

PRICE OF EDUCATION

A small increase isn't out of line

A year ago, I ran on a policy of "fighting unreasonable tuition increases," and I intend to — but as I hope to show here, there's good reason to consider the notion that not all hikes are unreasonable. I hope to prove that a small, judicious tuition increase is worth consideration, given UNC-CH's situation, and might be an effective way to preserve affordability while pursuing excellence.

But how do we know that a tuition increase is judicious? To figure that out, we have to ask whether we can afford it and whether it's necessary.

By some indications, UNC-Chapel Hill is even more affordable than it was five years ago. Trustees were first authorized to use campus-based tuition increases in 2000. Since then, the average debt load among the students who borrowed anything at all actually dropped

MATT CALABRIA
STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT, UNC-CH

from \$13,700 to \$11,519 in 2003 — despite the national average's continual rise to about \$18,900. This is largely due to UNC-CH's need-based aid program, serving about one-third of its students.

The Carolina Covenant has strengthened efforts to keep Carolina affordable — and beginning next fall, it will pay the entire cost of a Carolina education (down to the books) for about one-tenth of our new students. That covers every family of four making less than \$37,000 a year.

A pricing study by the highly regarded Art & Science Group LLC concluded that UNC-CH can increase tuition without harming its applicant pool as long as it stays competitive with peer institutions. Average tuition at private and public universities increases by 9 percent per year and 12 percent per year, respectively. Statistically speaking, there is almost no chance that a small tuition increase would price undergraduates out of UNC-CH.

Keep in mind that tuition doesn't always reflect what families actually pay. In 2003, four-year public university students only ultimately absorbed 27 percent of the tuition sticker price after grants and tax breaks.

But we shouldn't raise tuition just because we can. "Needs" are sometimes subjective, but UNC-CH would make good use of additional funding. Tuition dollars would be put first toward faculty salaries. Since July 2001, more than half of the College of Arts and Sciences faculty members who received outside offers took them. Why? This year the average offer was 50 percent more than what we were paying them. A full professor at UNC-CH makes \$106,300 on average — that's \$6,500 less than at the University of Virginia, \$11,600 less than at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and almost \$17,000 less than at the University of California-Berkeley.

If you had trouble getting the classes you wanted, if you've seen the sometimes 30 or more students "sitting in" on a certain class, if you've observed that some departmental course listings contain classes not taught in years or if you've noticed that sometimes there aren't seats open in even introductory courses, you've already felt the effects. For departments to hold down class sizes as the state mandates larger student populations, UNC-CH will require more professorships that would be funded by a tuition increase.

In addition, teaching assistant stipends are significantly lower than those of our public peers. Increasing stipends would help attract graduate students and improve TA programs, which in turn help undergraduates.

As the Board of Trustees prepares to discuss tuition once again, it's important for students to consider both the price tag and the benefits of a potential tuition increase. It's our money and our education — and both of those are worth taking seriously.

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OFFICIALS DEBATE THE WORTH OF CAMPUS-BASED HIKES

Railing against a national "financial arms race" between colleges, UNC-system Board of Governors chairman Brad Wilson spoke out in December against campus-based tuition increases in a memo to his fellow board members.

By Jan. 31, the 16 UNC-system schools are likely to have come before the BOG with tuition increase proposals meant to fund their respective goals and fit their individual needs.

It's been argued that these increases are better for the schools and for the system because they ensure that the campuses have control over where the money goes. Some campus officials believe that campus-based increases give them more control over money, keeping the legislature from allocating tuition revenue as it so chooses.

But Wilson's recommendation against increases rings with an increasingly popular criticism of tuition hikes in the UNC system. The state constitution mandates in Article IX, Section 9 that "The General Assembly shall provide that

the benefits of The University of North Carolina and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense."

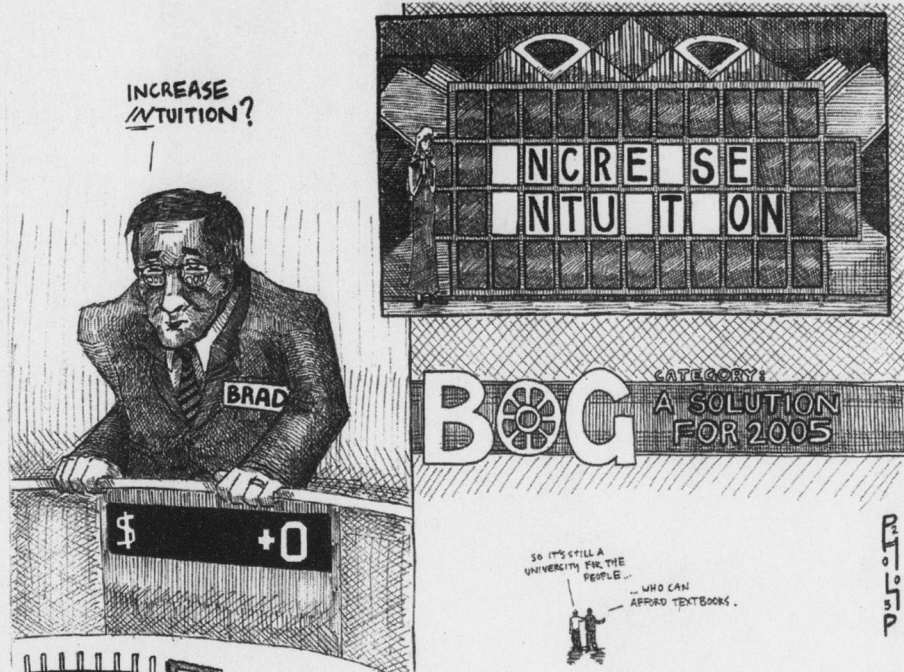
The Tuition Advisory Task Force at UNC-Chapel Hill released a report in November suggesting three possible campus-based increases, ranging from \$250 to \$350 for in-state students and from \$800 to \$1,200 for out-of-state students. Chancellor James Moeser is lobbying for an in-state hike of \$250 and an out-of-state increase of \$1,200 in order to raise \$9.25 million.

The needs that the task force presented are real following years of budget cuts, but the hikes of recent years are no less tangible. Campus trustees, the BOG and the legislature have yet to speak the final word.

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VIEWPOINTS CARTOON



Raising tuition mustn't become an annual trend

Since I came to UNC-Wilmington four years ago, I have seen four tuition increase proposals.

The first increase was retroactive — the state legislature made us pay again mid-semester. The next year, I came out in favor of our campus-initiated increase.

Since then, I have been opposed to both increase proposals. Have I flip-flopped? Maybe so, but it almost seems that I am one of only a few people to thoroughly consider each proposal — how it will help our university and how it might hurt those struggling to pay the bill.

The main tenet of opposition is based on the principle of affordability outlined in Article IX, Section 9 of the N.C. Constitution.

But each case is different and should be thoroughly considered — there should never be blanket opposition (or support) for any increase.

Increases shouldn't become an annual event. In December, students have come to expect three things: finals, winter break and, now, a tuition increase. It seems that year after year, the same wording is used in each proposal: the need to restore faculty positions, to increase salaries and to use the remainder for financial aid to cover the cost of the increase. This has left me quite skeptical.

I say this not because I lack faith in our administration. I say this because the extra money people have to pay is hard-earned. The proposed increase might be pocket change to some, but to many of the people in places I've lived in and visited across North Carolina, the cost is a sizable portion of their paycheck.

It is these people that an increase is pushing further away from a quality education, and it is these people that need it the most.

ZACH WYNNE
STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT, UNC-W

Our universities' leaders are seeing tuition increases as the only option in patching the holes in their budgets.

This should not be the case. As citizens, we must send the message to the legislature that fully funding education at all levels is an investment in us and an investment in our state's future.

Having a highly skilled workforce attracts the new industries we need in North Carolina to prosper. We, as citizens, must constantly be in contact with our legislators to ensure that the university is fully funded so that we can obtain the best education possible.

Two of our most respected leaders, Board of Governors Chairman Brad Wilson and Gov. Mike Easley, have taken the principled stance of opposing yet another tuition increase this year.

They have seen that the constant increases are getting out of hand and are becoming too much of a burden on those who need the education most — I commend them for that.

The state constitution does not propose opposition to any and every increase. It promotes the idea of access and affordability. It is our duty as leaders in the university to uphold those principles, especially during stagnant economic times. This means that whenever increases become as frequent and excessive, we must fight to stop them.

It is the right of all North Carolinians to have access to an affordable, quality higher education. This means we must follow the lead of Chairman Wilson, Governor Easley and others.

We must say no to another increase.

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UNC's trustees have focused on its affordability

Accessibility and affordability remain at the core of UNC-Chapel Hill's commitment to our state's young people and to their families.

Access to UNC-CH should be based on merit, not on ability to pay. That tradition has characterized our approach to public higher education from the University's beginnings.

As trustees, we also aim to preserve the academic quality that makes UNC-CH a great public university. We've followed two principles in carrying out recent campus tuition increases.

We have pledged to keep in-state tuition rates in the lowest quartile of our national public peers. And we have met all demonstrated financial needs of students to hold them harmless from campus tuition increases.

Carolina remains a perennial "best value." Kiplinger's Personal Finance and The Princeton Review have singled out the University as a leader for quality and affordability. We were second among public campuses in U.S. News & World Report's list of "Great Schools, Great Prices."

N.C. students truly receive an excellent bargain. This fall, undergraduates paid \$4,451 in tuition and fees at UNC-CH. That was the second-lowest rate among our 10 public peer campuses. We were more than \$1,000 below the 25th-percentile threshold set by our Board of Trustees as a target not to exceed.

The University has been innovative in keeping accessibility and affordability at the forefront of its priorities. The Carolina Covenant promises admitted students from low-income families that they can earn a UNC-CH diploma debt-free.

The covenant builds upon our board's practice of reserving 35 percent of the revenue from campus tuition increases for need-based financial aid. Every needy student has received a grant to cover the cost of those increases.

NELSON SCHWAB III
MEMBER, UNC-CH BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Carolina also meets the needs of middle-income students.

Our board has made a philosophical commitment to keep tuition affordable for North Carolinians. Last year we also took a new approach for out-of-state students that is value- and market-driven, with a goal of aiming for but not exceeding the 75th percentile of our public peers. Carolina should remain a bargain for out-of-staters, but not by compromising the University's quality. Further, our rates cover the cost of education for non-residents. We are not subsidizing those students with state funds.

Now our campus is deliberating about next year's tuition. I was among the trustees, students, faculty members and administrators serving on the Tuition Advisory Task Force. At our trustees' meeting later this month, we will consider a campus-based tuition increase.

Chapel Hill is stronger because of this revenue source. Since we were authorized to use campus tuition increases in 2000-01, we have generated more than \$19 million to address the need of faculty support. Graduate teaching assistant compensation also has emerged as an urgent need.

One need the task force identified is improving the student-faculty ratio, which decreases class size — which, in turn, improves the quality of our education.

Campus tuition revenues are only one part of the University's funding. Maintaining quality education requires finding adequate resources. We intend to sustain a world-class faculty, because that will serve our state's students and economy well in the future. Carolina is committed to remaining accessible and affordable for North Carolinians.

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Papers, officials support a freeze

In the coming months, the UNC-system Board of Governors will once again face campus-initiated tuition increase proposals coming from almost every campus in the UNC system.

As in previous years, the chancellors will present compelling cases for the uses of tuition revenues, and the board will be forced to weigh the promise made to North Carolina citizens in Article IX, Section 9 of the N.C. Constitution.

But what will happen to our great public university system if we continue this trend year after year?

During last year's tuition discussions, Gov. Mike Easley urged board members to vote against the tuition increase proposals.

He told BOG members that "I believe that we can ensure

AMANDA DEVORE
PRESIDENT, ASG

academic quality without jeopardizing access."

Clearly, Easley's entrance into the tuition debate underscores the wide interest that exists across the state to ensure that our 16 UNC campuses remain "as far as practicable, free of expense."

Easley stated that the trend of tuition increases at the magnitude proposed last year could not continue without jeopardizing access to higher education in North Carolina.

Despite the plea from Gov. Easley last year, the board did pass tuition increases that ranged from 9 percent to 21 percent.

This year, another prominent state leader has made a courageous public statement opposing campus-based tuition increase proposals for the coming academic year.

In a recent letter to fellow board members, BOG Chairman Brad Wilson affirmed the importance of "keeping the cost to North Carolina students and their families as low as practicable" while urging members to vote against any increases this year.

The support North Carolina citizens have for Chairman Wilson's stance was echoed in almost every newspaper in the state via editorials and op-ed columns.

Through the higher education bond referendum in 2000, North Carolina voters endorsed the largest bond initiative in the history of higher education for facilities.

In the most democratic of ways, our citizens have indicated that the continued commitment to developing our higher education system is a top priority — worth billions.

The N.C. Constitution makes clear that this burden should not fall to the young generation of North Carolinians seeking higher education.

I hope that other state leaders, particularly members of the N.C. General Assembly, will follow the lead of Easley and Wilson.

Students are very grateful for the support given to the university during the recent string of difficult budget years.

As the budgetary picture for North Carolina continues to brighten, we hope that our state leaders will continue to see the importance of appropriately funding the university and the return their investment brings to the state of North Carolina.

The legislature can do so without placing an increased burden on the backs of students.

We should be proud that we are the university of the people and that our people historically have valued education above all else.

We must fight together, with leaders such as Gov. Easley and Chairman Wilson, to keep it this way.

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