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Red tape casts a shadow on varsity’s image

OUR uncle passed away suddenly on Jan 1, leaving behind our homemaker aunt and their only child, our cousin, who is a third-year accountancy student at Singapore Management University (SMU).

My cousin is currently doing his internship at Ernst and Young, and was scheduled to go for an exchange programme in South Korea in March after his internship ends. With his father's sudden demise, he has understandably withdrawn from the exchange programme to stay back and provide emotional and physical support to his mother.

He contacted SMU to explain his circumstances and request for entry to a term starting in February, when his internship ends. SMU offered him three modules for the modified term. We understand that the common practice for SMU students is to bid for desired modules using electronic dollars (e$) allocated to students at the start of each semester. The balance e$ can be accumulated to bid for future modules which, as we understand, can be highly competitive (and expensive) to bid for especially in the higher years.

However, SMU insisted that it would deduct the amount of e$ from his account based on the highest bid and also impose an extra penalty of 20 per cent of e$. If there was not enough e$ for the deduction, his account would be wiped out or reflect negative e$, my cousin was told in an e-mail.

This move of imposing an extra 20 per cent of e$ will effectively jeopardise and affect my cousin's future module bidding in the next few semesters. We do not see the necessity for such a move. We can understand if the penalty was imposed on someone who procrastinated till the last minute to arrange for module selection, but my cousin's circumstances was entirely unforeseen.

Would it not suffice to just deduct the same number of e$ from my cousin's account as the highest bidder for the modules?

Why is it necessary to impose an extra 20 per cent?

When my cousin contacted the associate dean of curriculum and teaching for help on this issue, he was told it was a "university-wide policy".
We thought that SMU, as an institution of professed excellence, would possess the flexibility to deal with variable circumstances. Instead of providing a source of comfort to its student, SMU has added to his grief by subjecting him to needless bureaucracy.

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