

Pennsylvania budget starves higher education

Douglas Lyons
7 November 2013

Layoffs of faculty and staff, this year and next, axed educational programs, increased tuition, and newly initiated revenue-making schemes are all in store at Pennsylvania's schools of higher education after a new round of budget cuts and falling enrollment.

Pennsylvania schools of higher education have seen their budget reduced in each of the past three years by Republican Governor Tom Corbett. State funding for 14 state-owned schools was cut 20 percent in the 2011-12 school year and has remained at that reduced level since. Funding for the state schools is now at the same level as they received in 1997.

The Corbett administration has responded to requests that the cuts be restored by pointing to the \$700 million deficit the state faces and has hinted that even greater cuts may be coming.

The cuts will lead to layoffs, tuition hikes, and a rollback in quality and scope of educational opportunities. “[W]hen you combine \$90 million in reductions, a loss of \$170 million in general funding over the past two years, losing half of our capital allocation funds and \$7 million in deferred maintenance—all that combined leaves a significant impact on universities and students,” said Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) spokesperson Kenn Marshall.

Dr. Steve Hicks, president of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty (APSCUF), warned, “Additional budget cuts are going to put the college dream out of reach for many Pennsylvanians.”

Along with the latest funding cuts, Corbett has announced the formation of a panel that will analyze and dictate higher education policies based on costs. Rob Wonderling, a former Republican-state senator and head of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, will lead the 30-person panel and report findings to the governor by mid-November.

Almost every state school of higher education has already warned of faculty layoffs this year and next, the elimination of programs, and increased tuition.

Located in rural north-central Pennsylvania, Mansfield University has plans to terminate 54 jobs, of which 29 are full-time faculty, representing about 20 percent of the school's tenured and tenure-track faculty. Mansfield's forecasted budget shortfall over the next two years is currently \$14.3 million, with state funding 14 percent less than in 2008.

Edinboro University, situated near Lake Erie, plans to eviscerate liberal arts courses, including German, music, music education, philosophy and world languages and culture. Forty faculty positions will be eliminated in 2014, along with 13 management and staff positions this year. New revenue-raising schemes will eventually begin, such as charging students for psychological and counseling services and charging non-students transient leases in residence halls.

On Wednesday, East Stroudsburg University announced the elimination of 15 tenure and tenure-track faculty positions and the phasing out of its degree programs in music, French, and German.

This year the state system's board of governors has raised tuition by 3 percent, or \$194, at state universities. Spokesman Kenn Marshall said that the increases in tuition will generate \$27 million. For students, the 3 percent increase translates into \$1,552 extra for a four-year degree. On average American college graduates leave school with \$35,200 in college-related debt when factoring in room and board, schoolbooks and supplies, and basic sustenance and necessities, according to a survey conducted by Fidelity. The board of governors is also imposing a new technology fee at an annual cost of \$368 for students.

Temple University, which is partially supported by the state of Pennsylvania, has raised tuition and fees 3.6 percent. Room rates for students will increase 3.1

percent, and food plans will go up 2.6 percent. In-state students will pay \$14,096 annually and \$9,440 in room and board for a standard plan.

Frank T. Brogan, who became the state system chancellor on October 1 after holding a similar position in Florida—he was also Lieutenant Governor of Florida under Jeb Bush— has indicated that the liberal arts can expect major cuts. Brogan, who is paid nearly \$330,000 annually, has said it is time to “retool” and that this will mean “a different complement of faculty.”

The shift toward technical and career training at the expense of liberal arts in PASSHE schools began with the economic crisis of 2007. This has registered most clearly in the sharp decline in the number of students preparing to become public school teachers. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (so-called STEM fields) now account for the largest percentage of students’ majors with approximately 13.6 percent, followed by the business and health care fields at 13.1 and 10 percent respectively. Education, formerly the leading career path, is now forth at 9.3 percent.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact