likert-scale choice are examined in detail, while all responses are presented in Table 5.

The highest number of participants responded the Student Recreation Center was important to them (70.2%). Less than one tenth of respondents believed the Student Recreation Center was not important (9.8%). The next activities or organizations deemed to be of greatest importance by participants were the Student Medical Center (64.3%), the Student Union (63.2%), the Computer Learning Resource Center (54.0%), and Academic Enrichment (51.7%).

The organization ranked least important by respondents was Marching Band (51.3%). Only 11.2% of students indicated Marching Band was important to them. Other organizations participants viewed as not important included Larimer Team Facility (49.7%), the Morse Center YMCA (49.1%), the Child Care Facility (41.1%), and Athletics and Cheerleading (38.7%). The main organizations and activities receiving a neutral ranking from participants included the General Fee Reserve (52.6%), Student Activities/Dean of Students (44.9%), Larimer Team Facility (44.2%), General Student Services (43.1%), and the Glass Bowl (42.7%). Table 5 lists the organizations and activities which received funding through the general fee in 2008-09 and the percentage of respondents who rated each organization and activity as not important, neutral, and important. The table is organized with organizations and activities rated most important at the top.
Table 5

*Importance of General Fee Funded Activities and Organizations to Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Recreation Center</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Medical Center</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Union</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Learning Resource Center</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Enrichment</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life and Student Affairs</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Transit Services</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student Support</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Student Services</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Health and Pharmacy Plan</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Activities/Dean of Students</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort Services</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Facility</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Service Debt - Student Union</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC - Nursing and Physical Therapy</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics and Cheerleaders</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Bowl</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morse Center YMCA</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fee Reserve</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marching Band</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larimer Team Facility</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Author designed survey; calculations by the author.
As evidenced by the organizations ranked most and least important in Table 5, general trends emerged from the findings of the research study. Chapter five will summarize these trends and provide conclusions and recommendations.
Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations

This section will provide a brief summary of what has been covered in the thesis thus far. Chapter five will discuss the findings of the research in relation to the literature review and methodology. Conclusions and possible ramifications from the study will be discussed. Finally, practical suggestions for further research as well as suggestions for state governing boards and research organizations will be provided.

Summary

Mandatory student activity fees were introduced in the early 1900s as a means to provide students with additional services that extended beyond the classroom. Students used the self-assessed fees to fund extracurricular activities which took hold and came to become an essential part of the American college experience. Mandatory fees expanded and evolved to subsidize somewhat controversial organizations which served the needs of a few but took funds from the whole.

From the 1960s until present day, mandatory fees have been found at the center of court case after court case with students squaring off against institutions regarding the collection, control, and allocation of student fee funds. Recent student anger over the cost of mandatory student fees at Bowling Green State University and the University of Oregon indicate there is a limit on how much students are willing to pay in mandatory fees. To add to the cloud of controversy swirling around mandatory fees, the institutional
cost to educate a student began to skyrocket. State laws prohibited institutions from raising tuition. Faced with rising college costs and decreased funding, some institutions found mandatory fees a medium to increasing revenue (Pickert, 2008). At the same time the budgets of students are contracting. Students’ desire value from their education and may begin to question the funding of organizations and activities they find controversial or simply of little use.

Conclusions

The intent of this study was to provide information about University of Toledo students’ awareness of the general fee. The UT general fee has grown from $5.00 per semester at its inception in 1925 to $555.60 per semester in 2009. Organizations and activities funded through the general fee have also grown and expanded. UT does not allow students to indicate the services they are willing to fund through the general fee. Rather, UT charges each student a general fee along with tuition.

The results of this study indicate students are keenly aware of the cost of the general fee. More than 90% of participants indicated awareness that they paid a general fee each semester. Though students were aware they paid a general fee each semester, the majority of students (57.5%) were unable to accurately identify the cost of the general fee each semester. Only 42.5% of students correctly identified the dollar amount of the general fee. Nearly the same percentage of students (43%) thought the dollar amount of the general fee to be less than its actual amount, while a mere 14.5% of students believed the cost of the general fee to be greater than its actual amount.

Respondents demonstrated even less accuracy in determining which organizations and activities received funding through the general fee. All organizations and activities
listed on the questionnaire were funded through the general fee in 2008-09. Yet no respondent indicated all organizations on the list received funding through the general fee. It is possible participants simply did not know what some of the listed organizations were. The three categories which received the lowest percentages were also three of the least recognizable organizations and activities on the list. Specifically, only 9.5% of respondents indicated HSC - Nursing & Physical Therapy received funding through the general fee, 10.8% chose the Morse Center YMCA, and 11.3% believed the Larimer Team Facility was funded.

The organizations and activities that were widely thought to receive funding through the general fee were commonplace campus activities and organizations that most, if not all, students have heard of. Among them were the Student Recreation Center (45.5%), the Student Union (44.0%), and General Student Services (41.3%). Such organizations have also traditionally been funded through student activity fees. In recent years, the student activity fee has nationally morphed to cover much more than simply student activities. Perhaps UT students are unaware the activity fee has broadened in scope to include numerous organizations and activities catering to specific populations and interest.

Only 38 percent of students were aware the general fee funds subsidized the Dean of Student’s Office/Student Activities. Student fee lawsuits such as Southworth v. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and Rosenberger v. University of Virginia challenged the legalities of using general fee monies for controversial campus organizations funded through the student activity fee. The divisive organizations and activities which ignited student anger in the court cases and came to define the collection,
control, and allocation of general fee funds are housed in the Dean of Student’s Office at the University of Toledo. Nearly two thirds of the sample was unaware their fee dollars were funding the Dean of Student’s Office and potentially controversial organizations.

Also interesting, many students believed organizations related to athletics did not receive funding through the general fee. Athletics and Cheerleading received more general fee dollars than any other organization in 2008 ($9,309,270) (FY08 Student General Fee Recommendation). Paradoxically, only 25.7% of respondents were aware Athletics and Cheerleading received general fee dollars. Only 29.6% of students thought the Glass Bowl was funding through the general fee and a mere 11.3% believed the Larimer Team Facility received general fee funds. As explained in the literature review, athletics became a central revenue source for institutions during the first part of the twentieth century. University of Toledo students appear to be largely unaware their general fee funds are being used to subsidize the business of athletics.

As also demonstrated in the literature review, a myriad of services are offered to students through the general fee. However, participants from this study indicated some organizations and activities were valued much more than others. Respondents placed the most importance on the Student Recreation Center (70.2%), the Student Medical Center (64.3%), the Student Union (63.2%), the Computer Learning Resource Center (54.0%), and Academic Enrichment (51.7%). Participants found Marching Band (51.3%), the Larimer Team Facility (49.7%), the Morse Center YMCA (49.1%), the Child Care Facility (41.1%), and Athletics and Cheerleading (38.7%) to be least important.

Again, one explanation for why such little importance was placed upon organizations such as the Larimer Team Facility and the Morse Center YMCA could be
attributed to lack of knowledge and familiarity with those organizations. Another possibility is that organizations such as Marching Band, the Larimer Team Facility, and the Child Care Facility serve a small percentage of students. Thus, if the sample is representative of the population, a small percentage of the sample would benefit from such organizations. If the respondent is not personally taking advantage of the organizations and activities they may be less likely to view the organization as important.

In contrast, the top five organizations and activities rated as important by survey participants serve the entire student body. The majority of respondents (70.2%) placed importance on the Student Recreation Center. Participants also placed value on the Student Medical Center (64.3%), the Student Union (63.2%), the Computer Learning Resource Center (54.0%), and Academic Enrichment (51.7%). Such organizations and activities are inclusive of the whole study body. This stands in sharp contrast to organizations ranked least important by survey respondents, such as the Larimer Team Facility (49.7%) which is reserved for athletes and Marching Band (51.3%) which only includes the musically gifted.

Another important consideration when making conclusions about the findings is the demographics of the sample. More than one third of participants were graduate or professional students. Graduate students may be less likely to view organizations geared towards undergraduate students as important. Graduate students are unable to participate in three out of the five organizations ranked least important in the survey, namely Marching Band, the Larimer Team Facility, and Athletics and Cheerleading. In contrast graduate students are able to participate in all of the top five organizations and activities ranked most important in the survey.
The majority of participants in the survey were female (58.1%). The gender demographics of the survey are slightly different than those of the population. During 2008-09, 49.5% of full-time UT students were female while 50.5% were male. Because the number of females was not that much greater than the number of males, it is unlikely that gender affected the survey data.

There is a need to further investigate student awareness of the general fee at the University of Toledo. The population studied was the 17,331 full-time undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Toledo. The survey was emailed to all UT students listed in the public email address book. Of those students, 878 responded to the survey invitation. The sample was further narrowed when 122 participants indicated they were part-time students and were withdrawn from the survey. These variables presented a sample rate of 4.4% of the population. The response rate of the sample could not be determined. The response rates for web surveys are generally around 30% of the sample. An additional survey with a clear response rate would provide greater certainty the sample is representative of the population (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Recommendations

Several recommendations are offered based upon the findings of this study and the review of the literature. First, send the survey invitation to a complete listserv of all current undergraduate and graduate full-time students. This study was unable to access a University held electronic listserv of the target population. Rather than forgo the study, a public email address book was utilized to invite full-time students to participate in the survey. This convenience sampling method was less than optimal and resulted in several emails being bounced back and countless members of the population not being reached.
A current listserv would guarantee the study is reaching the intended population and increase the sample size.

Second, send follow-up survey invitations to the sample one week after sending the initial survey invitation. Follow-up email reminders have been found to significantly increase the response rate. One follow-up email sent one week after the initial survey invitation has been found to produce the greatest survey response rate (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Next, consider conducting a qualitative study with students to gain more in-depth information about their views of the general fee and specific organizations that receive funding through the general fee. A qualitative study with open-ended questions would provide the researcher with the “why” behind the participants’ answers. A qualitative study would provide insight into student awareness of the general fee as well as the reasoning behind the ranking of organizations and activities as important, neutral, or not important.

The recommendation is also offered to make changes to the wording of the survey. Organizations that are not widely known on campus such as the Larimer Team Facility and HSC – Nursing and Physical Therapy should be defined or students should be offered an answer choice to indicate they have never heard of the organization. Students cannot rate the importance of an organization if they are unsure of what exactly the organization is.

Another survey could list out the various entities that receive funding through the Dean of Student’s Office. As evidenced in the literature review, several organizations which may be viewed as controversial fall under the umbrella of Student Activities/Dean
of Students Office, such as Campus Crusade for Christ, the Interfraternity Council, Spectrum UT, and the Egalitarian Society of Pagans. Students may not be aware general fee dollars are going to fund said organizations. How students perceive such individual organizations may be very different from how important they rated Student Activities/Dean of Students Office.

Exhaustive searches of the literature found little research has been conducted on student activity fees nationally. Organizations such as the College Board and the Digest of Educational Statistics group tuition and fees into one sum. Based upon the results of this study, students are highly aware they pay a general fee each semester. More than 90% of participants (91.3%) indicated they were conscious of paying a general fee each semester. An additional 42.5% correctly identified the dollar amount of the general fee. Student interest in the general fee at the University of Toledo leads to the recommendation that national organizations separate out tuition from mandatory fees in future reports on college pricing.

Based upon the findings of this study, similar suggestions are given at the state level. The Ohio Board of Regents provides data on the mandatory fees assessed at each public institution in the state. The data includes all mandatory student fees, such as parking fees, laboratory fees, technology fees, and the general fee, among others. While useful, the data needs to be more specific. The literature review detailed mandatory fees assessed at the University of Oregon during 2008-09 which included an energy surcharge fee, a technology fee, a fee for the campus health center, a building maintenance fee, and a student activity fee (Glater, 2007). State reports listing the aggregate cost of mandatory fees at institutions cover up what may be an extensive and objectionable list of fees.
At all levels, greater transparency is needed. Mandatory student activity fees, which evolved for decades, began a period of devolution in a sense in recent years. For example, the student activity fee was initially assessed at the University of Wisconsin to pay for the luxury of heating classrooms (Lorence, 2003). Today the student activity fee encompasses a multitude of charges on campuses, including, ironically, an energy surcharge to pay for electricity and heating at some institutions.

On many campuses mandatory fees have deviated from providing additional services to students to subsidizing services which were once included in the cost of tuition. Recent student anger at an array of intuitions across the nation along with an overwhelming percentage of the sample from this study indicates students are aware of the cost of mandatory student activity fees. Furthermore, student indignation indicates students have a ceiling on how high mandatory activity fees can be raised.

Few question the necessity of mandatory student activity fees. Student activities provide a forum for students to learn beyond the walls of the classroom. Academic pursuits have amalgamated with social pursuits to form a uniquely American system of higher education. The holistic education of the student is valued. The challenge remains finding a fair way to fund extracurricular activities and services without sacrificing quality or the integrity of the institution. Mandatory student activity fees need to be transparent and equitably distribute the burden and benefits of higher education amongst students and institutions.
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Appendix A

2008 General Fee Allocation on the Main Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>FY08 General Fee Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Athletics &amp; Cheerleading</td>
<td>9,309,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Student Recreation Center</td>
<td>3,540,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Student Union</td>
<td>2,839,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Student Activities/Dean of Students</td>
<td>1,280,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Student Medical Center</td>
<td>848,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  University Transit Services</td>
<td>536,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Larimer Team Facility</td>
<td>391,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Food Service Debt – Student Union</td>
<td>360,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  General Fee Reserve</td>
<td>224,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Marching Band</td>
<td>171,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Child Care Facility</td>
<td>128,963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Study Abroad</td>
<td>73,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Escort Services</td>
<td>61,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Glass Bowl</td>
<td>61,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 HSC – Nursing &amp; Physical Therapy</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 19,852,592

*Source:* FY08 General Fee Recommendation Form, calculations by the UT Budget Office.
Appendix B

*Student Activities/Dean of Students Major Organization Funding during 2008-09*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Organization</th>
<th>FY 08-09 General Fee Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Student Union</td>
<td>87,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Government</td>
<td>47,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Broadcasting Organization</td>
<td>47,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Clubs</td>
<td>42,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLSA</td>
<td>26,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Student Union</td>
<td>12,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Student Association</td>
<td>10,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Bar Association</td>
<td>9,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockets</td>
<td>7,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student Association</td>
<td>3,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$295,774</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Dean of Students’ Office, calculations by the Dean of Students.
Appendix C

Student Activities/Dean of Students Other Organization Funding Through the General Fee during 2008-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Organization</th>
<th>FY 08-09 General Fee Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Key National Honor Fraternity</td>
<td>8,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Homecoming Commission</td>
<td>8,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Y</td>
<td>6,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Dance Marathon</td>
<td>5,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum UT</td>
<td>3,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfraternity Council</td>
<td>2,984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Pharmacy Club</td>
<td>2,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortar Board</td>
<td>2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Crew</td>
<td>2,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panhellenic Council</td>
<td>2,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPHC</td>
<td>1,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Bash</td>
<td>1,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Alumni Association</td>
<td>1,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Crusade for Christ</td>
<td>1,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>1,383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Student Union</td>
<td>1,244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT TV</td>
<td>1,083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Ballroom Dance Society</td>
<td>916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa Kappa Psi</td>
<td>835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Environment Education</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Club</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitat for Humanity</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Phi Omega</td>
<td>433</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camp Adventure</td>
<td>323</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Society of Black Engineers</td>
<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<td>UT Anime Society</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT College Republicans</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Recreational Therapy</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRC Leadership Team</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration Praise Choir</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circle K International</td>
<td>182</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAAAW</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact Movement</td>
<td>115</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art of Living Club</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes in Action</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarian Society of Pagans</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers Without Borders</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim American Society</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Omicron Delta Kappa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Red Cross Rocket Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Religious Studies Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Society of Automotive Engineers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Student African American Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>University Bible Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>UT Anthropological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>UT Dianetics Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>UT National Art Education Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>UT Sociology Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Dean of Students’ Office, calculations by the Dean of Students.
Appendix D

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: A Survey of Student Awareness of the General Fee at the University of Toledo

Investigators: David Meabon (Principal Investigator), Katherine Ott (Student Investigator)

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gauge student awareness of the General Fee at the University of Toledo.

Description of Procedures: This research study will take place at the University of Toledo. Participants will be recruited through the UT Update. Participants will complete an online survey about the General Fee at the University of Toledo. The online survey will require 5-10 minutes of students' time. To participate in the current study you must meet two criteria: (1) you must be 18 years of age or older and (2) you must be a full-time student.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this survey. Please note that participation in this study is strictly voluntary. No personally identifiable information will be collected from participants. The survey will only be administered to students over the age of 18.

Voluntary Participation: Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect your relationship with your institution or any of your classes (if applicable). In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information: For other questions about the study you may contact the Principal Investigator, David Meabon, at 419.530.2666 or via email at david.meabon@utoledo.edu.

Confidentiality: The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you provided this information. We want your honest answers to these questions. No personally identifiable information will be requested. No information will link you as the participant to your responses. All student data collected will remain confidential and will be secured within an electronic database for analysis. All surveys will be housed through Vovici Survey Software. Once your survey has been completed, your data will be purged into the form of aggregate data. None of your records will be accessible.

By clicking "Accept" you are indicating that you understand the above stated terms and agree to participate in the survey.

Accept, I agree to participate in the survey.
No, I choose not to participate in the survey.
Appendix E

Survey Invitation Email

Higher Education professor Dr. David Meabon and Katherine Ott are conducting a short survey about student awareness of cost of tuition and fees at the University of Toledo.

All full-time graduate and undergraduate students are invited to participate. The survey will take between five and ten minutes to complete. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

To participate in the survey please click on the following link:

http://vovici.com/wsb.dll/s/15b20g3b384
Appendix F

Survey Instrument

1. Are you aware that you pay a general fee each semester?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Please check the appropriate dollar amount category into which the UT general fee for one semester for a full-time student would fall:
   - Less than $100
   - $101 - $300
   - $301 - $500
   - $501 - $700
   - $701 - $900
   - Greater than $901

3. Please indicate which university organizations and activities you believe received funding through the UT general fee in 2008:
   - Study Abroad
   - HSC - Nursing and Physical Therapy
   - Student Activities/Dean of Students
   - Marching Band
   - Escort Services
   - Athletics and Cheerleaders
   - Glass Bowl
   - Larimer Team Facility
   - Student Union
   - Child Care Facility
   - General Fee Reserve
   - Student Recreation Center
   - Student Medical Center
   - University Transit Services
   - Food Service Debt - Student Union
   - Academic Enrichment
   - Student Life and Student Affairs
   - Computer Learning Resource Center
   - General Student Services
   - Morse Center YMCA
   - Student Health and Pharmacy Plan
   - Other Graduate Student Support
4. Please indicate the importance of the following UT organizations or activities to you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC - Nursing and Physical Therapy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Activities/Dean of Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marching Band</td>
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<tr>
<td>Escort Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athletics and Cheerleaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glass Bowl</td>
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<tr>
<td>Larimer Team Facility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Care Facility</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fee Reserve</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Recreation Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Medical Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>University Transit Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Service Debt - Student Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Enrichment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life and Student Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Learning Resource Center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Student Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morse Center YMCA</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Health and Pharmacy Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Graduate Student Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>