

Recommendation, re: Student Readiness

Preparing Students for Online Learning

Recommendation #3: That the university administration provide or seek additional funding for the student emergency fund to support students who require upgrades to their technology to participate in remote delivery classes and to support their academic success in the event of a transition to online delivery in September 2020.

Rationale:

In the winter term, the emergency fund built upon the success of existing funding programs (for students with documented learning disabilities, Indigenous students, and students of African descent). However, those funds serve a narrower cohort of StFX students than may experience need in the fall 2020 term.

In addition to various pressures that online delivery of class material will doubtless bear on students' learning, some students may face financial difficulties during the coming academic year. Many of our students will be unable to find adequate summer employment, and some students' parents will have been impacted financially as well due to unemployment, etc. Despite the federal government support of students and for those who have become unemployed, these funds may not be sufficient to support academic needs in a teaching and learning environment that is delivered remotely. Thus, the high cost of a university education will be an even greater strain on some of our students than is usually the case. More fundamentally, there are also pre-existing inequities which the current epidemic exacerbates, which means that not all students have access to the same technology resources as their peers.

Should StFX open for online delivery in September 2020, our students will require more than ever access to reliable technology and sufficient internet services in order to complete their classes. The student emergency fund, to which alumni and other donors subscribed so generously in the weeks after the abrupt end of the Winter 2020 term, provides some relief to students who required upgrades to their laptop computers. Adequate hardware will likely be a challenge for some of our students. Although these funds may ease only a small percentage of the overall financial burden that our students face, it can still go towards helping them succeed.

Next Steps:

1. Continue discussions with the Financial Aid Office [Advancement];
2. Begin investigation of an additional call for donations to the existing student emergency fund; [Advancement/AVP];
3. Develop straightforward criteria so that students in need of technology upgrades can easily understand their eligibility and how to apply for said funding, as well as a clear timeline for all decisions [Advancement/Financial Aid Office];
4. Ensure all students are aware of these funds in a timely manner [Advancement/Financial Aid Office/Registrar].