

International UM students claim cost was raised by up to RM36,000

Written by admin2

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KUALA LUMPUR: A group of international students at Universiti Malaya (UM) has raised an outcry over an increase in tuition fees of up to RM36,000. The Star's R.AGE team spoke to 15 students, all undergraduates in their first year, who claimed to have had their tuition fees increased after they arrived in Malaysia.

When I applied for the course in March 2017, it was only about RM5,000 a semester. But when I arrived in August, I found that they had increased the fee to RM9,500, said an accounting student from Indonesia, who requested anonymity.

I have not paid as I am still waiting for them to quote the final fee, he added.

Another student from Nigeria said her course fee was RM4,440 per semester when she checked in July. When she arrived in September, however, it was revised to RM6,720 and then RM7,020 in December.

I hope UM will charge us the original fees and that this scenario will not repeat itself in subsequent semesters, said the student.

The addition in fees differs from course to course, but ranges between a few hundred ringgit and RM9,000 a year.

R.AGE sighted the offer letters of some of the students and found that they did not contain the exact fee, but pointed to a fee structure on the online student portal.

According to the students, the fees were revised in the months after they accepted the offer, but they were not informed of the changes.

The students claimed that no explanation was given for the fee hike except that the university reserved the right to change the fees at its discretion.

The students also claimed that they knew of over 40 other students who had been affected by this fee increase.

Further investigations revealed that a fee structure published on UM's official Facebook page on Feb 2, 2017, was significantly lower than the current fee structure displayed on its online student portal.

R.AGE also looked through archived versions of the online student portal, finding that prices for one of the courses was changed as recently as July 28, 2017.

R.AGE has been contacting various departments within UM since Thursday for a response to the claims and to explain the increase in fees, but has yet to receive any.

National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC) senior legal and policy manager Shabana Naseer Ahmad said students should be advised upfront on how much and what they would be paying for.

It's unfair for universities to claim that they can change the fees as they wish. They should have a rough figure of the estimated cost and not implement a drastic change in fees, which is misleading, she said.

Fee changes should be made in advance with valid reasons, such as new regulations or requirements imposed by the Government.

She said students who feel that they have been misled can reach out to NCCC at www.nccc.org.my.