

November 11, 2019

Via electronic mail to: dariya@marylandconsumers.org

Dariya Brown
Student Rights Program Manager
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
2209 Maryland Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21218

Re: Maryland Public Information Act Request

Dear Ms. Brown,

Salisbury University (the “University”) has received and processed your request dated October 2, 2019 under the Public Information Act, Md. Code Ann., General Provisions Article (“GP”) §§4-101 to 4-601 (the “Act”). Specifically, you requested:

Copies of public records that pertain to withholding a student’s transcript because they owe an institutional debt. I wish to inspect all records in your custody and control pertaining to the following:

- 1. [a] How many students hold institutional debt? [b] What is the average amount of institutional debt held by a student? [c] What is the most common type of debt owed by a student to your institution?*
- 2. How many transcripts were withheld per year over the past 5 years?*
- 3. What were the amounts owed that resulted in withholding a student’s transcript?*
- 4. What were the reasons why students owed (i.e. unpaid parking tickets, library fees, etc.)?*
- 5. What were the demographics of students that had transcripts withheld (i.e. race, gender, class-standing, etc.)?*
- 6. How many of these debts were repaid?*
- 7. How many of these debts were repaid after the release of the student’s transcripts?*

Correspondence confirming receipt of your inquiry and a request for extension was sent October 10, 2019. This communication seeks extensive clarification and offers additional background relevant to your request.

I am aware that you have spoken with Allison Boyle, an Assistant Attorney General from the Educational Affairs Division and provided the following five (5) clarifications for your request:

[a] “students [that] hold any institutional debt” means students who are currently enrolled and owe institutional debt;

[b] “institutional debt” is defined as debt a student owes directly to the institution, such as tuition and fees, room and board, parking tickets, or library fees;

[c] “most common type of debt owed” means the type/category of institutional debt that is owed the most by students;

[d] “transcripts withheld” means (i) the number of transcripts that are blocked and will not be released because a student owes institutional debt, and (ii) the number of transcripts that are requested and denied (and therefore withheld) because they are blocked; and

[e] “the amounts owed that resulted in withholding a student’s transcript” means the amount a student owes as it relates to "blocked" transcripts and transcript requests that are denied.

I am also aware that you have further clarified that you are requesting information for past due accounts.

Second, as a preliminary matter, please note that pursuant to the Act, the University is not required to create new records in order to respond to your request.

Third, please note that financial holds are placed by the University Office of the Bursar and transcripts are issued by a third party vendor through the Office of the Registrar. Transcript request denial for financial holds is not tracked between offices, meaning that there is no way for the University to know who is denied a transcript because of a financial hold, as we do not track that information.

Fourth, notwithstanding the clarifications you provided, in order to address Question 1 of your request, we need further clarification and may require an interactive process in order to further process your request.

1. [a] Information can be provided for past due accounts for a specific current date and would include such accounts up to about six months past due. At that point, past due accounts are transferred to the State Collections Unit (SCU) and the University does not receive information from the SCU that can be provided to you without creating a new document. Note that the definition of past due accounts is students who have an outstanding balance past the due date, and not the date accounts are sent to the SCU. Providing this information for a specific date would include accounts that may be paid at any time within the next six months.

Regarding your other requested information:

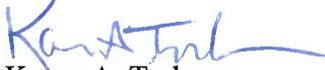
1. [b] We do not maintain data on the average amount of institutional debt held by a student and cannot respond to this request.
1. [c] Generally, tuition and fees are the most common type of debt since generally every student owes this debt as soon as it is posted to their account until they make full payment, which may be made by the payment due date.
2. The University cannot determine the number of transcripts that have been requested and withheld for financial debt reasons over the last 5 years because our data is not tracked in this manner. Thus, the University does not have records responsive to this request.
3. The University cannot determine the amount of the debt that was owed at the time a transcript was requested and withheld for financial debt reasons because our data is not tracked in this manner. Thus, the University does not have records responsive to this request.
4. The University can provide you with examples of the reasons for student debt, however, this list is not necessarily complete.
5. The University does not track the demographics of students who have had transcripts withheld. Thus, the University does not have records responsive to this request.
6. For purposes of this response, the University presumes that you mean debts *paid* and not “debts repaid” as you seem to have excluded student loans from the definition of “institutional debt.” The University does not track information regarding debts paid based on students who have had transcripts withheld under either of the definitions provided. Thus, the University does not have records responsive to this request.
7. The University does not track debts paid after students’ transcripts are released under either of the definitions provided. Thus, the University does not have records responsive to this request.

As the University has no documents responsive to Questions 2, 3 5, 6 and 7 of your October 2, 2019 request, this portion of the request is now closed.

Under Section 4-206 of the Act, the University is entitled to charge a reasonable fee to locate, review, prepare and reproduce the requested records. You have not been charged for the first two hours needed to review your request, determine the appropriate response, search and prepare the responsive records. The first two hours have been used prior to the date of my letter of October 10, 2019. As I mentioned in that letter, the fee is likely to exceed \$500. Once clarification is received regarding question 1[a], I will be able to provide you with the actual fee. Upon receipt of the fee, you will be provided with the records responsive to your request.

The University awaits your clarification pertaining to Question 1 of your request before we will resume processing. If you do not respond to this letter within ten business days (by November 25, 2019), the University will presume that you do not wish to proceed and will close our file.

Sincerely,



Karen A. Treber
General Counsel