



Sobering news about the future of Barrytown College

Hugh Spurgin
March 19, 2015

Students at the Barrytown College of the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) got a face-to-face meeting with Dr. Michael Balcomb and Dr. Hugh Spurgin on Thursday, March 19, and learned of some sobering realities and some good news, too.



Dr. Michael Balcomb, center, and Dr. Hugh Spurgin, at right, gave students at Barrytown College straight talk about the lack of Federal financial aid to students on March 19, 2015.

Dr. Michael Balcomb, chairman of the UTS Board of Trustees, explained that in late January it was discovered that federal financial aid for the undergraduate program had never been authorized by the US Department of Education (DOE), which means that in the future the cost of tuition, fees, and room and board will soar for undergraduate students and their families, until the US government approves federal funding for the Barrytown College program. As Dr. Spurgin, Interim President of UTS, explained in a subsequent letter to students on March 23, the previous administration had been notified of the denial of federal financial aid to the undergraduate program on 26 December 2013, but that decision of DOE was not reported to the UTS trustees, administrators, alumni, students or parents.

“Now with the discovery that federal funding was never authorized for the undergraduate students, it is unlikely that we can open the Barrytown campus in September,” Balcomb told a gathering of 21 students at Barrytown College. “I have to be honest with you,” he continued, with his voice sometimes cracking with emotion. “It is unlikely that student aid will be available next year, therefore I am here to encourage you to consider other options for continuing your undergraduate education.”

However, Balcomb made it clear that the undergraduate program will neither close nor be suspended. The

\$12,000-a-year Founder's scholarship, which all Barrytown College students receive, will be available in the fall. But since there is no government financial aid, each student would have to pay \$20,500 per year for tuition and housing for the 2015-16 year, even after the Founder's scholarship is taken into account. That sum is far more than the students and their families currently are paying.



Dr. Michael Balcomb told students at Barrytown College that he had good news and bad.

“It was thought,” Balcomb explained, “that the price per student per year was \$32,500 a year, but actually the cost is much more.” He went on to say, “I believe that UTS will flourish in the next forty years but the education industry has changed. UTS can be turned around, but I’m not sure it can be done so quickly as to make for a seamless experience for you. It will take two to three years to re-establish our financial stability and to get our house in order.” Balcomb said, “My preference is that we pause and do a wave two later.” He further explained that the good news is the HSA Board voted to make the Founder’s Scholarship of \$12,000 portable to other colleges or universities, if the students choose to transfer.

Balcomb and Spurgin explained that it would be less expensive for the students to transfer for the coming semester to a college that is authorized to disburse federal student loans, work-study funds, and Pell Grants. Schools that are prepared to give generous offers to transfer students from Barrytown College include the University of Bridgeport and Sun Moon University in Korea. Balcomb also discussed the University of Nevada at Las Vegas as a solution for students who would feel comfortable living in an intentional community and participating in CARP outreach. The Founder’s scholarship is available for a student who transfers to an American university that has an accredited undergraduate degree program.

During the question-and-answer period after the talk, one student asked, “If the financial situation was so precarious, why was the school opened in the first place?” Balcomb answered, “In hindsight, it was a mistake. It should not have opened without federal funding being secured. Yet, I don’t think it was a loss; I hope one day we can restart on a more stable basis.”

A few students expressed sadness, but said they were not surprised, since Spurgin had met with almost all of them on two occasions and also talked with groups of students at meal times. They said that he explained that the US government had not approved for Barrytown College students to receive government financial aid and that UTS was facing financial challenges.

Spurgin promised he would work to make the transition smooth for any student who chooses to transfer. A team of administrators from the University of Bridgeport, headed by Dr. Thomas Ward, is scheduled to meet with interested students on April 3, after spring break. Spurgin explained that Bridgeport offers a wide variety of educational programs and courses.

The same facts were related to the parents of Barrytown College students on a conference call on March 19. On that call, Balcomb said, “I am confident we can get UTS back on its feet. I told the students I want to push the ‘reset button.’ This is a fantastic group of students. I see great potential for leadership in them. When I look at your children, I see the loyalty and their maturity.”