

New plan stabilizes systemwide tuition

Ties resident rate to state funding

BY ERIC JOHNSON
SENIOR WRITER

In 2005, when UNC-system officials decided to hold the line on tuition hikes for in-state undergraduates, they faced staunch opposition from chancellors and campus officials.

The system's Board of Governors endured a five-hour public meeting that saw chancellors from almost every system school pleading for tuition increases that the board ultimately refused to grant. The process was anything but amicable.

Now, as part of a revamped tuition policy introduced by UNC-system President Erskine Bowles, the board is once again asking campuses to forgo any tuition hikes for resident undergraduates.

And this time, that directive has been honored without so much as a word of protest.

"We've worked hard to make sure that everyone was on board with this policy," Bowles said during the board's November meeting. "We've had the chancellors involved from the very beginning."

Bowles' four-year tuition plan, which he crafted shortly after taking office in 2006, marks the most significant change in tuition policy since 1998, when campuses won the right to request their own tuition hikes and keep the revenue.

While the old policy allowed campuses huge leeway in their requests and gave the board complete discretion to approve or deny them, the new plan is highly specific.

It is designed to create a direct tie between state funding and tuition rates. In years when state funding is low, campuses have more room to increase resident undergraduate tuition. But when the state legislature is more generous, Bowles' policy sharply restricts tuition hikes.

The idea, Bowles has said repeatedly, is to "incentivize" state lawmakers to provide adequate funding. "I want to clearly show the relationship

between state appropriations and tuition," Bowles said last year.

Ever since the legislature delivered an impressive 10.6 percent increase in university funding this summer, Bowles and his staff have been lobbying campus officials to reinforce that cause-and-effect relationship even more clearly.

According to the system's complicated formula, most campuses are allowed to ask for moderate tuition increases this year even after such a generous allotment of state money.

But Bowles has pressed all chancellors to avoid any hikes for in-state undergraduates, and so far they appear likely to comply.

John Ellison, a member of UNC-Chapel Hill's Board of Trustees, explained Bowles' thinking as a kind of long-term "strategic positioning."

"He thinks he can get more for us if we hold off this year," Ellison said in October. "It's a way of showing the legislature that we appreciate what they did for us."

But even as university officials celebrate a year of hefty funding and a calmer tuition process, there remains a question of how much lawmakers are paying attention.

"I'm not sure they're aware of it," said Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand, D-Cumberland, referring to the new policy. "I don't know how closely they're following it."

There is also the lingering issue of whether nonresidents and graduate students will eventually find a measure of tuition predictability.

The system's four-year plan covers only resident undergraduates, and while in-state undergraduates will see their rates remain flat next year, nonresidents at most system schools expect significant increases.

"We need to find a way to show that we respect and appreciate our out-of-state students," Eve Carson, UNC-Chapel Hill student body president, said in a November interview.

"What they've done for in-state students is great, but it's not the end of the discussion."

Contact the State & National Editor at stndesk@unc.edu.

UNC votes early on tuition rates

Accountability stressed during talks

BY WHITNEY KISLING
UNIVERSITY EDITOR

Coming in two months earlier than usual, this year's tuition talks reflected an acceptance of inevitable increases, a demand for accountability and pressure for predictability.

With the earlier discussion, several students and some officials aired concerns about the gravity with which the vote was handled.

They called for clearer accountability in the use of tuition dollars, as well as greater predictability with future increases.

The change in the timeline came after the task force's 2007-08 suggestion for a \$500 increase in undergraduate nonresident tuition was overruled by the board at its January 2007 meeting, in favor of a \$1,250 increase.

After those increases were announced, Provost Bernadette Gray-Little, who leads the tuition and fee advisory task force with the student body president, gave a presentation to the board in May about ways to improve efficiency in evaluating tuition.

"It's pretty easy to reflect on what future needs are going to be," said Roger Perry, chairman of the Board of Trustees. "This isn't microbiology. It's important, and it needs to be thoughtfully and

carefully done, but I don't think it's something that requires a lot of time."

This year the task force cut back on the number of its meetings and submitted ranges instead of numbers to the chancellor.

Trustees then voted to increase tuition \$1,250 for undergraduate nonresidents in the 2008-09 academic year, but they didn't raise undergraduate resident tuition because of a state mandate.

At the November trustee meeting, about 30 members of student government and the general student body spoke to the board, showing concern not about the actual dollar increase but about accounting for where tuition goes.

They wanted to know how their money would be spent.

A few trustees, including Rusty Carter, supported the students' concerns.

"How it's going to be allocated is very generic," Carter said at the November meeting. "There's no real substance."

Reasons behind increasing tuition, trustees began to say this year, should be more about providing for the needs of concrete programs or areas rather than staying on par with peer institutions' ranks.

"As long as we have needs, I'm

"How it's going to be allocated is very generic. There's no real substance."

RUSTY CARTER, UNC TRUSTEE,
DURING NOVEMBER TUITION-VOTE MEETING

comfortable justifying a tuition increase," trustee Nelson Schwab said in January.

Student Body President Eve Carson supported the increases but suggested a discussion of predictability at the trustees' meeting later this month.

Still, the fact that Carson supported the undergraduate nonresident hike, calling it a "fair amount," differed from her predecessor, James Allred, who gave a speech at the January meeting opposing the hike and advocating for predictability and affordability.

"I cannot support a decision that will cause Carolina to lose this honor," Allred said to a room of about 200 students, who gave him a standing ovation.

"And we do not want to be remembered as the board that sold our reputation as America's best value."

While still contentious, the November meeting focused more on accountability. Especially when it came to graduate students,

Increases approved by BOT for 2008-09 school year

- Tuition**
- Resident undergraduates: \$0
 - Nonresident undergraduates: \$1,250
 - Resident graduates: \$400
 - Nonresident graduates: \$800
- Fees**
- Undergraduates: \$57.19
 - Graduates: \$56.89

Carter specifically advocated for more explanation because graduate students account for so much of the increases.

As a step in the direction of predictability, trustees and Stephen Farmer, director of undergraduate admissions, added new wording to acceptance packets that provides ranges in which to expect tuition increases during a four-year period.

"That's probably about as strong a predictability as you can give," Perry said.

For now, the only truly predictable aspect of the tuition process is that it will likely be approved by the UNC Board of Governors next in February.

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.



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