

Tuition spikes tighten budget, endanger University studies

Reduction of federal and state funding cause for immediate financial concern

STEFAN VERBANO

NEWS REPORTER

The State Board of Higher Education unanimously approved a seven percent average summer tuition increase earlier this month for Oregon's seven public universities, citing flagging state support and universities' desires to align summer tuition with regular academic year rates.

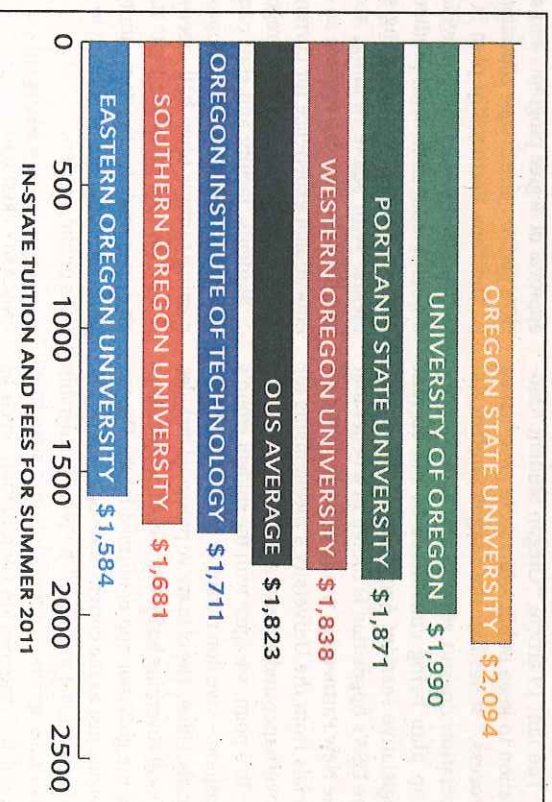
Twenty years ago, students enrolled at Oregon University System schools paid roughly 30 percent of the full cost of their education, while the state covered most of the resulting balance. The inverse is true today: students are now expected to cover more than 60 percent of their academic costs with less than one-third coming from governmental appropriations. Federal and state support has dropped even more dramatically in recent years — in this

biennium alone, OUS's budget has been cut twice — and has, as a result, left schools like the University struggling to manage their growing annual operating budget with the fraction that annual state support affords.

This paradigm caused the University to increase regular academic year tuition by roughly seven percent annually to offset declining funds from Salem, a compensatory measure that has started to affect summer tuition rates. For the 2010-11 fiscal year, federal and state allocations dropped to \$61.9 million, accounting for less than nine percent of the University's \$700 million annual operating budget.

Historically, summer prices have been significantly lower than those during the regular academic year, but individual OUS campuses are now shoring up fall, winter and spring tuition by increasing costs during summer

TUITION
CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



NATE MARUCH DESIGN EDITOR

TUITION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

months. An Oregon resident undergraduate hoping to take 12 credits at the University this summer will pay \$1,990 in tuition and fees — a 4.3 percent increase from last summer. A nonresident undergraduate in a similar situation will pay \$2,854, 16.6 percent more than last summer. Comparatively, the tuition increase from summer 2009-10 increased 10.4 percent and 7.9 percent for residents and nonresidents, respectively.

To make the financial situation worse, the state legislature has also denied OUS's request to avail a \$20 million expenditure limitation — essentially a request to spend excess funds — stemming from an enrollment rate last fall that exceeded the state's early estimates. The petition to use the extra tuition money pocketed on OUS campuses at the beginning of the school year had to be approved by the Legislative Emergency Board, an appendage of the state's Budget and Management Division.

"We ha(d) to go back to the Legislative Emergency Board and ask for permission to spend that money on students for their instruction and support, to avoid cutting classes and services due to the budget cuts," OUS spokesperson Diane Saunders said. "We were denied that request in mid-December; legislators said they would consider it again during the 2011 session."

Saunders also said that although tuition increases can potentially bereave students of the privilege of education, the snowballing costs are necessary to ensure classes and course sections are available to students so they can graduate in four years.

"There is an understanding by the campuses and the board that any tuition increases can be a financial challenge for students," Saunders said. "Until the level of state funding rebalances the state-student percentage of covering the full cost of an education, tuition increases will likely continue so that students can be assured that they

are getting a quality education for what they are paying."

ASUO President Amelie Rousseau doesn't oppose bringing summer tuition rates closer to those for the rest of the school year, but acknowledges that any increase will become an unbearable financial burden for the most cash-strapped students.

"I don't think that it is necessarily smart to have way cheaper classes during the summer," Rousseau said. "(However), any increase in tuition means students' access to classes is going to be compromised."

Enrolling in this upcoming summer term will become more cumbersome for students like University sophomore Moira Flanigan, who will have to take a smaller credit load in light of the tuition spike.

"I have no idea where I'm going to get the money," Flanigan said. "I will probably be restricted to a lower credit amount, which is unfortunate."

HIGHER EDUCATION
SVERBANO@DAILYEMERALD.COM