

Wayne State students in Detroit face 8.9 percent tuition increase

Usman Clemens
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Students returning to Wayne State University in Detroit for the 2013-2014 school year face a massive tuition hike, an 8.9 percent increase, or approximately a \$900 hike in tuition, for full-time resident undergraduate students taking 30 credit hours. This significantly surpasses tuition rises at other public universities in the state such as Oakland University, with a 3.4 percent increase and University of Michigan, with a 3.5 percent increase.

The tuition proposal, which the WSU Board of Governors approved last week in a 5-2 vote, is part of a continuing assault on the right to university education. In his first budget after being elected in 2010, Michigan's Republican Governor Rick Snyder cut higher education funding by 15 percent in order to pay for a big business tax cut.

As a result, and despite a return of some of the funding, Wayne State's allocation of funding from the state is equivalent to what the university received in 1991. In effect, the cut amounts to a loss in virtually two decades worth of funding increases.

As a consequence, WSU has cut its budget by \$50 million in the last three years and \$19 million in the last year. At present, Michigan spends more on its prisons than it does on its colleges and universities.

Debbie Dingell, chair of the Wayne State Board of Governors, declared in a press release announcing the tuition hike, "The state has decided higher education is not a high priority. We have to face the limitations of our basic funding source – student tuition."

The situation is exacerbated by state rules, which set a 3.75 percent limit on the amount that WSU can increase its tuition. The result of exceeding this limit is a loss in about \$500,000 in state funding. This will inevitably be used as an excuse for further tuition increases in upcoming semesters.

The increase will bring tuition revenue to \$348 million, which is a \$14 million increase from last year. At the same time, enrollment is projected to fall by two percent for the upcoming school year.

WSU tuition rates have risen sharply over the past 5 years as the state has cut funding. A comparison of tuition rates in the 2008-2009 school year to the upcoming 2013-2014 school year reveals a rise of approximately \$3,000 dollars for students taking 30 credit hours.

Tuition increases will hit particularly hard in the Detroit metro area, since Wayne State has traditionally served as a destination for students who can't afford the higher tuition charged at University of Michigan and Michigan State. Many WSU students work full time in order to help pay the cost of college. At present some 80 percent of WSU students receive some type of financial aid.

The impact of rising tuition has been compounded by the attacks on grants, scholarships and financial aid by the ruling elite. The Obama administration's 2011 cuts of billions of dollars in the Pell Grant program for lower income families, combined with millions of dollars in cuts to the Michigan Promise Scholarship by former Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm, have made it even more difficult for students and workers to get an education. This is driving students to take even further loans inflating the already over \$1 trillion student loan bubble.

Parallel to the attack on education is the attack on those who educate. Last year the Wayne State administration attacked the tenure protection of professors at the university. At the time, WSU President Allan Gilmour used the expiration of the faculty's three-year contract to demand provisions in their new contract allowing for termination for "just

cause.” Gilmour stated that he wanted negotiations with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to address “flexibility” and “accountability.” The AAUP ultimately agreed to a concession-laden eight-year contract.

While demanding that students and educators sacrifice, Gilmour, a former auto executive, took in \$400,000 in compensation in 2011.

The assault on higher education is occurring against the backdrop of the loss of millions of decent-paying jobs since the 2007-2008 financial crisis and their replacement with primarily service-sector jobs. Many young people have tried to remedy their personal situations by enrolling in college, with the hopes that a degree will help them find better jobs. However, because of the rapidly increasing costs of attending a university, along with ever decreasing wages, many are driven to take massive loans in order to finance their educations.

Students who are currently faced with dire situations will have little prospects once they leave school. Official youth unemployment in the US is 16.2 percent—or more than twice the official rate for the population as a whole. However, the reality of the situation is that many millions more have stopped looking for work altogether, resulting in a real unemployment rate of 22.9 percent.



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