‘FED UP WITH THE FEES’

SGA officials, YAL voice frustration on increasing fees, budget cuts at UL

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As the cost of a diploma continues to rise, student fees remain a continuing source of frustration for University of Louisiana at Lafayette students.

The most recent development is the cutthefeescampaign, a protest from the local chapter of Young Americans for Liberty, who are expressing grievances with rising costs and a perceived lack of transparency as to where the money is spent.

“We are specifically protesting student fees to advocate for financial transparency and a conservative approach to spending UL student money,” said YAL President Kaleb Moore. “We believe the current student fee structure does very little to show where the money is going.”

The well-documented drop of state funding to public universities has caused a necessary struggle to cover costs. Due to state laws that strip schools of the autonomy to raise tuition on their own, Louisiana universities like UL Lafayette have resorted to covering the fund gap with rises in student fees, a frustrating loophole in the system for students and families who constantly have to come up with more money.

UL Lafayette does provide a breakdown of the allocation of funds on the university’s website, but some of the language and categories are vague.

According to Moore, YAL is advocating for UL Lafayette to implement a version of the “Ohio Checkbook,” which is a comprehensive, detailed list of that state’s spending. The checkbook is a major campaign promise of YAL member Rachel Lautigar’s current campaign for SGA president.

“I support paying for quality educations, but I do not believe that every fee contributes to students receiving quality educations,” Moore said. “I, as well as most students I’ve met with, believe that a more detailed report would give the students the information necessary for taking the appropriate action regarding the fees.”

Moore also said he and YAL are advocating for less responsibility on students to fund various university programs, groups and events that they are not involved with or aren’t interested in. Moore said the onus to find funding should be put on the organizations themselves.

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Photos by Brianne Hendricks/The Vermilion

The cutthefeescampaign drew attention to the movement with chalking around campus.

Some students expressed their displeasure with fee increases beside the Student Union.
FEES

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and that the burden shouldn’t be on the shoulders of every student.

Moore also acknowledged that the fees were passed by a student body referendum, but lamented the fact that most of the current student body was not involved, and called for current students to have a voice.

“I believe it’s in the best interest of the organizations, their members and non-member students to explore other means of funding such as fundraising, outside donations and individual membership fees,” Moore said. “This idea of individual responsibility rather than a collective tax for funding boosts passion and interest for those who are really motivated and willing to invest. It doesn’t disenfranchise the rest of the student body, (who) could potentially resent an organization it funds but doesn’t participate in.”

Moore and YAL have been met with some ideological opposition by students like Rex Jones, an SGA graduate school senator. Jones said the problem is students don’t see the real value in the services they are paying for, and that he struggles to see a viable alternative to the current system.

He also expressed that rising student fees don’t necessarily correlate with a lack of responsible spending.

“We’d all like to see lower fees, but what fees do YAL propose to cut?” Jones said. “Their most popular targets are cheerleading fees and other student initiatives … This student body cannot cut valuable student services just because the student chooses not to find value in the arts, journalism, reduced child care and campus traditions … We pay way more for ‘energy’ and ‘auxiliaries’ than we do for student initiatives.”

Jones pushed back on the idea of a lack of transparency regarding fees. He also suggested that additional motivation for the protests is rooted in a desire to fulfill campaign promises.

“This checkbook, a major plank of Lautigar’s campaign, is designed to increase transparency by displaying to the public an itemized list of expenditures from accounts funded by student fees,” Jones said. “Kaleb Moore served in the judiciary branch of SGA with Lautigar … I believe that, in order to apply pressure to the administration, YAL, led by Moore and Lautigar, has been using #cutthefees to apply pressure to university administration to make good on Ms. Lautigar’s campaign promises.”

This dichotomy of ideas and positions regarding fees are an illustration of the controversy caused by the current state of higher education funding in Louisiana. The problem doesn’t seem to be going away, as the most recent state budget called for major cuts to both higher education and public safety. Some students like Jones can sympathize with this reality.

“The university is a multimillion dollar operation hamstrung by the limited avenues through which it can raise capital and by meticulous laws that detail the ways in which funds can be spent,” Jones said. “I think students need to wake up and realize that tuition has risen everywhere across the country. Affording college has become a national problem … I think instead of demonstrations, we need discussions.”

However, costly current university projects create a perceived lack of priority management on the part of UL Lafayette administration. These projects make the idea that the university is strapped for cash less believable for protesters like Moore. The current increase in housing, which was met with great opposition when announced, is an example.

“I believe that raising student fees without sufficient explanation is harmful to the students as well as the faculty,” Moore said. “Personally, it is concerning to me that luxury apartments and an amphitheater can be built immediately following the cuts in state funding … it only contributes to the disenfranchisement and frustration.”

Budget cuts show that Louisiana’s state legislature continues to put higher education at the bottom of it’s list of priorities for funding. A budding contentious relationship between students and administration at UL Lafayette has become the result.

SAFETY

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After the debris is put into the container from the street sweeper, it’s hauled off and put at the public works yard in a series of 30-yard dumpsters and it is emptied into the dumpsters.

Then, trucks at Waste Management bring the debris to the landfills.

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The parade route in Lafayette, which runs from Surrey Street to Cajun Field, is where Nepveuax said the main focus during Mardi Gras clean-up is.

As a manager, the task of cleaning up is Nepveuax’s job, joking he doesn’t have a choice, but did add it’s hard work but worth it at the end of the day.

“All year long, we are working to keep the city clean functioning and having it looking as good as possible,” Nepveuax said. “Mardi Gras is just another activity for us to put out our best effort.”

If you drove out on the streets the day after Mardi Gras, Nepveuax said you can see that his guys working hard for those next few days, even if they have to come up at midnight.

“And that shows that we want to get that done,” Nepveuax said, adding, “And we want to get the city back to looking good as possible, so we pride ourselves.”

ROY HOUSE

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looking house and it does have a good story. Its relationship with the university is significant,” Thompson said.

History professor Michael Martin, Ph.D., who is the former director of the Center for Louisiana Studies, said the idea to move the center to the Roy House came from the lack of visibility at its current location.

“I started as director in 2011. In 2012, we started discussions with the university for some other place for the center because, where it is now, there’s no visibility and it’s hard to get to,” Martin said, adding the move to the Roy House coincided with the UL Lafayette master plan, which was unveiled in 2013.

Martin said the center had to choose between several historic buildings owned by the university before settling on the Roy House.

“The Roy House was that happy medium, where we knew it would take some work, but once the work was done, it would be a showpiece for the university and for the center,” Martin said.

Dean of Liberal Arts Jordan Kellman, Ph.D., said the Roy House will help the center be on full display as an asset to students, faculty and the public.

“The Center for Louisiana Studies has often been called one of the best-hidden gems of the university,” Kellman said, “Since then, it’s taken on a much broader mission of public awareness of programming.”

Kellman also said the Roy House will serve as a gateway to the university once restored.

“We really don’t have a front door to the university. The discussion was that the Roy House could serve that function. What a better organization to be that front door than the Center for Louisiana Studies?”

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