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NEWS

Saturday, June 18, 2005

Local

UW on tuition increase: Let's talk
Middle-class and poor students would be protected, president says

By [JAKE ELLISON](#)
 SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

The University of Washington's new president has been selling a radical cost-shifting idea that would dramatically boost tuition and improve access -- making wealthy students pay far more while expanding aid for the poor.

Under that kind of plan, Mark Emmert said, tuition could jump to \$8,000 a year -- the average tuition charged by comparable public universities.

An aggressive increase in financial aid would keep middle-class and lower-income students from being hurt by the increase, Emmert said this week.

Tuition at the UW is set at \$5,103 for 2005-06, a 7 percent increase over the past year, but less than a third of the university's actual per-student costs.

"Everybody gets the benefit of low tuition," Emmert said, "even those who could pay more and want to pay more of their share."

Raising tuition along with financial aid in order to improve university funding isn't a new idea in Washington, but Emmert has been working hard to reinvigorate the concept in conversations with Gov. Christine Gregoire, legislators and community leaders. Most agree the idea isn't likely to pass muster with legislators next year.

"I think it makes sense," Emmert said. "The primary issue here is if the cost of education for a student is \$16,000 or more, what's the right distribution? ... Striking that balance has always been the great challenge."

The university hasn't developed any specific tuition plan, however, and there is no written proposal on the table, Emmert said.

Over the next 18 months, Gregoire will lead a committee of citizens, business leaders and legislators in an effort to revamp state education funding, from kindergarten through college.

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That committee likely will consider Emmert's idea.

The governor has been telling state officials and legislators to look at the revamped tuition model, said Debora Merle, the governor's higher education policy adviser.

One way the idea would work, Merle said, is if tuition is set at \$20,000, in-state students would automatically get \$8,000 taken off. More cuts could follow, depending on how much the student and his family earns.

The high-tuition idea is catching on with public universities around the country.

Miami University in Ohio just finished its first year under that approach, charging roughly \$19,000 a year in tuition -- up from \$9,000. The university gives in-state students between \$10,000 and \$11,200 back to offset the increase, a university spokesman said.

Of the school's in-state freshmen, 38 percent paid more than they would have under the old model, university spokesman Richard Little said. **(Editor's Note: The original version of this story gave an incorrect percentage.)**

Some critics of the approach are concerned that students may be forced to take on bigger student loans, attend less expensive colleges -- or simply drop out.

"There is no example of this model that doesn't squeeze the middle very hard," said Patrick Callan of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Unlike private universities that charge high tuition but also have generous financial aid packages, most public colleges don't have large endowments, Callan said.

The result, according to Callan, is recruiting more out-of-state students or forcing middle-class students to pay more.

Emmert said he's committed to making sure all qualified students can get into the UW "regardless of income. We don't ever want to create a tuition model that denies access."

Asked about the tuition proposal this week, some UW students were wary.

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"I can't get any financial aid; my family is supposed to be able to support me," said UW senior Kendall Gourley-Paterson.

"But even I am struggling. ... If I was a freshman and there was a big increase, I don't think I would be able to pay for college without getting huge loans."

The UW's incoming student body president expressed similar reservations. "I still think that it discourages some accessibility," said Lee Dunbar. "High tuition is high tuition."

Also opposing the idea is Washington State University President V. Lane Rawlins.

"Public education is something that we've reaped some incredible benefits from, and as you privatize it, you make it more selective and harder for some people to participate in," he said, comparing the high-tuition model to private schools.

Rep. Phyllis Kenney, chairwoman of the House Higher Education Committee, said lawmakers have been exploring the idea for years.

"I don't think it would happen next year," the Seattle Democrat said. "We are looking at it, and there are just a lot of questions still pending."

Kenney said it's unclear, for instance, whether the sliding scale would apply to just the UW or whether the other five state-funded universities would take part.

Rawlins warned that major tuition increases can backfire on a university.

"Somewhere, somebody has to pay more, and when they pay more, some of them will be discouraged from attending school."

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