Costs may rise for international students

by SARAH SWAIN
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It might soon become more expensive for international students to attend Tufts, if a proposed regulation by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is enacted. If approved, the regulation will impose a $95 entrance fee upon international students studying at American universities.

The purpose of the entrance fee is to ensure that international students are following the conditions set by their student visas. Students studying in the US under student visas are required to take a certain number of courses, and are prohibited from working at an off-campus job for more than a specified number of hours. The INS will use the fee to create a computer database of information to monitor whether these students are working within the hours permitted and taking the proper number of courses required by the visa. These changes could have a large impact on Tufts because of its significant proportion of international students. Currently, 14 percent of the undergraduate students are foreign citizens or reside overseas.

Paula Grenier, of the INS Press Office in Boston, described the evolution of the fee. She stated that Congress amended a statute in 1996 that directed the Justice Department to work with the Department of Education in order to ensure that non-immigrant international students were not violating the terms of their student visas.

Grenier said that the law, not the INS, formed the basis for the fee, because it "established that institutions of higher learning should impose and collect a fee from international students in support of the information database program."

The proposed fee is INS's effort to comply with that Congressional action. Congress's directive did not include funding, however, so the $95 fee will be used to see INS, page 17
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fund and operate the database. According to Greiner, Congress has mandated that the database program be self-financed, thereby passing the cost on to students. “[Congress] established that institutions of higher learning should impose and collect a fee from international students to support the information database program,” Grenier said.

The regulation has raised concern at universities across the country. Eyleen Schmidt, a spokeswoman for the INS, told the Daily Texan at the University of Texas at Austin on Jan. 28 that the creation of the database would make current INS information easier to manage by converting paper files into electronic form.

The fee, which will be decided upon by the INS in May 2000, would be enacted each time an international student transfers to a new university. No charge will be incurred by foreign students attending high schools or elementary schools in the United States.

The fee, if adopted, will result in higher administrative costs for Tufts, because it will require the University to create a staff to manage the money. This staff would be responsible for informing students about the fee, collecting the money, and then passing it on to the INS.

Tufts University Bursar Kathleen Mundhenk stated that the Bursar’s Office has been working to start a dialogue with other departments at Tufts to determine any administrative reorganization that will be needed in order to comply with the regulation. However, she noted that the regulation has only been proposed and has not yet passed, forcing the Bursar’s Office to wait to see what the end result will be before any action is taken.

Mundhenk added that it is too early to determine how the proposed regulation will effect international students at Tufts. She said: “At this point, our office is still gathering information about the regulation. We really don’t know what it will do, but we are trying to find out what changes and steps will be necessary for the University if the regulation is passed.”

As the regulation stands now, Mundhenk said, “Tufts will probably have the responsibility for transferring the full payment of each student to the INS.”

Students responded with skepticism towards the idea of the fee and the ensuing red tape. Sophomore Elizabeth Exton, from London, England, said, “I don’t know how I feel about it, but it sounds odd that the money has to go through the University first. It really depends on who is getting the money.”

Exton worries that the fee would aggravate students, who are already paying high fees to attend school in the United States. “We have to pay a lot anyway, because of out-of-state tuition, and also we have to change our money to US dollars. Another fee would not go over well,” she said.

Sophomore Tufts Community Union Senator Anoop Swaminath agreed with Exton. “I think this proposal is another mistake in a series of recent mistakes by the INS. The fee is most unnecessary and should not be enacted.”

Although this is the first time that the proposed fee has been brought to his attention, Swaminath feels that the issue should be addressed in future Tufts Community Union Senate meetings. He said that any Senate action would take place after student reaction to the proposal is evaluated.

“It really depends on how students feel about the whole thing and on their reactions to it,” Swaminath said.