

## **Testimony in support of HB0526: *Higher Education – Differential Tuition – Notification and Income Tax Subtraction Modification***

**Sharon Wenner**  
**February 18, 2020**

### **Background**

I submit this testimony in support of Maryland House Bill HB0526. I have been a Maryland resident since 1970, my husband and I have both worked in the state of Maryland for over 30 years, and two of our children attend the University of Maryland, College Park. The subject of differential tuition first arose in our family last January when we received our son's spring semester bill. It included an extra charge of \$1400 (increasing the base in-state tuition of \$4325 by 32%). The charge was listed as "DIF TUIT CMP", with no further explanation, and we wondered how the money would be used. Thus began the process that led me here today, respectfully asking for your full support of Bill HB0526.

### **Research**

In my search for information about how differential tuition is used, I spent two weeks making phone calls and sending emails to various University administrators, including the Offices of the Bursar, Financial Aid, Registrar, Admissions, and the Provost. I was also referred to the Department of Computer Science and the Maryland Higher Education Commission. With the exception of one assistant director in the Department of Computer Science, none of these administrators assisted me or provided any information other than a referral to an FAQ website. I very much appreciated that the assistant director made an honest effort to obtain information for me. Copies of the assistant director's email and the FAQ web page are attached for reference.

The most shocking information I unearthed is that twenty-five percent of differential tuition (\$350) is used for financial aid for other students. It's clear the University is unwilling to expose this fact. The information I was given contains only one vague reference under the third FAQ bullet entitled "Why do I have to pay differential tuition?" The posted response states "To make sure we can welcome students from all backgrounds we use differential tuition to provide financial aid to the students who need it most."

Five weeks after my final phone request, when I had all but given up the search for answers, I received a phone call from an Associate Vice President from the Office of the Provost. I don't know what prompted the response after so long, but the first words she said were "Are you a reporter?" We had a courteous but fruitless discussion, with my concerns dismissed because "... that money is part of the University's revenue stream and that's that." At that point the overwhelming lack of cooperation and transparency from so many University officials convinced me that any further attempts to communicate with personnel at College Park would be pointless.

That experience left me with no answers to an important question: Why isn't the \$350 charge for financial aid (per semester) reported to taxpayers, and eligible as a tax deduction? The only difference between this and the millions of dollars in yearly donations to the University, many made by extremely wealthy donors, is that it is well hidden and misrepresented as tuition. Why are voluntary donations used for financial aid reported as charitable contributions, yet non-voluntary financial aid expropriated from "tuition" payments are unreported? It is simply wrong to assume that the money is not missed or needed by your constituents.

## **Legislative Relief**

I am extremely grateful to Delegate Miller and the eight co-sponsors of HB0526 for taking these concerns seriously. After University employees either ignored or responded to me in a dismissive and patronizing manner, I was relieved to hear that it is reasonable to request changes in the areas of transparency and tax relief. I served for four years, while also working full-time, as the President of the Marching Unit Boosters at Glenelg High School, and understand very well how important and difficult it is to subsidize education costs for those who are less fortunate. Transparency and information, rather than blindly bankrolling post-secondary institutions, is the only thing that will drive costs down for everyone.

I wanted to communicate what I learned and explain the basics of proposed bill HB0526 to other UMD parents, so I made a post to the “Univ of Maryland: College Park Parents of Terps” Facebook group. Upon reading that twenty-five percent of differential tuition is used for financial aid, hundreds of commenters expressed shock and outrage, and the volume of replies caused Facebook to suspend my account due to “suspicious activity”. After I went through the process of reinstating my account, I made a second post asking the parents to turn down the volume and promised to provide updates as the bill goes through the legislative process. I respectfully ask that you promote the best interests of your hard-working constituents by supporting HB0526.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sharon Wenner

Attachments:

- 1) Email from Department of Computer Science
- 2) Hardcopy of “University of Maryland Differential Tuition FAQs” website

# Attachment 1

-----Original Message-----

From: XXXXXXX <XXXXXX@umd.edu>  
To: Sharon Wenner <sharonwenner@verizon.net>  
Sent: Thu, Feb 21, 2019 1:50 pm  
Subject: Differential Tuition Questions

Dear Sharon,

I was finally able to get all of the pieces of information together from the Dean's Office with some help from the Provost's Office as well. Again, I apologize for the delay in getting answers to you---financial matters are out of my scope of work, so I wanted to be sure that we fully address your questions.

1) Does the Department of Computer Science receive 100% of the differential tuition paid by computer science majors? If not, where does the rest of the money go? 3) Are the funds used for scholarships or financial aid?

The allocation of differential tuition revenue is the same for all programs (CS, Engineering, Business). Each term, the Office of Financial Aid identifies the CS majors with extreme financial need and a portion of the differential tuition revenue is directed to those students. In a typical year, CS receives 74-76% of the revenue directly and ~25% goes to need based aid for CS majors so they are not forced to drop out of the program due to a lack of funds. There is no administrative overhead or any other portion of the revenue that is directed elsewhere.

2) What is the money used for? I'm not interested in extreme detail, but it seems that there must be some accounting available that would provide this information.

Since the inception of differential tuition, a combination of differential tuition revenue and increased college/campus budget allocation to CS has resulted in the hiring of additional tenure-track faculty, a significant number of full time instructional faculty; we have also increased the number of academic advisors, and the budget for teaching assistants has expanded by more than \$1M.

4) What body determines how the funds are used?

Differential tuition is part of the CS departmental budget. It is the responsibility of the department Chair to plan, allocate, and oversee department budget expenditures, in coordination with the college Asst. Dean for Finance and the College Dean. The Dean provides an annual report to the Provost indicating how the funds were used.

I hope that this helps to address your questions about differential tuition funds.

Best,

XXXXXXXX

Assistant Director, Undergraduate Studies  
Department of Computer Science  
1151 A.V. Williams  
8223 Paint Branch Drive  
University of Maryland, College Park  
Phone: 301.405.2681



HOME > RESOURCES & POLICIES > DIFFERENTIAL TUITION FAQs

# Differential Tuition FAQs

## ⊖ What is differential tuition?

Differential tuition is an additional charge that enhances the educational experience of certain high-demand programs. The funds aim to add more course sections, expand specialized career services, enhance the value of degrees, attract more top in-state students and strengthen the national standing of the State's flagship university.

\*Helpful Hint: Even with differential tuition, the cost of a degree at UMD is much below the average of other public research institutions.

## ⊖ Who has to pay differential tuition?

Undergraduate students with majors in the Robert H. Smith School of Business and the A. James Clark School of Engineering or the UMD Department of Computer Science who have 60+ credits will have additional differential tuition.

The 60+ credits include any college credit earned before enrolling at UMD, including Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Advanced International Certificate of Education, dual enrollment and credits earned at other colleges.

Graduate students will not be charged the differential tuition. For current costs, visit the [Student Financial Services and Cashiering website](#).

## ⊖ Why do I have to pay differential tuition?

To make sure we can welcome students from all backgrounds we use differential tuition to provide financial aid to the students who need it most. The University of Maryland takes great pride in the quality and accessibility of our first-rate education; these funds are also used to maintain our world-class facilities. The university will make sure all funds will stay within our programs.

## Office of Student Financial Aid

[MY FINAID ACCOUNT](#) / [TYPES OF AID](#) / [RESOURCES & POLICIES](#) /

### ⊖ How much will differential tuition cost?

For the 2019-2020 academic year, the charge will be \$1,428/semester in addition to tuition for full time students registered for 12 or more credits. For part time students, the charge will be \$118/credit. Students from Maryland and students coming from other states are charged the same.

### ⊖ Will Financial Aid/Scholarships cover the differential tuition?

The University of Maryland will offer the following students our differential tuition Grant:

- Students attending UMD who have a \$0 - \$8,000 Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
- Students attending UMD on full and partial scholarships through Banneker/Key
- Students who are Frederick Douglass Scholarship recipients
- Newly admitted freshmen who transferred in 60+ Advanced Placement (AP) courses will be offered the differential tuition Grant during their first year only to offset Different Tuition charges

### ⊖ Do I have to pay differential tuition for Summer and/or Winter Session?

Differential tuition will not be charged for the winter and summer terms.

### ⊖ If I double-major in two of the programs charging differential tuition, will I have to pay double?

No, students with a double-major will pay only one differential tuition fee.



Office of Student Financial Aid

0102 Lee Building / 7809 Regents Drive / College Park, MD 20742 USA

P: 301.314.8377 / [umdfinaid@umd.edu](mailto:umdfinaid@umd.edu) / ©2019 All rights reserved

