



ONLINE FEES: CONFUSING, BUT NOTHING TO FEAR

Pre-med freshman Grayson Gruber uses his laptop on the one day a week he's required to come to campus for class. Photo by **C. Aileen Blaine/The Jambar**

C. AILEEN BLAINE

During the summer, students noticed a confusing \$100 fee added to their already-increased bill for “distance learning.” This came after Youngstown State University increased tuition for both returning and incoming students after passing its budget in July.

All five of freshman pre-med major Grayson Gruber's classes are online to some degree. Only one requires him to come to campus one day per week. Fees for each of the five classes appeared on his billing statement. The same night the fees appeared, they were removed with little explanation.

“Honestly, I think [the fees] were unnecessary, because we're not given the choice,” Gruber said. “Why even put it on the statement in the first place, if it's just going to be refunded? Because that can mess people up. Why make us freak out even more during the pandemic?”

Neal McNally, vice president of finance and business operations, said “while the web-based fees were added to courses that were converted to web-based, YSU removed fees that would've otherwise been charged had the course not been taught in the web-based modality.”

As to why the fees appeared on billing statements, McNally said a number of billing adjustments and corrections were made due to the logistical issues the pandemic has brought.

The bursar's office changed the billing statements to prevent

inapplicable charges.

According to Jessica Chill, director of cyberlearning, only web-based asynchronous classes require the \$100 fee, an amount that has not increased since 2017. She said departments chose from online-live, agile-hybrid, or virtual-campus modalities to keep fees at a minimum. If a student paid a fee for a web-based asynchronous class, the money defrays the cost of office operations as well as the software and technology used.

The department of cyberlearning focuses primarily on assisting students and faculty with Blackboard navigation, hosting webinars and offering guidance. It helps students stay on track even from afar with technical support and reminders about registration and withdrawal dates.

Chill said it's important for the university to implement technology into its classes as a way to stay current and improve. She thinks it's good for both students and faculty to have technological elements to their instruction.

According to a report released by the Board of Trustees June 4, the budget for the 2021 fiscal year was reduced by \$26.1 million. As a result, all departments took budget cuts, including the department of cyberlearning.

Despite this, Chill said neither students nor faculty will be negatively affected by the budget cuts. In March, her department partnered with the Institute for Teaching and Learning and Information Technology services to form the Academic

Continuity Team. The team ensures faculty and students get the most positive experience possible.

“Right now, we really want to focus on improving the quality of courses and keeping the students we currently have happy,” Chill said. “Despite the decrease in the budget, we've really managed to produce some great resources for faculty and students.”



Like the rest of YSU, the department of cyberlearning also endured budget cuts for the 2021 fiscal year. Photo by **C. Aileen Blaine/The Jambar**