

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



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Laurier holding tuition fee increase to 15 per cent

Wilfrid Laurier University is planning to increase tuition fees by 15 per cent for all undergraduate and graduate programs for the 1996-97 academic year, five percentage points below the 20 per cent increase allowed by the province.

The increase will bring tuition for a typical full-time student to \$2,816, up from \$2,450. Most other Ontario universities are increasing tuition by the full 20 per cent allowed, "or close to it," said Dr. Andrew Berczi, Laurier's Vice President: Finance and Administration.

The tuition increase, which takes effect May 1, will also apply to part-time students, whose fees will rise to \$632 per credit course from \$550.

The universities were given permission to increase tuition fees by up to 20 per cent in last year's economic statement from Ontario Treasurer Ernie Eves. The increases were to partially make up for the \$280 million that the government removed from university funding. That reduction resulted in a loss to Laurier of \$6.27 million for the 1996-97 budget year - a 17.4 per cent reduction in the university's operating grant.

The government indicated that 10 per cent of the tuition increase is to be put into bursaries and scholarships which will aid students in financing their university education. This will add about \$300,000 to Laurier's existing bursaries and scholarships.

Although the reduction in provincial government funding has caused pain, Laurier has been better able to deal with it than many other institutions, Berczi said, because it adopted a multi-dimensional set of planning strategies to cope with the government's cut in operating grants. The university has traditionally been very careful with its finances and has no accumulated debt.

Through a planned increase in enrolment of about three per cent annually and thanks in large part to the hard work of department and budget managers, "We managed to put together a balanced budget without needing to go beyond a 15 per cent tuition increase for 1996-97," Berczi said.

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"We have been able to distribute the load among the members of the university community. We didn't want to put all the weight on students' shoulders. We are fully aware of the ever-increasing financial demand on students."

Still, Berczi added, even with the increase in tuition Ontario students "will still pay less than 30 per cent of the cost of their education."

Laurier's 1996-97 budget, which is yet to be approved by the Board of Governors, is based on numerous assumptions, including satisfactory contract negotiations with the university's four unions. It is also subject to future changes in government funding. "Should the government introduce another major cut," Berczi said, "the decision to raise tuition by only 15 per cent may have to be revisited for the 1997-98 fiscal year."

Meanwhile, the university has successfully negotiated with student representatives for an increase in compulsory ancillary fees.

"The agreement is to drop the two existing compulsory fees - for health services and athletics - and replace them with a single Compulsory Student Services Fee," Berczi said. "We are pursuing 50 per cent cost recovery from students, with the rest paid by the university."

The resulting agreement means higher costs for students: the old fees totalled about \$95 a year, which is now increasing to a maximum of \$220 per fiscal year. The fee will also apply to part-time students at the rate of \$22 per one-term course taken at the Waterloo campus.

Although the fees have had to be increased, Laurier's compulsory fees "are still in the bottom third" of those charged by Ontario universities, Berczi said.

The end result of all the planned changes: Laurier's enrolment will move within the next five years to a level somewhat above the previous high reached in 1992; Laurier students will pay lower tuition and other fees than other Ontario students; Laurier will continue to be known for the quality of its programs; no layoffs are anticipated; and the university's facilities, which have grown by 18 per cent in the past five years through the addition of a new science building and office space on Regina Street, will be more fully utilized.