

Tuition and Fee Statement Billing and Collection Process

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Student Financial Services at TAMU bills students prior to the beginning of each semester. Payment is due approximately 10 days before classes begin for undergraduate students that pre-register, and slightly later for graduate students and those that late register. This allows the Student Accounts and Billing Office to contact students that have not paid by the due date, and remind them that payment must be received in advance of the beginning of the semester as directed by Texas State Law. Students that do not pay prior to the first day of classes are dropped, but their classes are reserved. They are also assessed a \$100 late registration charge. Students can have their classes reinstated by paying the full amount due. This was a change from our previous process where the classes for non-payers were released to other students. On the first day of class, dropped students ended up in line in the cashier office, then in their departmental advisor's office to find new classes, and then back to the cashier. Now, because students' classes are retained, they do not have to visit their academic department and their classes can be "reinstated" by merely paying their fees at the cashier office.

Texas A&M University is a four-year, public, land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant institution located in College Station, Texas. The university is centrally located, approximately equidistant from three of the 10 largest cities in the United States (Houston, Dallas and San Antonio) and the state capitol (Austin). The university's enrollment includes approximately 36,600 undergraduate, 7,500 graduate and 500 professional students studying for degrees in 10 academic colleges.

The university's mission is dedicated to the discovery, development, communication, and application of knowledge in a wide range of academic and professional fields. Its mission of providing the highest quality undergraduate and graduate programs is inseparable from its mission of developing new understandings through research and creativity. It prepares students to assume roles of leadership, responsibility, and service to society. Texas A&M assumes as its historic trust the maintenance of freedom of inquiry and an intellectual environment nurturing the human mind and spirit. It welcomes and seeks to serve persons of all racial, ethnic, and geographic groups, women and men alike, as it addresses the needs of an increasingly diverse population and a global economy. In the twenty-first century, Texas A&M University seeks to assume a place of preeminence among public universities while respecting its history and traditions.

Toward the end of each fall and spring semester, Texas A&M University allows students to pre-register for the next semester's classes. Fees for the selected classes are calculated and fee statements are mailed to each student. Payment is due approximately 10 days before classes begin for undergraduate students that pre-register, and slightly later for graduate students and those that late register.

As the payment due date approaches, the Student Accounts & Billing (SAB) Office begins the process of contacting students that have not paid, and reminding them that payment must be received prior to the beginning of the semester as required by Texas State Law. Contact with the student is made by utilizing the university's e-mail system (NEO) and later by telephone calls to student's local and/or permanent residence.

Students that have not made payment prior to the first day of classes are dropped; however, the student's classes are reserved and removed from the student's schedule. This allows the student to maintain enrollment in the classes they registered for while providing incentive to make the necessary payments. Because the classes have not actually been removed from the student's schedule, the students can pay all tuition and fees plus a \$100 late registration fee and have the classes reinstated. This is a complete change from our previous process in which the classes of the non-paying individuals were released to other students. Previously on the first day of class, dropped students would stand in a long line in the cashier office to pay their fees only to find they had no classes. They would then go to their departmental advisor's office to find new classes, and then back to the cashiers to pay. Now, because the student's classes are reserved, students do not have to find new classes and simply have to pay their tuition and fees, plus a \$100 late registration fee, to have their classes "reinstated".

The SAB office hopes to accomplish two goals by contacting students early and reserving their classes. The first is to have the students pay their tuition and fees by their due dates. The second is to reduce the amount of frustration and inconvenience experienced by everyone while trying to get a student re-registered. This situation can be extremely frustrating when the student is planning to graduate that semester.

In developing ways to achieve our goals, we first examined ways to get the students to pay on time. As a result of students paying on time, fewer students would have their classes dropped and frustration levels on campus would be reduced. This idea had the added benefit for the administration of better faculty and facility management.

We decided that the best way to get the students to pay is to remind them that payment is due. We further determined that the quickest and least expensive method of contacting students who had not paid was to send an e-mail to their official university e-mail account. Each student is assigned an e-mail account upon admission to the university and the account will remain with the student as long as they are enrolled with the university. In most cases, students will have their own personal e-mail account with one of the many internet service providers so the university e-mail system will also send an e-mail message to the personal account informing them that an important message has arrived in their university e-mail account.

Two weeks prior to the semester's due date, Student Accounts & Billing receives a file of students that have not paid a sufficient amount toward their tuition and fees and are subject to having their classes cancelled. From this list of students, the SAB office sends the first of a number of emails. The message is designed to point out that payment

has not been received, they are in danger of having their classes cancelled, and they need to make payment by the due date. Additional information about payment methods and emergency loans is also included. The list is updated daily with additional e-mails sent out every few days. As the due date approaches, the tone of the e-mail becomes more adamant.

On the night of the due date, the SAB office again determines which students have not paid for their tuition and fees. These students are sent an e-mail stating that sufficient payment has not been received according to due dates and they are subject to a late payment penalty. We also give them a drop date when payment must be received or their classes will be dropped. The drop date is the last working day before classes begin.

As the drop date approaches, the SAB office continuously reviews the list of students that have not paid. During our review, we attempt to identify students that will not be coming to Texas A&M for the semester. We do this by reviewing accounts of students that reflect no-activity (payments, add or dropped classes or fee options, etc.) since they originally registered for their classes. We exclude those students that registered within the past 10 days and all graduate and professional students. Once these no-activity students are identified, we call each student to verify that they will be attending classes. Those that will be attending are reminded payment is due before classes begin and for those that indicate they will not be attending that semester are instructed on proper process for dropping classes. By having them drop their classes, it frees up seats in class sections for other students.

By the last working day before classes begin, each student that has not paid their tuition and fees will have received at least three e-mails to their official university e-mail

account and possibly a telephone call. At the end of the day, students that have not paid a sufficient amount toward their tuition and fees as directed by the Texas State law are administratively dropped and assessed a \$100 late registration fee. The administrative drop removes the student's name from the class roster of the classes they registered for, but reserves their seat in each class.

On the first day of class, professors inform the dropped student that they are not on the class roster and must pay their tuition and fees to re-register. Once the student pays their tuition and fees plus the \$100 late registration fee, their classes are automatically re-instated. No hassle or frustration for the students, the departmental advisors and the SAB office.

In retrospect, the billing and collection process is continuously reviewed with improvements added each semester. Over the past few semesters, the e-mail messages have been improved to answer students' questions before they call our office. We have addressed such items as:

- if you have already made payment, disregard this e-mail
- where to get emergency tuition and fee loans, and
- if you have added or dropped classes or options, please review your account balance.

We have also added an e-mail telling students that their fee statements have been mail. For the Spring 2003 semester, we added a "You're OK" letter to students that have made payment in a sufficient amount to hold their classes. The e-mail was added to decrease the number of telephone calls and e-mails from students wanting assurances from our

office that we have received sufficient payment and their classes are not in jeopardy of being cancelled.

In short, our tuition and fee statement billing and collection process is intended to inform the student and to avoid actions that will only increase tension between the school and the student, our customer.