

States Plan Big Tuition Increases

Budget Woes Lift College Costs As Much as 40%

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State colleges and universities in every region of the country are preparing to impose this fall their steepest tuition and fee increases in a decade -- the latest fallout of state fiscal crises in which most governors and legislatures this year sharply reduced aid to higher education.

Recently announced tuition increases for in-state students of as much as 21 percent in Maryland and almost 30 percent in Virginia over last fall's levels are larger than those in many states, but still well behind increases in states with even larger budget gaps. Tuition and fees at the State University of New York and the University of Oklahoma are rising about as much as those at the University of Virginia, but they are rising 39 percent at the University of Arizona and 40 percent at the University of California.

The pattern marks a reversal from the boom times of the late 1990s, when state tax collections soared and most governors dramatically raised aid to public colleges and universities, which educate two-thirds of the nation's four-year college students. Some states, including Virginia, froze or even rolled back in-state tuition; others, including Maryland, kept increases to a minimum.

Like most of their counterparts, Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) and Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner (D) lifted tuition limits in the face of record budget gaps. Tuition and fees at the University of Maryland at College Park will be \$6,759 this fall (\$1,089 more than last year), and at the University of Virginia, \$5,968 (\$1,370 more than last fall). In dollar terms, those increases are among the nation's highest.

Governors and lawmakers in several states said they cut state aid to higher education reluctantly, but did so knowing that colleges and universities could raise money from other sources, including tuition.

University officials voiced concern that many lower- and moderate-income students now will be pushed into community colleges or out of higher education because federal financial aid and most state aid programs are not keeping pace with rising tuition. Meanwhile, the job market for young adults is dismal, and more students need to work to afford college.

"It is curious that national and state political leaders are so interested in ensuring access to and quality in K-12 education, yet once you get to higher education, the interest in accessibility seems to fall off," said Charles Hoslet, director of state relations for the University of Wisconsin system, where tuition on flagship campuses is going up 18 percent.

David W. Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, said the shift represents a largely unacknowledged national policy decision, as states react one by one to the most serious fiscal crises in decades. The effect, he and others said, is to shift the cost of higher education away from states, onto in-state students and their families.

"They're just balancing budgets, and this is the fallout, and nobody is asking, 'What about our future?'" said Joni E. Finney, vice president of the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education in San

Jose.

Some states, including New York, Oklahoma and Washington, are increasing financial aid to cover some or all tuition increases for lower- and moderate-income families, but many, including Maryland and Virginia, made no changes. And several, including Tennessee and Massachusetts, reduced need-based aid, saying the fiscal crisis left them no alternative. The largest federal grant program, the Pell Grant, is not increasing its maximum award.

With the increases, tuition and room and board at many state universities is now more than \$10,000 a year. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges found that room and board at major state universities last year averaged a little less than \$6,000.

Students interviewed last week in several states had reactions ranging from annoyance to despair, depending on their financial circumstances. Michael Hansen, who faces a \$570 tuition increase at Maryland's Salisbury University, where he will be a junior this fall, said he already works two jobs -- at the library and delivering Chinese food -- to help his parents pay his tuition, and now "will have to work a little harder so that I can remain a member of academia and not a full-time delivery boy at some random Chinese restaurant."

The stakes are higher for University of Iowa senior Mayrose Wegmann, one of eight children of a single mother who earns the minimum wage working at a coffee shop. Wegmann already has more than \$24,000 in debt, works more than 40 hours a week, doubles up with three students in a two-bedroom apartment, does without cable TV and long-distance service and walks rather than driving or riding the bus. She also receives the maximum Pell Grant of \$4,000, which isn't going up, although her tuition and fees will increase almost \$900 this fall -- for a combined increase of 55 percent more than when she was a freshman. She said her options are to work even more hours or go further into debt.

"It's disheartening for anyone from my background to see these increases, because we know how important a higher education is," said Wegmann, a political science major. "We're all working harder and harder to pay our way, but we're not getting a better education. In fact, we're getting a worse education because the time we have to study is so limited."

A survey by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges found tuition rising at public institutions in all 37 states that have responded so far, almost all as a result of state budget cuts. Increases were less than 5 percent in only three states -- Montana, New Mexico and Hawaii.

This is the second consecutive year of higher education budget cuts in 24 states, according to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and with no sign of an upturn in state revenue, another round is likely next year. Many states have raised tuition two years in a row.

In Minnesota, the state colleges and universities system recently approved 12.5 percent increases for this September and September 2004, which will mean four consecutive years of double-digit tuition increases for in-state students. The legislature increased need-based grants by 17 percent over the past two years, but officials said some financial-aid students still will pay more.

While public colleges are still far more affordable than their private counterparts, unpredictable costs are a growing issue. Karen Kielbasa, who is putting herself through Virginia Tech, where she will be a senior, said she could handle last year's 9 percent increase and this year's 7.6 percent boost -- she simply took out larger loans -- but was blindsided by the school's decision to raise tuition in the middle of the year by about \$400 a semester.

She said she had to double the hours she worked in the campus library and at a horse stable -- from 15 to 30 a week -- while taking 15 credits.

Elizabeth Hust, who is paying her own way through the University of Wisconsin with financial aid and an almost 40-hour work week, said she cannot afford to finish her five-year program for a bachelor of fine arts degree. With tuition increasing \$700 this fall, she said, she will have enough money for only one more year of college and will drop out in the spring, work full-time and finish her degree part-time over the next few years.

Meanwhile, she may profit from her privation. She has reduced her food budget to \$40 a month by eating a lot of rice and making her own bread and pasta -- a regimen she is detailing in a cookbook for students that she plans to call "How to Survive on Literally Nothing."

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