



Government & Politics

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Students at Public Colleges Brace for Large Tuition Increases

By RICHARD MORGAN

Tuition at public colleges has risen slowly since the late 1990s,

but students in several states are bracing for the biggest increases in a decade this fall as lawmakers slash higher-education spending to stanch bleeding state budgets.

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[Rising Costs](#)

At the same time, legislators in a few states are warning college leaders not to shut out financially needy students, forcing colleges to seek other ways to raise funds from students.

Over the past five years, tuition at public colleges has risen at an annual rate of slightly more than 4 percent. But for 2002-3, many public colleges are projecting percentage increases in the double digits. At the University of Iowa, officials have proposed a 19-percent increase, to \$4,191, for in-state students. In-state tuition at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is slated to climb 21 percent, to \$2,814. And officials at Pennsylvania State University's flagship campus, at University Park, are talking about a 10-percent increase, which would push its in-state tuition to more than \$7,700 annually.

"Tuition increases should be a last resort, but for many in education, it's a first resort," says Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, a research group based in San Jose, Calif. "In the last two decades, the largest increases have come in the depths of recession. It's part of the poker game of tuition -- schools threatening increases to poke lawmakers into giving them more money. But, by pushing tuition now, we undermine higher education by kicking the public when they're down."

Constitutional Guarantee

In North Carolina, the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina system agreed this month to raise in-state tuition by 8 percent next year, and to allow the system's 16 campuses to impose additional increases that range from \$100

to \$400. (The Chapel Hill campus tacked on \$300.) The increases, which come on the heels of a 9-percent rise last year, stirred up plenty of controversy and student protests in a state whose Constitution guarantees free tuition "as far as practicable."

The bulk of the new tuition revenues will be used to pay for the 5,800 additional students (a 3.4-percent increase) expected to enroll in the system next fall. The board's vote marked the first time that it had decided to use tuition money to pay for enrollment growth. In the past, the state's General Assembly provided funds for that purpose through appropriations or by ordering tuition increases itself.

Meanwhile, in California, Gov. Gray Davis, a Democrat, is renegeing on an agreement he made with the University of California in 2000 to avoid tuition increases by allocating additional state funds to the nine-campus system. Lawmakers in California are grappling with a projected \$18-billion budget deficit. The governor, who is up for re-election this year, has told the university system not to increase tuition, even though he did not come through with the \$36-million that he had promised this year.

The governor "says he doesn't want [an increase], but he doesn't provide money to stop one from happening," says Brad Hayward, a university-system spokesman. Mr. Hayward says the system is likely to cut programs rather than raise tuition.

Given that it is an election year, with politicians fearing a public backlash against higher college prices, some higher-education officials are searching for alternative methods of raising tuition. One such strategy is a "tiered" tuition approach that would disproportionately place the brunt of the increases on new students.

Tiered plans work by charging incoming students more than returning students. The higher price is imposed on each new class, so that after four years, students in all four classes will be paying the new, higher rate. The University of Illinois system established a tiered plan last year, and a few public institutions in Indiana, Kansas, and Ohio are now looking to copy the idea.

The plans appeal to colleges because they raise the bulk of the new tuition revenue from students who have yet to enroll. "It's not really an increase for [incoming students]," says Elizabeth A. Conlisk, a spokeswoman for Ohio State University. "They never paid any different."

Indeed, at Cleveland Heights High School, outside of

Cleveland, Bruce J.R. Fink, a guidance counselor, says that about 70 percent of the senior class is bound for college -- but that those students are more concerned about being admitted than about the "financial hammer" of tiered plans. Tuition costs a lot already, he says. "So what's a little more than a lot? It's not a burdening concern in their minds." And current college students who benefit from the tiered approach are finding themselves uneasily complicit.

"Students here aren't going to be complaining that they're paying less," says Joshua L. Wolf, a student-government representative at Ohio University at Athens, where tuition is slated to rise 9.9 percent for returning students and 15 percent for new students. "Next year's freshmen aren't students yet, so we can't represent them. But they will be subsidizing, and they should raise holy hell."

Meanwhile, many public colleges are coming under fire for circumventing traditional tuition increases but still expanding revenue -- by raising student fees. The attorney general in Texas, for example, is investigating whether the University of Texas System's Board of Regents had the authority to impose an "infrastructure" fee of \$150 per semester on the Austin campus without the approval of the state Legislature. The money would be used to maintain compliance with building and fire codes.

Fees for Bathrooms?

At a meeting last month over a new technology fee for students in the City University of New York system, Liam Flynn-Jambeck, a student at Hunter College, mocked the adoption of unusual student fees as a roundabout way of increasing tuition. "I'm not sure if you know, but many students use the bathroom at some point in the day, and they don't pay a dime for this," deadpanned Mr. Flynn-Jambeck, who also proposed fees for using campus elevators and chairs. "I thought a \$55-per-semester bathroom fee would be appropriate. But why stop there?" CUNY eventually adopted a \$75 technology fee.

Travis J. Reindl, director of state-policy analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, says policy makers want both lower appropriations and lower tuition for public colleges -- an approach that forces universities into "back-door tactics." While colleges have always used some programs, such as teacher education, to subsidize others, like engineering, Mr. Reindl believes students will bypass colleges that so blatantly charge them more through two-tiered tuition plans.

"They'll walk right by you," he says.

RISING COSTS

Public colleges are considering their largest tuition increases in a decade as states grapple with tight budgets this year.

Some proposed increases for state residents:

	2001-2	2002-3 proposed	Percentage increase
University of California at Berkeley	\$3,429	\$3,696	7.8%
Ohio State University	\$4,788	\$5,262	9.9%*
University of Iowa	\$3,522	\$4,191	19.0%
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	\$2,328	\$2,814	20.9%

*Figure applies only to rate for returning students.

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