

California's public universities start new round of tuition hikes

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Students in California's public universities are bracing for another round of sharp hikes in tuition and fees. The series of increases is placing a decent college education increasingly out of reach for many of the state's residents.

On Wednesday, the California State University Board of Trustees voted to approve a plan that will raise tuition for undergraduate, graduate and credential programs by 5 percent in January 2011 and another 10 percent the following fall. Total tuition costs for undergraduates will rise during this period from \$4,230 to \$4,884 per year.

The state's other major public university system, the University of California (UC) system, will vote on an 8 percent tuition increase next week. This would raise UC tuition by about \$822 per year for most students, to a yearly average of \$12,150.

As part of the attack on teachers and staff, the board of regents will also vote in December to impose a two-tier pension system. The minimum retirement age for new teachers and staff hired after June 30, 2013 would rise from 60 to 65.

Tuition in the UC system has increased 32 percent in the past year alone, prompting massive student protests in March. Tuition in the CSU system has increased by 33 percent. Both institutions have imposed enrollment cuts along with employee furloughs, decreased course offerings and layoffs.

The California public university system was once the envy of the world in terms of quality and affordability. As early as the 1970s, academically-qualified students were able to attend both the UC and CSU systems free of charge under the state's Master Plan for Education.

However, between 2001 and 2010, full time undergraduate tuition rose at CSU from \$1,428 to \$4,335 per year, an increase of over 300 percent. Four

tuition hikes were passed at CSU within the past two years alone.

Students must also pay various campus-based fees, as well as all the costs included with student living, such as room and board and transportation. Sonoma State University, part of the CSU system, has a total annual cost ranging from \$15,948 (for students living with their parents) to \$23,712 (for students living on their own, off campus).

Students at UC Berkeley, the UC system's most expensive school, already pay total costs (including room and board) of more than \$31,000 a year, and over \$54,000 for out-of-state students. In comparison, the 2009 median household income in California was \$56,134 per year.

At the same time, financial aid has become very difficult to obtain. At UC Santa Barbara, the financial aid office was so understaffed this past semester that they were forced to close their office during business hours to catch up with work.

The hikes openly flout the "Master Plan," which is still legally in effect. To get around legal requirements, institutions have avoided labeling the skyrocketing costs as "tuition," instead using the term "fees." The use of the euphemism seems to be no longer politically tenable, however, with both the UC and CSU systems now reversing the terminological classification.

Soaring tuition is part of moves aimed at undermining the public education system. Plans are already underway to privatize sections of the universities, including the University of California Los Angeles Business School.

Both the CSU and UC system have also begun denying entrance to tens of thousands of qualified students. Those who are still fortunate enough to attend graduate with immense debt loads. (See, "The

American student loan racket”)

The CSU board of trustees has claimed that the tuition hikes will be used to increase course offerings and university services. The state’s budget passed in October, however, restores only a portion of the hundreds of millions taken from the universities in previous years. The universities will still operate at a net decrease in funding even with the increased costs that students will have to bear.

The attack on public university education is part of an overall attack on social funding at the state and national level, carried out by both the Democrats and Republicans. The political representatives of big business have rejected any increases on tax cuts for corporations or the wealthy.

In response to California’s ongoing fiscal crisis, Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Democrats who control the state legislature have repeatedly cut spending for public education, social programs, and state employees’ wages, pensions and benefits.

The newly-elected Californian governor, Democrat Jerry Brown, ran his campaign promising even harsher austerity measures than his Republican opponent, Meg Whitman. Brown will undoubtedly make good on his promises in his proposed state budget, which will be released this December.



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