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Students Face Another Year of Big Tuition Increases in Many States

By MICHAEL ARNONE

Come fall, more students at public colleges will face sticker shock than ever before.

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Still struggling with flat economies, huge budget deficits, and ballooning college enrollments, many states significantly raised the cost of attending public colleges for the 2003-4

academic year. Double-digit percentage increases in tuition for the second straight year, by the largest margins ever at some institutions, were common across the country.

The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges found in a survey conducted last month that more than 25 state colleges or university systems -- over one-third of the respondents -- increased their tuition by between 10 percent and 20 percent. In addition, five raised tuition by 20 percent or more, four by 25 percent or more, and another four by 30 percent or more.

Some of those percentage increases were stunning: 25 percent at the City University of New York system; 30 percent at the University of California system; and 39.2 percent at Northern Arizona University, the highest of the 75 respondents.

The tuition increases this year, not adjusted for inflation, are as large as any during the past three decades, and are showing up in more states, says David L. Wright, a senior research analyst with State Higher Education Executive Officers, an association of state officials at higher-education governing and coordinating boards.

California, with the largest public-college system in the country, was hit especially hard. The tuition increases for

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this fall come on top of midyear tuition bumps, approved last December, that took effect at the University of California and California State University systems in the spring.

Such big increases could spell disaster for higher education in some states. Robert L. Moore, executive director of the California Postsecondary Education Commission, says that a 60-percent increase in tuition at the state's 108 community colleges raised rates to \$18 a credit hour, from \$11 an hour, and could reduce the number of community-college students by 100,000. The University of California and Cal State systems will not even admit students or allow transfer students at some campuses in the spring, in an effort to keep costs down.

In some of the hardest-hit states, such as Virginia, the increases are making up for the late 1990s, when tuition was frozen during the economic boom. Indeed, in California, the increase marked the first time either system raised rates since 1994-95, and tuition had even been cut at one point since then. In other states, such as Arizona, the increases mark an acknowledgment that the state can no longer keep tuition artificially low. The increases are also occurring in a different economic landscape from previous recessions, when tuition normally goes up. State governments and colleges are using new tactics to adapt to the new conditions, including midyear tuition increases and charging new students more than continuing ones.

The news is not all bad. More than 20 institutions or systems increased their tuition by 10 percent or less, and at least 10 others by 5 percent or less. One state, Mississippi, did not raise 2003-4 tuition for its four-year institutions at all.

And while large percentage increases may seem scary, "students don't pay a percentage, they pay a dollar amount," points out Gregory S. Nichols, executive director of the Iowa Board of Regents. He says it is hard to tell how much a percentage increase prevents colleges from "getting people to their door in the first place. I know that for those who decide to go, the dollar amount matters."

Big differences in percentage increases can represent the same dollar amount in different states. For instance, the University of Arizona is increasing tuition for 2003-4 by 38.4 percent, or \$1,000. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst is also raising tuition by \$1,000 this year, but that is only a 15.4-percent increase

there. What's more, many of the largest increases are in traditionally low-tuition states, including Arizona and California. Even with their new rates, many of those states are still charging close to last year's national average for in-state undergraduate tuition at public colleges, which was \$4,081, according to the College Board.

Despite the anxiety about rising tuition, higher education in several states remains essentially free for many students, especially those who are middle class. Merit-based scholarships in Florida, Georgia, New Mexico, and other states pick up most or all of the tab for reasonably-high-performing students, many of whom come from school districts in relatively affluent areas.

Even so, "There's a pretty pronounced shift of funding of higher education from the state to the student or family," says Will Doyle, a senior policy analyst with the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. "At a time when people can least afford these kinds of increases, they are being asked to shoulder greater responsibility."

New Tactics

Under pressure, states are developing innovative ways of charging higher tuition. For example, public institutions in six states -- California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Oregon, and Virginia -- took the unprecedented step last January of raising tuition in the middle of the academic year. The amounts varied, from 13 percent at the University of Oregon to 4.6 percent at the University of Connecticut.

As states drafted their budgets for 2003-4, a popular strategy was to charge new students more than returning students. For example, tuition for 2003-4 at Indiana University is going up 4 percent from the 2002-3 level for returning students, to \$5,517. New students, though, will pay 22.6 percent more, or \$6,517.

Because raising tuition is political poison, some states have crafted ingenious antidotes. In Illinois, Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich, a Democrat, signed a new "truth in tuition" law last month. Scheduled to take effect in the 2004-5 academic year, the law guarantees that tuition will not rise between students' freshman year and graduation, locking it in for four consecutive years, or for five years in those majors that require extra courses.

"From a legislative standpoint, it will make families happy and students happy because they will know what they'll

be paying," says Cheryl Fields, director of public affairs for the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. She adds, though, "It's not a great policy unless you're going to tell institutions, 'You're not going to receive budget cuts.'" The Illinois state legislature cut higher-education appropriations for 2003-4 by 7.7 percent, or \$108.2-million.

Some states capped the amount that their public institutions could raise tuition, and established certain conditions before giving the colleges state funds. In New Jersey, colleges will get an additional \$48-million from the state only if they do not increase their tuition by more than 9 percent. (Each institution in New Jersey sets its own tuition rates.) And they can't make students pay increased fees instead of tuition.

In some states, the legislatures set tuition. For both philosophical and financial reasons, however, some state governments are getting out of the business of setting tuition altogether. The Texas Legislature voted in June to give the state's Board of Regents free rein to increase tuition. Although the change will take effect in September 2003, no tuition increases are planned for the fall, college officials say. But with a slumping economy and growing enrollment, higher prices might not be far off. Some legislators and student representatives say they expect a 50-percent increase in tuition over the next two years at many public colleges in Texas.

A Lag in the Recovery

Since the 1980-81 academic year, tuition increases have been cyclical, usually appearing the year after a recession, according to annual tuition surveys done by the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board.

"A lot of state universities are thinking, all we have to do is weather this short-term storm," says Thomas J. Kane, a professor of public policy at the University of California at Los Angeles and an expert on college tuition.

But the tuition tempest may continue longer than optimistic officials think. After the 1981-83 recession, Mr. Kane says, many cuts in state funds to higher education -- which led to tuition increases -- were restored as the economy recovered during the mid-1980s. Recovery from the 1991-94 recession, however, carried over until 1999.

There's no telling when recovery from this recession will come, he says. "I'd fear that many of these cuts are

semi-permanent, ratcheting down support for higher education." Given those factors, he says, "tuition increases are inevitable in the future and we need to be planning for how to minimize the impact on families and students."

Without such planning, Mr. Doyle says, "We're faced with the prospect of rationing access to public education."

LESS FROM STATES, MORE FROM STUDENTS

Dwindling state appropriations have forced many public colleges to make double-digit percentage increases in tuition and required fees for 2003-4, on top of similar increases they enacted last year. Here are some of the largest increases for 2003-4:

	2003-4 tuition and fees	Percentage increase over 2002-3	Dollar increase over 2002-3
Northern Arizona U.	\$3,596	39.2%	\$1,012
U. of Arizona	\$3,593	38.6%	\$1,000
U. of California system	\$5,437	29.5%	\$1,239
State U. of New York System	\$4,350	27.9%	\$950
U. of Oklahoma	\$3,741	27.7%	\$812
Texas Tech U.	\$4,745	22.7%	\$878
Indiana U.*	\$6,517	22.6%	\$1,202
Iowa State U.	\$5,028	22.3%	\$918
Indiana U.-Purdue U. at Indianapolis*	\$5,703	21.0%	\$989
U. of Virginia	\$6,149	19.1%	\$984
U. of Massachusetts at Amherst	\$7,482	15.4%	\$1,000
U. of Maryland at College Park	\$6,759	14.6%	\$861
Ohio State U.*	\$6,474	14.3%	\$810
Michigan Technological U.	\$7,440	12.9%	\$849

NOTE: Rates apply only for new students.

SOURCE: National Association of State Universities and
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