

Tuition hikes continue in Ohio

Eight of Ohio's 14 public universities have imposed or proposed tuition increases for next school year, despite a push from students to keep costs down.

University of Akron leaders agreed to raise tuition by 2 percent recently, following increases that have been approved at the University of Cincinnati, Youngstown State University and Shawnee State University.

Four other schools have proposed increases: Ohio University, Miami University, Wright State University and the University of Toledo.

State-funded colleges can't raise tuition by more than 2 percent, or \$188 a year, whichever is higher, under limits that state lawmakers set last year. Several, including Ohio State University, have yet to recommend new tuition rates.

The costliest proposal so far is at Miami. Administrators there are asking the board of trustees for a 2 percent increase that would add \$265 a year to tuition for undergraduate, in-state students.

On the lower end, undergraduates at Ohio University would pay \$150 more.

So far, only Bowling Green State University has decided to keep costs level. Leaders there decided against an increase out of concern for rising student debt, President Mary Ellen Mazey announced in December.

That concern has spurred students across the state to protest tuition increases at their schools. Some have joined with the Ohio Student Association to organize "teach-ins" and rallies to highlight soaring costs on campuses.

"It's unreasonable, if you ask me," said Asia McRae, 22, a junior studying anthropology at Akron and a member of the Ohio Student Association. "I have friends who work 35 to 40 hours a week and are barely making do after you take into consideration living expense and tuition costs."

Officials at Wright State and Miami said they did not know of any organized protests at their schools.

The association urges colleges to balance budgets without putting an extra burden on students. But officials at some schools said they feel pinned. With drops in enrollment and state aid, many must rely more on tuition.

Over the past three years, enrollment at Youngstown State has decreased by about 12 percent, leading to \$12 million in lost revenue. In the same time period, state money allotted for the university has slipped by almost \$9 million.

At Akron, along with the tuition increase, the university is cutting programs and has increased meal and housing prices to close a \$15 million deficit.

But tuition has been used as a remedy for other challenges, too.

At Miami, none of the proposed uptick would cover operating costs. Instead, all of the money would be channeled into scholarships.

"In essence, collectively there wouldn't be any increase for students, but individually, some students would pay more," said David Creamer, vice president of finance and business services and the treasurer at Miami.

Under the proposal, students who can afford Miami's costs would subsidize some students who can't. Miami, which bills itself as "Ohio's Public Ivy," charges \$13,266 for

tuition, the most among the state's 14 public universities.

"We continue to try to deal with income barriers for some students," Creamer said. "Our students don't all come from similar families."

At Ohio University, the board of trustees started to discuss tuition scenarios last month that range from a freeze to a 1.5 percent increase.

A campus budgeting group has since suggested the highest option, which officials said would supply \$3.2 million for the university's wish list of projects and buildings.

Officials at Ohio, along with most other schools, plan to finalize their tuition and fees for next school year by the end of June, after the current semester ends.