

# THE FACTS ABOUT THE COMPUTER PROGRAM AND THE SPECIAL STUDENT FEE.

In the past few days there has been some serious concern aired over a special fee that will be instituted Winter Quarter to fund about *one third* (not the bulk, as has been erroneously reported, but one third) of the University Computer Program. That concern is certainly justified. Students have a right to know how and why their money is being spent. A brief history of the proposal outlines some facts which may be useful in helping students to make an informed decision on the propriety and value of the fee and program.

At the first of the summer, after having completed a study of computer programs at various campuses across the nation, President Peterson and Vice President Altman approached student leaders with the concept of a computer program, expressing their feeling that it would be essential to the future quality and competitiveness of University of Utah graduates. The administration approached student leaders because of their concern about the financial burden that the fee would pose to the student body. It is important to note that the administration did not have to consult with students at all.

## *I. What does the computer program involve?*

The computer program is a three-phased, 20 million-dollar project designed to make all University students computer literate. It involves a hierarchical network consisting of 8 super mini-computers; 70 workstations; 1000 personal computers; and automated library personal computer systems. These computers will be networked together and available to all students in labs and public user areas across campus. Subsidation of such a costly program is only possible through a

## *II. What are the benefits of the program?*

**1.** *First, there is an obvious need for computer literacy.* Many of the better graduate schools are already requiring computer literacy as part of their curriculum, and there are few college-related jobs that are not using computers in one form or another. There is little doubt that this use will continue to expand, and few people will deny the need for computer literacy in the job market of the future.

**2.** *Second, the proposal is timely and immediate action was needed.* Vendors were offering discounts which greatly lowered the total cost of the program, and these were discounts which would not always be available. There were also many research grants ready for contribution to the program, and it was not clear that they would always be there. Finally, the Board of Regents needed the proposal by September in order for them to act on it, so the decision had to be made

propose student fees lies entirely with the administration, and the power to approve and levy those fees lies with the Board of Regents in a process that contains no formal student participation. In short, the fee could have been instituted over the summer without any student input whatsoever. But because of the administration's concern for students, they approached student leaders and were willing to work with them to form an adequate student fee which would help fund part of the project. Even though the administration's proposal is extremely moderate in comparison with other peer universities' computer programs (such as the University of Michigan, which spends \$50 million annually on its program and charges its students approximately \$350 per year in computer fees alone), student leaders were still skeptical, asking many questions and voicing many arguments. Consequently, concessions were made and the finances were reworked several times, resulting in a one-fifth reduction of the original fee proposal. The new proposal was then reviewed by 70 representatives in student government, who by-and-large share the same concerns as the rest of the student body. After *vigorous* debate and *evaluation*, they approved the proposal *unanimously*.

partnership of several resource areas, including administrative discretionary monies; a student fee; research grant monies; vendor discounts; and a reasonable portion of the funding is being sought from the State Legislature. The fee will begin Winter Quarter, 1986, and has been approved for only 3 years. Computers are already starting to arrive, and students will be using computers before the fee is assessed. Campuswide workshops, seminars, and tutoring will take place immediately.

**3.** *Third, there are several immediate advantages available to the student body.* The plans in the proposal called for installing 60 to 100 PCs by the end of October, before students even began paying fees, and about 400 PCs would be installed before the end of Spring Quarter. Plans also called for the immediate availability of workshops and seminars that would train students now, thus allowing even seniors to gain benefits from the fees they were paying, even though those fees were meant to pay

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**4. Fourth, there are obvious long-term advantages.** A school that can claim that all of its students are computer literate typically has much higher starting salaries for its graduates than schools which can't make that claim. The computer program included a provision that would incorporate computer usage into the curriculum. The so-called "graduate fee" (i.e. fees on classes 500 level or above) was made higher because those upper-level classes were likely to make more extensive use of the computers in both curriculum and research. Instituting such a complete program allows the "U" to make the claim that its students are computer literate and improves the salaries of its graduates.

**2. Second, the proposal is timely and immediate action was needed.** Vendors were offering discounts which greatly lowered the total cost of the program, and these were discounts which would not always be available. There were also many research grants ready for contribution to the program, and it was not clear that they would always be there. Finally, the Board of Regents needed the proposal by September in order for them to act on it, so the decision had to be made before school reconvened.

**5. Fifth, it was obvious that students would have to bear their share of the program's financial burden.** As nice as it is to think that the State Legislature should fund all of the University's programs, it is not realistic to assume that they can or will do so. Total state revenue is projected to increase by only \$50 million next year, and that increase has to be divided up among numerous areas of governmental concern. According to the Governor's Planning & Budget Commission, there is simply not enough money to fund the whole program through one source.

## *III. Addressing some important concerns?*

**1. Did students participate?**

Yes. ASUU has been established by students to communicate student body concerns to the administration. In the matter of the computer fee, the body of student government debated the proposal vigorously and approved it unanimously. If students are dissatisfied with this process, it should serve as a message that they need to take a more active role in the student governmental

**2. How much are students really paying?**

It should be noted that the program is designed primarily for educational purposes that will directly benefit the students, yet students are paying less than 1/3 of the total costs. Based on figures from the Registrar's Office, the average student will pay about \$24 per quarter,

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**6. Sixth, approval of the program and fee presented several opportunities for U of U students.** The University had a unique opportunity to convey a sense of need and urgency to the State Legislature. The fee was a chance to show them that improvements need to be made now. Furthermore, it was an act of good faith which will be favorably viewed by the Legislature when requests are made for the funds which are needed to institute a completely successful program. Finally, early adoption of such an extensive program gives the University the opportunity to be a leader, at the forefront of educational quality rather than following in the rearguard.

**3. Are special fees a dangerous precedent?**

No. Unlike tuition increases or other sources of funding, special fees are more flexible, and easier to remove. In the current proposal, the fees can be terminated as soon as the hardware is purchased. Historically, fees have been used frequently to purchase higher-quality academic facilities. The computer fee is no different than the fee which students paid to build the Marriott Library and other such facilities. If anything, this program sets a good precedent in that it gives students the opportunity

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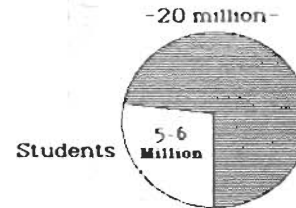
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Briefly summarized, those are the facts which persuaded student leaders to support the administration's proposed computer program. We hope that these facts will help you to make an informed decision for yourself about the program's value.

As a final note, we would ask students to recall that we enjoy many benefits which were paid for by students who attended this institution long ago. Not the least among these benefits are the new Student Services Building, the Library, and the Union Building. It is unfortunate that we can't always receive all the benefits from the work we do, but university life is transitory, and improvements are often long-range designs that take place over time. If there are any students who have further questions, ASUU is planning a discussion next Tuesday, October 8, from 11:00 to 12:30 in the Union West Ballroom, where the ASU president Ned Stringham, will respond to questions in an effort to further inform the student body. Thank you for your concern and support.

Sincerely,

*N. Stringham*  
Ned Stringham  
ASUU President

*Brett Bailey*  
Brett Bailey  
Chair, ASUU Public Affairs Board