**Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education**
**Office of the Chancellor**
**Guidance**

**REFUNDING SPRING 2020 STUDENT FEES GUIDANCE**

**March 20, 2020**

**The following guidance is provided for refunding student fees associated with the suspension of in-person instruction due to COVID-19 during the Spring 2020 semester.**

**Background:**

**U.S. Department of Education (ED) Guidance**

Although the US Department of Education has released [Guidance for interruptions of study related to Coronavirus (COVID-19)](https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19) (March 5, 2020), this guidance does not address the impact of suspending in-person instruction on student living decisions and associated costs.

Applicable guidance was provided by ED in 2018 regarding the inability of the university to educate students relating to a natural disaster or pandemic influenza outbreak. That [2018 disaster guidance from ED](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/disasters/disaster-guidance.docx) specified: “The Department strongly encourages institutions to provide a full refund of tuition, fees, and other institutional charges, or to provide credit in a comparable amount against future charges, for students who withdraw from school as a direct result of a disaster. The Department also urges institutions to consider providing easy and flexible re-enrollment options to such students.”

**System Conclusion:**

Given that the university is providing full educational and student services, tuition and other academic/student service fees do not need to be refunded.The above federal guidance would indicate that if a university will not be providing services for which the student has been charged, an appropriate refund (or credit) should be made to the students’ accounts. Therefore, guidance is focused on auxiliary or self-supporting services that will no longer be provided and which were charged to the student via specific fees.

**Principles for Refunding Students in Spring 2020 Due to COVID-19:**

1. These guidelines are applicable to those students who remain enrolled for the remainder of the semester. The suspension of in-person instruction for the remainder of the semester does not change the student’s modality classification for billing, financial aid, and/or reporting purposes.
2. Given that the universities are providing full educational and student services (including health services), tuition and academic/student service fees will not be refunded.
3. Students should be refunded for services they will no longer receive, including housing, dining, and unused portions of other fees as determined by the university.
4. Refunds should be prorated, based on the number of days for which the service will not be provided to the student(s).
5. Refunds involving affiliates, such as activity fees and some housing fees, may be dependent on the cooperation of the affiliate. Similarly, refunds for dining may be dependent on vendor agreements.
6. The preferred method of reimbursement is through a refund to the student account. Credits to student accounts for future use, while not recommended, may be used as an alternative only if refunds cannot address solutions to #5, above. However, if a credit is applied, it should first be applied to any remaining current charges. Please be aware there may be federal financial aid implications for credits applied in the future award year.
7. Generally, universities should not change the Cost of Attendance. Please refer to all applicable federal and state financial aid regulations and guidance.
8. Refunds for eligible students will be processed by the universities at the earliest possible time based on a schedule determined by the institution.

The following scenarios illustrate situations where refunds are to be provided and the proration effective date.

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| **Scenario** | **Timing** |  **Guidance** |
| 1)University required students to move out of campus-provided housing. | Students were not allowed to return to live in housing after the original spring break period. | Room, board and other fees identified by the university must be refunded, prorated to the first day after the end of the original spring break. |
| University required students to move out of campus-provided housing. Students returned to live in housing after the original spring break period.  | Room, board and other fees identified by the university must be refunded, prorated to the effective date housing was “closed.” |
| 2)Students are able to remain living in campus-provided housing. Student chooses to move out.  | Varies by student. The earliest date applicable would be the first day after the original spring break period. | Room, board and other fees identified by the university should be refunded, prorated to the effective date the student terminated housing/dining contract. |
| 3)Students remaining on campus. | No housing/dining refunds. | For other services that may no longer be provided, other fees identified by the university may be refunded based on the date services ended. |
| 4)Students living off-campus, not university property. |  | Other fees identified by the university must be refunded, prorated based on the same timing in scenario 1. |
| 5)Affiliate housing excluded from above. |  | Each university will have to work with their affiliate housing providers for the best interest of the students. |

 **Withdrawals:**

Universities are not required to refund tuition and fees for students who choose to withdraw, given that the university is providing full educational and student services and the refund period is passed. See Board of Governors’ Policy 1983-19-A: [*Refund of Tuition and Fees*](https://www.passhe.edu/inside/policies/BOG_Policies/Policy%201983-19-A.pdf)*,* and University refund policies. However, Section B.8. of the Board policy provides: “A student is eligible for consideration for a refund for any reason approved by the president or his/her designee.”

For those who do withdraw, universities should provide a flexible and easy way for students to re-enroll, either in the current semester or future terms.