1 Background

Tuition consultations have been a topic of extensive discussions between the university administration and the AMS and GSS over the past year. The result of these discussions has pointed to the needs for a re-examination of the approach the university takes in regards to tuition consultation. With the recent events involving the Bachelor of International Economics the need for policy changes became even more evident. The BIE process brought to light key issues with the existing policy and the way in which consultations should be conducted at UBC.

The UBC policy that governs tuition consultation is Policy 71 – Consultation with Students about Tuition and Mandatory Fees. This policy was first adopted in December 1994 and was revised in June 2005. This policy is reflective of times following the removal of the tuition cap placed by the Provincial Government after which students saw large increases in tuition. In 2005, the Provincial Government instated a mandate that increases to tuition would be limited to cost of living increases as set by the Ministry of Education. With the current provincial tuition mandates in BC, UBC is only able to increase tuition by 2% per year and this is an action that the university will likely continue to find necessary annually. The AMS understands the necessity for increasing tuition annually by 2% and this is reflected in the AMS's current tuition policy (Appendix A).

Policy 71 sets out a framework for informal and formal consultations with students for increases to tuition and mandatory fees. While the university has followed this process for the annual domestic tuition increases the sentiment among students has been that it is more of a communication of a pre-decided outcome than a consultation in which stakeholders could reasonably expect a change to the proposal.

This has sparked conversations between the AMS, GSS and the university administration on how best to frame the annual tuition increase consultations. According to Policy 71 for cases of an approved “multi-year tuition program” such as the annual 2% domestic tuition increase, “the University and the applicable student societies may agree upon simpler arrangements for consultation on a case-by-case basis.”

While steps are being taken to address a reframing of this annual consultation, there remain other issues with the communication, coverage and awareness of the policy. This document provides information on the gaps in the policy from the student perspective and recommendations to address these gaps for the future. While there are issues with the annual tuition consultation process which deals with annual increases of 2% to domestic tuition, this document focuses on providing overarching recommendations that can be adapted to address issues regarding all tuition consultations moving forward.

2 Current Issues

2.1 Questions over Coverage of Policy

A key question that arose from the BIE process is whether Policy 71 covers consultation on tuition set for new programs. The policy reads that mandatory fees “are changes that require approval by the Board of Governors and that a student must pay to complete an academic program.” While this definition could apply to the tuition of new programs, it is not explicitly clear on paper or in practice whether new programs are required to undergo tuition consultations, and to what extent.

There is a spectrum of possible tuition for new programs and as such, it may not make sense to conduct a particularly in-depth consultation for all programs. There are cases in which new program tuition is simply set to equivalent programs within that faculty or department at the standard domestic tuition rate, and then
there are cases like the BIE where the tuition is well above programs within that department or faculty. There is a lack of criteria to determine whether a given proposal should undergo consultation and what that process should look like.

2.2 Framework without Principles
Policy 71 provides a clear framework for conducting consultations and, if followed, sets the groundwork for a fair and robust consultation process. However, as we have seen with the BIE, even if all the steps are followed a consultation framework without mutually agreed upon guiding principles will not result in the desired outcome. We have seen examples of this in other departments of UBC, where the university consults with stakeholders that while the process looks like a consultation, it does not feel like one from the standpoint of participants. In most cases the sentiment is that the consultation is more like a communication of pre-decided outcomes. In some cases, such as the annual 2% tuition increase, this may be the case. There is a need to generate classifications of consultation so that stakeholders are clear on what their role in the process really is.

The university has set objectives for the annual tuition consultation process (Appendix C). While the tuition objectives are clear and well-defined, there is still a lack of principles guiding the process to meet the objectives. As we know from past cases, simply following process does not result in an inclusive and effective consultation.

2.3 Awareness and Communication of Policy
As seen with the example of the BIE, other units of the university, beyond upper level administration, are not aware of the tuition consultation policy and the need to consult with students on proposed tuition. This is especially important for the case of new programs where tuition is set by an individual department who are not necessarily in contact with the AMS or the VP Students Office regularly. When these Departments are informed that they are required to conduct a tuition consultation, there is a possibility that they are unaware of the process they should follow.

If the intent of the university is to cover new programs under the tuition consultation framework, Departments and Faculties will need to be equally aware of what their obligations are and there will need to be central support and resources for ensuring that the consultation follows the framework and principles that upper level administration and students have set.

3 Recommendations
1. Revision of Policy to include New Programs
Policy 71 should be revised to reflect the need to consult with students on the establishment of tuition for new programs. This is necessary from a student perspective because tuition rates for any program, new or old, should be justified. The AMS recognizes that an in depth consultation will not be necessary for all new programs and this should be reflected in the revisions to the policy. The case of the BIE is a clear example of why this change is needed. Because new programs are not explicitly covered under the policy, the university administration had the discretion to decide whether they would choose to consult or not. Under this administration, the right decision was made however this cannot be guaranteed for the future and thus this is an important safe guard from the student perspective.
2. **Establish Tuition Consultation Committee**

A committee should be established as a partnership between students and the university administration to act as a body of oversight and guidance for tuition consultations. The role of this committee is not necessarily to engage in the consultation itself, but rather to determine the appropriate form of consultation that should take place for a given scenario. If the recommendation to include new programs under Policy 71 is accepted, the role of this committee becomes even more crucial.

With new programs and even annual tuition increases, the form that a consultation takes should be based on the unique attributes of the case. For example, with the BIE full consultation was necessary however this may not be the case with the establishment of Program X in the Department of Biology, if the tuition is set to the normal tuition rate of the Faculty of Science. In order to ensure that the university and students are allocating their time and energy most appropriately, this committee should determine what is most appropriate for the case before them and make recommendations for how the process should be carried out.

In order to ensure that a given consultation is carried out following the principles and objectives of tuition consultation, this body may also act as an oversight to the processes. This role is currently played by the Board of Governors at the very end of the process. To have the Board determine that a consultation was insufficient after all parties have gone through the motions is not efficient or effective, especially given that this then makes an internal issue public, pitting students and the university against each other.

Many other institutions have a similar body to this for tuition consultations. A draft membership and terms of reference for the committee has been included at the end of this document as a starting point for further conversation.

3. **Develop Internal University Mechanism for Communication about Tuition Consultations**

In order to ensure that individual Departments and Faculties have the correct information about when/how to conduct tuition consultations with students, an internal mechanism should be developed that adds tuition consultation to the checklist that administrators go through when establishing new programs. There are checks and balances in place for admissions, curriculum and governance through Senate however this process does not involve any reporting on whether students have been consulted on tuition. Student Senators are engaged through their committees making the academic process quite consultative however tuition and budgets are not within the purview of Senate.

A key piece to this is covering new programs under Policy 71 but this action needs to be coupled with finding ways in which the policy will be communicated and incorporated into the natural process of new program design and approval within Departments and Faculties.

4. **Utilize Tuition Consultation Website for All Consultations**

In the case of the BIE, the AMS used its own communication channels to reach out to students about the consultation taking place and the Department of Economics also used their communication channels, however for the sake of transparency and open information, the central UBC Tuition Consultation Website ([http://www.students.ubc.ca/tuitionconsultation](http://www.students.ubc.ca/tuitionconsultation)) should display information about all active tuition consultations. This is also important for ensuring that unbiased information is readily available to all members of the university committee during the consultation process. Through keeping all information on a
central website, every process will be linked back to the same policy, objectives and guiding principles to ensure consistency in all consultations.

5. **Develop and Adopt Guiding Principles for Tuition Consultations**

While the framework for tuition consultations is well defined and sets out a rigorous process for conducting consultations, the process on paper does not solve the recurring issue about the way in which the consultations take place. In order to ensure that tuition consultations are conducted in an effective manner, the university, AMS and the GSS should agree upon a set of guiding principles under which tuition consultations will be conducted.
Appendix A – AMS Tuition Policy

Title:
*Tuition Fee Policy*

Summary:
Opposes any annual increase of UBC student tuition in excess of 2%, including tuition paid by international students. Supports tuition reductions, as long as they are compensated by funds from non-student sources and do not reduce academic quality. Requests that the UBC Board of Governors consider any proposed increases to tuition fees in light of the financial burden that they represent to students and seek to minimize this cost.

Whereas the cost of education makes undertaking post-secondary studies at UBC often inaccessible;

Whereas UBC students have a vested interest in maintaining the quality of their university, their education, and their degree;

Whereas the AMS must balance its advocacy to reflect both its members' interest in a lower cost burden to pursuing academic studies and its members' interest in a quality academic experience;

Be it resolved that the AMS oppose any annual increase of UBC student tuition that would be in excess of 2%;

Be it further resolved that the AMS oppose any percentage annual increase of UBC international student tuition greater than that of UBC Vancouver domestic student tuition;

Be it further resolved that the AMS support in principle the reduction of UBC student tuition, when such a reduction would be met with an equal or greater supply of funds to UBC from non-student sources, such that UBC’s academic quality would not be diminished; and

Be it further resolved that the AMS respectfully request the UBC Board of Governors to consider any proposed increases to tuition fees in light of the cost burden that tuition represents for students, and seek wherever possible to minimize this cost.
Appendix B – Current Framework for Tuition Consultation

Meeting with AMS to establish:
- Stakeholder student societies to be part of consultation process
- Process and steps for consultation

Background information and tuition allocation information made publicly available

Public Town Hall held for entire campus community

Meeting(s) with University Administration and Student Society Representative to discuss key concerns

University Administration reviews information from Town Hall and meetings with student representatives and makes recommendation to Board of Governors

Decision communicated to student representatives and public

Opportunity for submissions to be made to Board of Governors regarding consultation decision

Decision made by Board of Governors
Appendix C – Existing Objectives of Tuition Consultation Process

- inform and engage the campus and broader communities in an open and transparent dialogue
- initiate a public consultation program as a means of obtaining feedback about the University’s 2012/13 tuition proposal
- ensure broad notification to students about the tuition proposal and the consultation process
- provide opportunities for students to become informed about the draft tuition proposal and to provide feedback
- analyze the feedback received during the consultation process
- share the findings from the consultation process with students, student leadership, and the Board of Governors

Appendix D – Draft Guiding Principle for Tuition Consultation

Independent – units which are primary beneficiaries of tuition revenue and/or are responsible for making final recommendations to the Board should not be the one conducting the consultation and summarizing the results to the Board of Governors.

Transparent – Questions and concerns should be addressed directly and all requested information should be made available to student groups. Stakeholders should be made aware of the circumstances framing the consultation.

Dialogue Driven – consultation processes should be open to hearing alternatives and presenting information in a manner that is open to discussion and dialogue.
Appendix E – Draft Terms of Reference for Tuition Consultation Committee

Purpose:

The UBC Tuition Consultation Committee shall oversee the implementation and application of UBC Policy 71 – Consultation with Students about Tuition and Mandatory Fees and review of the policy, related procedures, tuition consultation objectives and guiding principles.

Membership:

The committee shall be comprised of an equal representation of students and university administrators with representation from both graduate and undergraduate students.

- Representative from Provosts Office (1)
- Representative from VP Students Office (1)
- Student Representatives (2)

Duties and Responsibilities:

- The Committee will set and review tuition consultation principles and objectives
- The Committee will work with Departments and Faculties to determine the appropriate level of consultation for individual scenarios which involve tuition and mandatory fees.
- The Committee will provide recommendations on frameworks for such consultations and shall act as a body of oversight to ensure that the mutually agreed upon consultation framework is carried out.
- The Committee will ensure that the requirements of communication and information set out by Policy 71 between students and the university administration are met.
- The Committee will develop and review internal mechanisms for Department, Faculty and University obligations regarding tuition consultation.
- The Committee will set and review tuition consultation principles and objectives

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Based on similar committees at other institutions