

MEMO

Florida State University Admissions

To: Dr. Amy Hecht, Vice President for Student Affairs
From: David Schieler, Director of Admissions
Date: October 2, 2018
Re: Singular Tuition Rate Proposal for Florida State University

Dr. Hecht,

In a recent meeting you were sharing your desire for ideas on how we might as a University continue to climb in the US News and World Report rankings. Shortly following that meeting, I had an opportunity to reiterate that point to my colleagues in the Department of Admissions, during a regular staff meeting.

At that staff meeting several NPR, New York Times, and Chronicle articles were referenced, all coming to the same point – that reducing out-of-state and international tuition rates to the level of in-state students increases the diversity and ability of the student body at large. It is this change, increased diversity and ability, that we feel would contribute to our University goal of appearing within the top 25 public national universities.

I attempted to keep the proposal brief in recognition of your time, and as an appropriate use of my time. Please know that should you want to continue this conversation much greater research exists, and several institutions of note could be studied.

In Garnet, Gold, & Glory

David Schieler
Director of Admissions
Division of Student Affairs
Florida State University

In early September 2018 Florida State University was recognized as the 26th “best public national university” and tied for the 70th “best national university” in the United States (US News, 2018). This achievement should be celebrated, but we should not pause as we continue toward our goal of being recognized within the elite top 25 public institutions. This lofty goal will require collaboration and creativity across the University. What follows is one of many ideas that may help us toward that goal.

Of the top 100 best colleges and universities, as listed by US News & World Report (2018), 57 charge a singular tuition rate, while 43 charge differential tuition (in-state vs. out-of-state). This difference may seem surprisingly small, however when taken from the perspective of our University, of the 75 institutions ahead of us on the ranking 46 charge a singular tuition rate and only 29 a differential/residency-based tuition rate. Even more pronounced, the top residency-based tuition institution (University of California – Los Angeles) ranks 19th on the more general best national university list.

But what’s a singular tuition rate mean? In practice a singular tuition rate can mean many things. It can mean a negotiated moderate tuition rate (between current in-state and out-of-state rates), or it can mean utilizing alternative funding models, such as increasing use of the University endowment or lobbying for increased state appropriations, to match out-of-state tuition rates to current in-state rates. While practical details are necessary, this memo is simply a strategic idea, not an outline of actionable objectives.

So then, what’s the idea behind a singular tuition rate? According to a 2011 commentary piece in the Chronicle of Higher Education, a singular tuition rate means increased national and international recruitment opportunities (Piekle, 2011; McDonnell, 2011), both of which are often seen as having a positive effect on students. At the same time though, it can also mean increasing

the competition and rejection rates for in-state students (Glater, 2008; Sanchez, 2009), the very students some argue a state institution should be focusing its attention toward. This ethical argument is best summarized in two questions. Who is the institution serving, the state or the students of the state? And to what ends is that service done?

If the answer is that the state institution must serve the state by educating its future workforce, then recruitment of any student may well serve that purpose. In fact, by increasing admission's competition by decreasing barriers to access for out-of-state and international students, the state may be served best by producing the best graduates. If the answer is that the state institution must serve the state's secondary education graduates, a more careful balance must be taken allowing for student diversity while prioritizing state residents.

It is my belief as Director of Admissions for Florida State University that our purpose is to the state of Florida and the future workforce, and not to the diminishing number of our secondary education graduates (Florida High School graduation rates fall almost 5% below the national average) (Governing, n.d.). It is my belief that the education provided by our institution along with the attractiveness of the state and the job opportunities we are able to connect students with, help retain students within the state of Florida from whatever pre-college locale. This belief has some support (see Dendy, Underhill, & Wellman, 2005).

The point of this memo is not to sell you on a new tuition structure or to call for radical change in our admissions policies. It is simply to call attention to an opportunity for increasing the competition and diversity of our student body by decreasing barriers for out-of-state and international students. If this idea resonates with you and the other University Vice Presidents, I would be happy to provide further research I have collected on the matter. I would also make myself available for service to any formed taskforce or committee, if the time comes.

References

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