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Makerere University to stick with new tuition structure

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By Ronald Musoke

Prof. John Ddumba Ssentamu, Makerere University's Vice Chancellor on Feb. 18 called a hastily organized press briefing to clarify a number of issues concerning the new fees structure that has seen students run battles with the Police over the last one week arguing that they cannot meet the deadline due to financial constraints.

Ssentamu said it is not true that the university has hiked tuition fees; rather they are simply implementing the council policy which was reached six years ago.

According to the vice chancellor who is barely a year old in the hot seat of Makerere University, on Aug. 31 in 2006, the University Council held an

emergency meeting and agreed that in order to stabilize the university's financial position, tuition and other university fees should be paid on the first day of every academic year.

At that same meeting, it was also agreed that first year privately sponsored students who fail to pay first semester fees in full by the end of the second week of the beginning of an academic year shall forfeit their place at the university while a continuing privately sponsored student who shall not have paid fees by the end of the sixth week shall be de-registered.

In essence, the council decided that students should complete paying all the university fees by the sixth week of a semester and be registered then.

"Where a student fails to raise enough money to pay for a full semester load, the student can choose courses within the first six weeks and make payment for the course load he or she can afford and get registered.

"If a programme is costing you one million shillings, within the first week, pay the one million shillings. However, if you cannot afford to pay the one million shillings, pay the Ushs 600,000 and register for 60% of the course units," Ssentamu said.

Ssentamu said the university does not intend to drop the policy unless the council changes its position. This is only supposed to help the University to plan properly.

He said the university wants to avoid situations where students rush to pay tuition fees two days before examinations.

This has been affecting the planning at the university.

"We have been in a transition for the last two years and it has not been easy implementing these policies," he said.

The vice chancellor admitted that Uganda's oldest institution of higher learning has a lot of financial challenges, adding that if the new policy were to be dropped, the university would close.

According to Ssentamu, Makerere University has a monthly wage bill of Ushs 5.4b of which Ushs 2.4b is derived from internally generated funds which includes money contributed by the privately sponsored students—who constitute 36,000 out of the 42,000-student population at the university.

Ssentamu also noted that besides the university operating at less than 50% of the total staff establishment, money is needed to pay for temporary and part time lecturers, utilities (electricity and water) to the tune of Ushs 800m per month, teaching materials and laboratory equipment as well as internet bandwidth, computer software and maintenance.

He insisted that students will not be allowed to pay university fees and register after the end of the sixth week of a semester and only registered students will be allowed to use university facilities to attend lectures, do course work and sit for final examinations.

He explained that in September 2012, the Vice Chancellor was instructed by the University Council to implement this policy and communication was made to the students. Students opposed it and consequently a meeting was organized.


During the meeting, the students requested to postpone the implementation of the policy to the second semester. The Vice Chancellor said although the

postponement affected the smooth running of the institution, the university council reluctantly agreed to this request on the condition that they would comply in the second semester.

Alfred Masikye Namoah, the university Academic Registrar noted that this policy is friendly to students, if not; it is only similar to what happens in secondary schools and other universities.

"In other universities you are fined when you delay paying your tuition," Namoah said.



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