

Tuition rises in Washington state

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7 November 2012

It is now as expensive to attend a two-year school as it was to attend Washington State's flagship public university last decade. According to a recent Associated Press article, tuition at two-year colleges has gone up so much that students now pay as much tuition as University of Washington students paid just over 10 years ago. Meanwhile, budget cuts are forcing tuition and fees at the state's public universities to increase dramatically while tuition assistance falls away.

The latest budget cuts 19 percent of state funding to higher education. In order to offset these cuts, the state authorized public institutions to increase tuition between 7 and 11 percent. In addition to increased tuition, community college faculty pay increases are suspended, the work study program for needy students is reduced and institutions will be forced to raise class sizes, reduce course offerings, cut faculty, and provide fewer services to students to make up for reduced funding. As a result, students find it more difficult to get the classes they need for their degrees and find themselves taking out more student loans.

Full-time students (15 credits) in the state's community colleges pay \$1,400 for one quarter of instruction, or \$4,200 per year, not including special course fees, books and living expenses. That is up from \$1,180 per quarter or \$3,540 per year last year. Tuitions continue to rise at all of Washington's higher-education institutions. This year, the University of Washington raised its in-state undergraduate rate a staggering 16 percent to \$12,401 per year.

While the state government, under Democratic Party governor Christine Gregoire and a Democratic-controlled legislature, places its cuts from higher education spending directly on students from working families, students are being forced to take on ever-increasing amounts of debt to receive a basic education.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several students at Lower Columbia College (LCC) in

Longview, Washington.

Justin arrived at LCC already carrying \$10,000 dollars in student debt from two years at Washington State University. "I came back here because it was very expensive to attend the University. I needed to catch up on a few courses, so I decided to go here for a year while living at home to save costs." Despite receiving a federal Pell grant, Justin will still borrow more than \$2,100 this school year to pay tuition and buy books.

Student Kevin Davis has a fund set up by his grandparents to pay for his tuition, but it is draining alarmingly fast even after his first quarter at LCC. "I'm not sure if I'll be able to finish my degree on it, especially if I have to repeat a class." His friend Denielle added that because of fee increases and cuts to financial aid, she will have to pay extra out-of-pocket this year despite being covered completely last year.

Krysta Mayo says it will cost almost \$2,000 to go to LCC this year. "It's hard to keep classes around a work schedule. Books and software that are needed for classes and homework are expensive. My first quarter, I didn't get my financial aid check for a month and a half. I wasn't able to buy books or do my online math homework until it came." Tuition has gone up dramatically since Krysta started. She says she paid \$50 per credit when she started. Tuition is now \$100 per credit.

Key classes are hard to get into. Bursar Giles revealed that seats for Math and English courses required for LCC students are always full to capacity.

Cuts in education are occurring across the board. K-12 education remains underfunded in the face of the Supreme Court ruling at the beginning of the year that the state is failing to meet its constitutional obligation to ensure education is adequately funded to all the state's children. The constitution states, "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its

borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.” The state has responded by placing a referendum for publicly funded charter schools on the ballot.

Ballot measure 1240 is the fourth attempt to allow the establishment of publicly supported charter schools in the state. Each previous attempt, the last one in 2004, has been rejected by voters. Earlier this year, the legislature proposed several bills with bipartisan support in response to the Supreme Court’s ruling. The bills would have bypassed a public vote to impose charter schools by legislative fiat as well as severely restricting teachers’ rights, such as allowing their firing and employment of “noncertificated instructional staff” (see “Washington state schools, teachers under fire“).

The next two-year budget, set to be worked out next year, will likely include further cuts to education, both at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, as well as cuts to other vital state services.

Meanwhile, large corporations based in the state, such as Boeing and Microsoft, have secured substantial tax cuts from the legislature. An October 3 article in the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the World Trade Organization found last year “that Boeing had received billions of dollars in illegal subsidies, mainly in the form of tax breaks from Washington State, where Boeing’s main manufacturing facilities are located.”

The problems in Washington are by no means restricted to the state. Tuition everywhere is rising, and the student debt bubble in the United States is likely to trigger another crisis. Student loans have passed \$1,000,000,000. That is 10 raised to the ninth power, or \$1 trillion.

Nor is the crisis in higher education just a national one. Earlier this year, Québec students demonstrated against rising tuition. UK students recently protested a tripling of tuition.



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