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from the August 11, 2003 edition



SUN DEVIL: Senior Caleb Alvarado of Phoenix is the first male member of his family to go to college. A tuition hike prompted a friend to drop out. **DAVE CRUZ/SPECIAL TO THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR**

Tuitions up steeply nationwide
The increases at flagship universities could be the largest in 30 years.
By [Mark Clayton](#) | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

BOSTON – After graduating from a high school near Phoenix, Caleb Alvarado decided not to get a full-time job like many of his friends, but to become instead the first male member of his family to go to college.

By living at home, working 20 hours a week, and taking out a pile of student loans, he could afford to enroll at Arizona State University, rated the nation's lowest-tuition four-year public flagship, at \$2,583 last year.

But the tuition tide is changing. Mr. Alvarado, now a senior, is not so sure he could afford to be a freshman at ASU today. A 39-percent tuition increase this fall will add \$1,010 to the price of school - and to the \$25,000 in student loans he expects to owe when he graduates. One of his friends recently dropped out because of the tuition hike.

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Across the nation, students and parents are bracing for broad tuition increases that, at flagship universities, could be the largest in 30 years.

The result, experts worry, may be to price many low-income students out of college, departing from America's post-1945 view of public higher education as a key tool for promoting social equality and a broader middle-class.

The shift comes, moreover, at a time when education is an increasingly important ticket to good jobs.

"This is a potential crisis in the making in terms of having higher education opportunity available to those who need it the most: racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation students," says Travis Reindl, director of state policy at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, which represents 425 public four-year institutions.

The trend of tuition hikes runs nationwide. The State University of New York (SUNY) system has approved tuition of \$4,350, up 28 percent over last year. Some students marched across the state in protest. Oklahoma State University is expecting a 24 percent hike.

In fact, public universities were planning tuition increases in all 38 states that responded to a recent survey by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. Double-digit rises are common, with at least 10 universities planning increases of 20 percent or more.

"For the large public flagship institutions nationwide ... these increases could be as large as any we've seen since 1973," says David Wright, a senior researcher at the State Higher Education Executive Officers, based in Denver.

A key reason for the tuition tsunami: Budget cuts by cash-strapped states. Their 1990s largess toward public higher education has already been slowing, and for the fiscal year 2003-04 their support for universities is poised to fall by 2 to 3 percent, experts say.

University systems are raising tuition to help fill the gap.

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They are also trying to boost financial aid, but rising costs will nonetheless squeeze many families.

Already, the average yearly cost to attend a four-year public institution is 60 percent of the annual income of a family in the bottom economic fifth of Americans, according to the College Board. Student financial aid has grown, but in the form of loans, not grants. That makes college risky in the view of many first-generation students and their families. They don't want debts they can't pay if they fall short of a college degree.

Yet, with two-thirds of high school graduates saying they intend to go to college, higher education has changed from an optional path for the elite prior to World War II to a required ticket to the middle class today. Some worry that the tuition leaps will block the most needy students from going to college at exactly the wrong time.

"We're going to have the biggest high school graduating class in 2009 the nation has seen, bigger than the baby boomers," says Patrick Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in San Jose, Calif. "And what are we doing? We're reducing college funding and making it harder to afford."

If Hispanics and other burgeoning minority populations start to believe that getting a high school degree is a waste of time because they can't afford a public four-year college anyway, it may even boomerang and undermine K-12 school reform, he and others say. "We're trying to promote achievement for all children in K-12, and at same time we're now slamming the door on higher education," says David Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. "What if the 'No Child Left Behind' program succeeds. What will we tell all those city kids who want to go to college but can't afford it?"

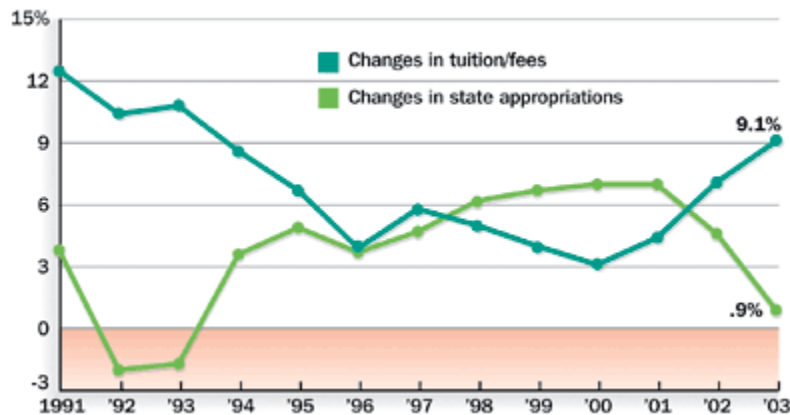
Though Arizona State University's tuition jump is among the highest percentage increases in the country, the school has plenty of company. Iowa State University is raising tuition 22 percent to \$5,028. And Kansas State University is pushing its tuition up nearly 18 percent.

In California, where Sacramento is whacking \$410 million from its higher education budget, a 30 percent tuition hike is planned for the University of California and California State systems. Colorado chopped 26 percent off its higher education budget and is hiking tuition 9.5 percent.

A number of tuition increases have no apparent tie to

state cuts. Some state university officials seem to figure that when others are raising tuitions, they had better do so, too, Mr. Callan says. Some see it as an education "arms race," as schools vie to offer ever-increasing quality.

In Arizona, legislators left higher ed funding about the same as last year. But university officials argued a big tuition hike was needed. "This is a powerful, powerful enhancement of our academic quality" ASU President Michael Crow said after the increase was approved in March. The increase will pay for higher faculty salaries, better library access, and technology. There would be a hefty increase in student aid, he noted. Many students grudgingly accepted the increase, but some protested.



TUITION RISES AS STATE SPENDING SLOWS: Costs for resident undergraduates at public universities have been rising at an accelerating pace. A key reason: Budget-strapped states have been less willing to chip in. ADAM WEISKIND - STAFF SOURCE: THE COLLEGE BOARD, 'TRENDS IN PRICING 2002'



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