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As state money is slashed, students are paying more of college cost
Higher ed • State funding still down, but tuition hikes expected to be less drastic as economy improves.

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To put himself through college, Ryan Rowbury has worked as a counselor for troubled teens, a tax preparer and a janitor, among other gigs.

“Since I don’t have anyone to support me, I need that ... I don’t want to be like my friends and be \$30,000 in debt and not even be done with school yet,” said the 24-year-old Utah Valley University student. “I’m looking forward to summer break, because I actually think I’m going to take a couple months off and just have one full-time job and one-part time job.”

Tuition has risen sharply over the past five years in Utah as the state cut funding for public colleges and universities during the recession, according to a new report from the Center on Budget and Priorities. On Friday, the Utah Board of Regents is expected to approve a system-wide 5 percent hike for next school year.

Utahns aren’t alone. Students and their families across the country are bearing a larger portion of public higher education costs, according to the State Higher Education Officers Association.

“Tuition revenues are up substantially due to higher prices and more enrollments, but not enough to offset losses of public funding,” said the group’s president, Paul Lingenfelter, in a statement. “Students are paying more, while public institutions are receiving substantially less money to educate them.”

According to his organization’s latest figures, U.S. college students are paying 47 percent of the cost of their public higher education, compared to less than a quarter of the cost 25 years ago. Utah mirrors those percentages almost exactly.



Chris Detrick | The Salt Lake Tribune University of Utah sophomore Francisco Cardenas , who is double majoring in philosophy and education, works to support his family. He says he is worried about making ends meet when his tuition increases.

Since 2008 especially, Utah institutions have been attempting to do more with less as state funding fell and enrollment grew to historically high levels, said Utah System of Higher Education spokeswoman Pam Silberman.

“There were some increases in funding, but it wasn’t matched by the increases in enrollment, and it really did put a strain on their resources,” she said, adding that Utah schools are still a good deal by comparison.

The average Utah student today, though, is still paying \$1,131 more a year since the beginning of the recession, according to the Center on Budget and Priorities report.

“It’s a massive impact, and it’s one that may not be felt immediately, but in the longer run it will have big effects,” said Allison Rowland, director of research and budget for Voices for Utah Children.

Family incomes were also down during the recession, and many students are paying for school with student loans. “What we’re doing is cutting off access to a generation of students,” Rowland said.

Low-income students are hit hardest.

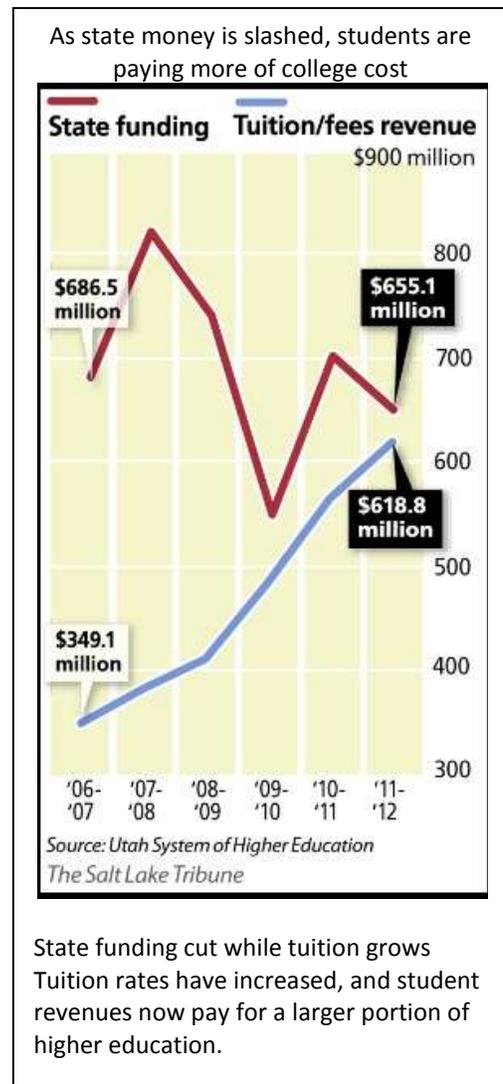
Francisco Cardenas is a 20-year-old University of Utah student who works 29 hours a week mentoring students while going to school full-time. He’s also working to restart a Latino activist group for teenagers. He lives in an apartment with his wife, who is starting college at Salt Lake Community College.

“Honestly, I’m kind of worried. Knowing my tuition could be increased creates a few setbacks for me,” he said. With rent, groceries, and tuition, their budget is tight.

“Every day, you’re almost on your toes for what you can and can’t do,” he said. “You can’t drive to that place, because that \$10 of gas could go to groceries.”

Tuition growth is showing signs of leveling off at Utah’s eight public institutions, though. The Utah Legislature bumped ongoing funding by 6 percent this year, and for five schools, the expected 5 percent statewide hike in tuition is smaller than last year.

At the University of Utah, that hike is its lowest in a decade, but the \$6,201 tuition will rise by about \$300 a year.



“It’s not a big increase, but it is still an increase, and that’s something the university needs to be coming away from,” said 19-year-old student Patricio Panuncio. He wants to be an international criminal defense attorney, but he’s not sure he’ll be able to come back to the U. next year.

“How are you supposed to be successful if you can’t even afford an education at a school like this one?” he asked. “For underprivileged students, it’s almost impossible. That’s just wasted talent.”

And another budget squeeze is looming for Utah institutions that expect to lose thousands of students and their tuition dollars due to lowered age requirements for missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Individual schools can tack additional hikes on to the statewide 5 percent increase. Utah Valley University will add another 1 percent, and says a large part of its proposed 6 percent boost will go to filling the missionary gap. “It’s important students not bear an undue share of the burden, but they also expect a certain level of quality,” said UVU spokesman Chris Taylor. “It’s not a decision we make lightly.”

Salt Lake Community College is proposing percentage bump due in part to enrollment declines, though they attribute their drop to people going to work instead of school as the job market improves.

“When we built a budget around enrollment, we had assumed we would maintain enrollment similar to last year, and we’ve seen a significant difference,” said Kimberly Henrie, assistant vice president of budget services and financial planning. The school plans to use the additional one percent to hire more faculty to teach crowded “bottleneck” courses, among other initiatives.

For Rowbury, the UVU student, tuition increases seem to be a natural part of the college experience. “I’ve known there’s been small increases but I’ve never really noticed,” he said.

The sociology major and aspiring therapist is too busy: On Tuesday, he finished a paper while working a graveyard shift at a group home for troubled youth, then drove to school, where he ended up falling asleep in the UVU parking lot. He woke in time to turn his paper in, then caught a little more shut-eye before heading back to class.

Rowbury said he’s ready to start his final semester in the fall: “I can see light at the end of the tunnel.”

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2013-14 Tuition bumps in Utah

With a larger appropriation from the state, Utah's public colleges and universities are expected to have lower tuition hikes next school year.

University of Utah

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$6,511

Next school year increase • 5 percent

This school year increase • 6 percent

Utah State University

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$5,273

Next school year increase • 5 percent

This school year increase • 6 percent

Weber State University

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$4,159

Next school year increase • 5 percent

This school year increase • 5 percent

Southern Utah University

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$5,208

Next school year increase • 5 percent

This school year increase • 6.5 percent

Snow College

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$2,830

Next school year increase • 5 percent

This school year increase • 7 percent

Dixie State University

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$3,642

Next school year increase • 5 percent

This school year increase • 5.5 percent

Utah Valley University

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$4,368

Next school year increase • 6 percent

This school year increase • 4.5 percent

Salt Lake Community College

Proposed 2013-14 tuition • \$2,924

Next school year increase • 6 percent

This school year increase • 4.5 percent

Source: Utah System of Higher Education, Utah Legislature

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