

Drastic cuts, tuition increases loom for Washington state universities

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Washington state Governor Christine Gregoire, a Democrat, in January proposed a 2011-2013 budget calling for more than \$630 million in cuts to higher education. Every aspect of the university system will be affected, including tuition, enrollment, programs and staffing.

In a letter to state legislators, Phyllis M. Wise, interim president of the University of Washington (UW), detailed the consequences of the new budget. UW is the largest university in the state system.

According to Wise, Governor Gregoire's current proposal would increase in-state tuition for the University of Washington from \$8,698 per year to \$9,638 in 2012 and \$10,688 in 2013, a rise of 10.8 percent each year. Even these hikes, however, will not prevent a further erosion of the quality of education at UW, as Wise maintains that a 20.5 percent yearly tuition increase is necessary to fully make up for the new reductions in funding.

Wise explains that the reductions proposed by the governor are equivalent to eliminating the core education budgets for the UW College of Arts and Sciences, which generates 50 percent of the degrees at the UW, or both the campuses in Bothell and Tacoma plus an additional \$45-100 million of programs at the Seattle campus.

In her letter, Wise notes the proposed cuts come on the heels of two years of steep reductions in funding. In 2009-2011, the university lost over \$132 million in state funding. Even with two tuition rate increases of 14 percent each, \$57 million more was needed to balance the core education budget. She points out that 2010 was the first year that students paid more for tuition than what the state provided in financial support. Under Grigoire's proposed budget, this gap would increase further, with students paying 65 percent of total

revenue and the state's support declining to 35 percent.

The 2009-2011 cuts included the elimination of 950 jobs, 12 degree programs, 384 undergraduate lecture sessions and 130 small group sessions; an increase in adviser load by 180 students per adviser; a decrease in the number of lab sections by 20 percent; the closure of four writing/tutoring centers and two computer labs; the closure of one library; reduced hours on existing libraries and the cancellation of subscriptions to over 1,200 journals.

Wise's recent letter to the legislature warns that the future could be even bleaker than that laid out by Gregorie, depending on state revenue forecasts. She notes that a 115 percent reduction in funding for UW would require a yearly 25.2 percent tuition increase, and a 130 percent reduction would require a 29.8 percent increase.

In justifying her massive assault on higher education funding, Governor Gregoire has claimed that student financial aid "will rise" to help needy students. However, residents have little cause to believe her, particularly given that in December 2020 she proposed to delay payment of \$76 million to the State Need Grant (SNG), which helps low-income students. Last year 7,000 undergraduates received aid from the State Need Grant.

According to the February 7 issue of the UW student paper the *Daily*, the "Washington Senate Ways and Means committee proposed a \$25 million cut from the grant's funds last Wednesday to make up for a current state biennial budget deficit of about \$500 million that needs to be settled by July 1, the start of the 2011-13 biennium."

The governor's proposed budget also takes aim at small scholarship programs such as Washington Scholars and the Health Professionals conditional

scholarship. In addition, she proposes a reduction in the State Work Study Program, which serves 2,800 needy students.

According to Jake Faleschini, president of the UW's Graduate and Professional Student Senate, an average undergraduate leaves school with \$15,000 in debt, but most students carry an extra \$50,000 in loans. Students in professional programs such as the UW School of Law face \$100,000 in debt.

With the axing of these scholarship programs and reductions in financial aid, which the Obama administration is also cutting at the federal level, students will be forced to accrue ever-greater amounts of debt to finance their college education, or simply go without.



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