TO: Executive Council
FROM: Jay Stein, Provost
DATE: February 19, 2009
RE: Recommendation Concerning Course Withdrawal Fee

The Academic Council recommends that beginning in Fall 2009 the $20 course withdrawal fee be effective beginning the second week of the semester rather than at the beginning of the fourth week, as specified by the Executive Council May 6, 2008.

The rationale for this recommendation is the following:

1. It sends a stronger message to students to select their courses carefully, to decide within the first week (when there is no fee for dropping or adding courses) which courses they intend to complete, and then to apply themselves to those courses rather than spreading their efforts for at least two more weeks among a larger number of courses, often knowing they will not complete them all.

2. By encouraging students who don’t intend to complete all the courses for which they registered to drop the excess courses in the first week, this change would open more seats in closed courses for other students who want to add courses. (By the end of week three it is too late for other students to be added to a course, so seats that are opened then are lost.)

3. Course withdrawals after week one, when the fee applies, would probably be spread over the first half of the semester, rather than bunched in weeks two and three. Since our enrollment figures (and a portion of our budget) are based on the week 3 census, students who withdraw in weeks 2 and 3 are not counted, while those who withdraw in week 4 or later are counted. Beginning the fee at week 4, as we have this year, encourages students to withdraw during week 2 or 3, when they are not counted in enrollment, while at the same time preventing other students to occupy those seats (and count in enrollment).

Registrar’s Office figures show that in Fall 2008, when the fee was applied beginning in week 4, there were 282 course withdrawals in weeks 2 and 3, nearly 15% more than in Fall 2007, when the fee was not applied. This trend appears to be increasing, as students become more knowledgeable about the fee. In Spring 2009 there were 110 course withdrawals in weeks 2 and 3, 78% more than in Spring 2008 when no fee was applied.

Whether or not this proposal to make the course withdrawal fee effective at the beginning of the second week of class is accepted, the Registrar’s Office plans to continue their practice of waiving both the late drop/add fee and the course withdrawal fee for good cause. The following “good causes,” all easily verifiable, are used:

*The student is a new (first-semester) freshman, transfer, or graduate student.
*The course section days/times/instructor changed after the first week of the semester.

*The student's major/minor was changed after the first week of the semester, making the course no longer needed for program completion.

I support this proposal and encourage the Executive Council to consider it at their next meeting so that, if the change is authorized, it can be included in the 2009-2010 catalog.