

## **Tuition to Spike at N.J. Colleges and Universities**

By Ana M. Alaya

Star Ledger

August 5, 2008

In a year of skyrocketing fuel prices and state budget cuts, the state's colleges and universities will raise tuition between 3.9 percent and 9 percent in the academic year that begins in September, according to a survey by The Star-Ledger.

Undergraduates will pay a range of tuition from \$5,988 annually at Kean University in Union Township to \$35,910 at Drew University in Madison, according to the survey of two dozen public and private institutions.

Charges for housing, food and mandatory student fees for everything from computer services to student government operations to health care, and other costs will add thousands more to final bills.

Many college leaders said the tuition hikes were necessary because of an ongoing lack of funding for facilities from the state and Gov. Jon Corzine's budget cuts to colleges and universities. Officials said they will be forced to freeze hundreds of faculty positions, slash library hours and scrap research trips.

The impact of the governor's proposed 3.5 percent cut in college aid, reducing it to \$2 billion, is compounded by cuts to higher education in five of the past 10 years. According to the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities, the recent spate of cuts over the past three years are the most severe in modern American history.

"Unfortunately for us in New Jersey, higher education has been a target for a long time," said New Jersey City University President Carlos Hernandez.

The \$3.4 million cut to NJCU's operating budget resulted in a 7 percent increase in tuition for this fall; 35 percent cuts to tech support for computer labs; unspecified reductions in library services, and delays in filling two dozen faculty and staff vacancies.

The Star-Ledger survey included four-year colleges with traditional two-semester formats. The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Thomas Edison State College and the state's for-profit colleges were excluded, because they have tiered tuition plans or unusual semester structures that make it difficult to compare tuition rates.

Nationwide, college tuition continues to increase faster than inflation, with prices up 31 percent this academic year over five years ago, according to the College Board. Meanwhile, many of the federal student grants and loans have increased only marginally or have decreased, when adjusted for inflation, forcing many students to turn to eye-popping federal, state or private loans to attend college.

Colleges have been increasing the amount of financial aid they dole out, however, particularly to needy students but increasingly to middle-class ones.

At Drew University, the most expensive college in New Jersey, for example, 90 percent of students don't pay the full "sticker price." The average student pays about half the advertised tuition after

receiving institutional aid, and for many that figure is further reduced by state and federal financial assistance.

"The sticker price is a budgeting tool and represents our costs to provide the education" said David Muha, a spokesman for Drew. "But through scholarship and use of the endowment and other sources, we can provide grants to bring that cost down and make it affordable."

In fact, elite colleges across the country have been under pressure by Congress to spend more of their endowments to alleviate costs for students, and Harvard, Yale and Princeton were among a number of institutions that announced increases in financial aid in recent years.

At Princeton, where the standard cost for 2008-09 -- including tuition, room, board, fees, books and other expenses -- will be \$49,190, a little over half of incoming freshman are on financial aid. The average institutional grant ranges from \$45,800 for students whose family earn up to \$75,000 annually, to \$16,000 for students whose family yearly income is \$200,000 or more.

New Jersey's average private college tuition is the 13th highest in the nation, according to the College Board, while the state's four-year public colleges are the second costliest in the country. At Rutgers, the state's flagship university, the total cost for a New Jersey resident who lives on campus will be \$21,482.

Rutgers President Richard McCormick said a 10.8 percent cut in state aid -- \$35 million -- will also force the university to cut back on faculty hires, staffing and building repairs.

At the New Jersey Institute of Technology, the most expensive public institution of higher education in the state, Baker Assaf, 22, of Paterson, said the strain of state budget cuts means fewer available classes -- in fact, a class he hoped to enroll in this fall has been canceled. Assaf, a member of Reach Higher NJ, a recently formed student group fighting for more state funding.

"Higher education is an investment," Assaf said. "Students who graduate from colleges and universities are more likely to settle and work in the very state where they went to college."

Rowan University was able to limit its increase in tuition to 7.25 percent, the lowest hike in a dozen years, by finding new revenue sources, including a partnership with Barnes & Noble on campus.

But Rowan President Donald Farish is not optimistic about the statewide picture.

"The state is clearly in a fiscal crisis and has been for a number of years," Farish said. "It is incumbent on us to continue to reduce costs, but we cannot do so at the expense of lowering the quality of our students' educational experience."