

Distance Ed Tuition Rate Announcement for 2008 / 2009 School Year

Grace Theological Seminary recently announced a tuition rate increase for distance education (DE) students beginning the 2008/2009 school year. This increase will significantly impact our students since over the course of a five year plan the seminary has decided to bring the DE tuition in line with that of the residential seminary program. The new DE tuition will be \$386 per credit hour and online students will be charged an additional technology fee of \$125 per course. The seminary will continue to offer courses in both the distance ed (CD, DVD, and ITS) format during a transition period during which courses will be converted to online format.

At the same time the seminary announced that two scholarship programs currently available for residential students have been extended to distance ed and online students. The Sparks Endowment, also known as the GTS Scholarship, will provide up to \$65 per credit hour for Grace Brethren Church members or \$50 for members of non-Grace churches. This is a recurring benefit which requires students to submit an online scholarship application each year as well as write a thank you note to one of the donors. More information is available at:

<http://www.gts.grace.edu/GTS-scholarship-application.htm>

In addition, Grace announced that the Partners in Education program has been extended to distance ed and online students. This is a matching grant program in which Grace Seminary matches a sponsoring churches gift of up to \$500 per year. This creates a total benefit of \$1,000 per year and is distributed in the amount of 50% in the fall semester and the balance in the spring. Churches are encouraged to sponsor their seminary students with any amount but the maximum that Grace will match is \$500 per year. No application is necessary for this benefit. The church should send the donation payable to Grace Schools attention the name of the seminary student that they are sponsoring.

Dr. Mark Soto who is the director of the DE and online programs at Grace Seminary would like to address the tuition rate increase. I realize that for many who have taken DE classes this will be a significant jump in cost and many students may wonder why and how the administration can justify such an increase in tuition for those taking distance education classes. Let me seek to answer those questions by explaining how our distance education program will be changing in the next years.

1. Many of you know that for some time now we have been pursuing offering classes online. That dream is now a reality. Grace Theological Seminary has contracted with LearningHouse, an educational internet provider, to care for all the servers, electricity, conversion of courses to online formats, and provision of 24-7 online technical training and support for learners and faculty. The cost of providing that same service if Grace did it all themselves would exceed the five-million dollar price tag. It was determined that the yearly student fee and the technology fee that is required by LearningHouse was a better way to provide internet classes. What this means is that Grace will utilize some of the tuition increases to pay the six-thousand yearly access fee for using LearningHouse and then it has been decided that each student will pay the technology fee we are required to pay LearningHouse for the convenience of taking classes from

home. As one who has taken online courses for the last 4 years I can tell you that having a technology fee is not unusual for online education.

2. We have begun redesigning each and every course for online delivery. This is called Instructional Design and involves re-thinking each course for delivery on the internet to adult learners instead of the traditional way courses are designed. This will mean your experience will not just seek to measure your content acquisition but rather will give you a collaborative setting in an asynchronous setting that engages you in active learning which will be immediately transferable to your ministry settings. This has required significant time on the part of your instructors in preparing the courses and will also add significant time expectations in facilitating them online. It is therefore fitting that the cost of the course be comparable and equivalent to the same investment made in the residential students.
3. We have also redesigned our course formats to be a compressed 8 week format instead of the traditional 16 week format. This means a more intense learning focus for each class but a much more rewarding engagement of the material. The compressed format eliminates the less busy times often found in a normal semester and allows the learner to focus totally on only one subject at a time, thus yielding a higher level of engagement, retention of material, and learning. For this reason we are not intending to allow distance learners to take more than one class in a given 8 week period. Right now we will be offering classes 5 times during the year allowing learners to earn 15 hours a year toward their degree.
4. The primary basis of adult learning is collaboration. The research demonstrates that online classrooms are as interactive, or more interactive, than a face-to-face classroom experience. Each faculty member who facilitates an online course will be required to attend the course room a specific amount of time each week allowing for more personal contact and greater interaction with the professor as well.

We recognize that many of you will be concerned about the increases in the cost of your distance education experience here at Grace. I want you to know that any increase in tuition is done only after evaluation by Dr. Manahan, our President; Dr. Katip, our Provost; Dr. Gill our Dean and Mr. Steve Popenfoose our CFO. They are painfully aware of the difficulty of raising tuition but the changes in what we are requiring professors to do, the cost of curriculum re-design, the additional cost of technology utilization make these changes necessary and will only allow us to maintain existing margins of cost effectiveness. Please be aware that before the Lord we believe that these changes are necessary to bring you a quality ministry training that allows you to remain where you are and be trained for the ministries God has called you do.

I trust this has at least explained our thinking and helped you to understand how and why we arrived at this change now. I believe that you will find that the experience online will greatly enhance your learning and be worth the cost of training for ministry in the local church and around the world.

Sincerely,

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