

Deseret News

Utah Board of Regents expected to approve 5 percent tuition increase

By Benjamin Wood, Deseret News

Published: Thursday, March 28 2013 3:30 p.m. MDT



The Utah Board of Regents on Friday is expected to pass the smallest annual tuition increase in roughly a decade. (Jae C. Hong, Associated Press)

SALT LAKE CITY — The Utah Board of Regents on Friday is expected to pass a tuition increase, raising the total for students at Utah's public colleges and universities by 5 percent.

It would be the smallest annual tuition increase in about a decade, but marks a 25 percent increase in tuition during the past five years.

Utah Valley University and Salt Lake Community College would see a total increase of 6 percent when combined with a 1 percent second-tier, or school-specific, increase.

The increases would mean an additional yearly cost to students of between \$134 at Snow College and \$310 at the University of Utah.

"Utah is still a really good deal," said Pamela Silberman, spokeswoman for the Utah System of Higher Education.

The 5 percent increase is slightly higher than last year, when first-tier tuition was raised by 4.5 percent. But Silberman said the second-tier tuition increases requested by individual schools resulted in a higher total increase for the majority of students last year.

Under the new proposal, tuition would increase for resident graduate students by 5 percent – 6.1 percent at UVU – as well as similar increases for non-resident students.

According to advocacy organization Voices for Utah Children, state funding to higher education has been cut by 31 percent, or \$2,619 per student, since 2008 when adjusted for inflation.

As state funding decreases, institutions rely more heavily on student-paid tuition for operating revenue. Since the beginning of the recession in 2008, the average tuition at Utah's four-year public schools has increased \$1,131, according to Voices for Utah Children.

"Business leaders have said over and over again that their companies need a well-educated workforce," Allison Rowland, the organization's director of Research and Budget, said. "Utah has chosen to cut investment in this area, which makes it harder for many young people in our state to go to college. This is not the way to create a thriving economy."

Silberman said she could neither confirm nor deny the findings of Utah Voices for Utah Children because the Utah System of Higher Education does not typically adjust for inflation or calculate an average tuition in its reports. However, historical data shows that between 2008 and 2012 tuition at the University of Utah, for example, increased by 37 percent or \$1,675 and tuition at Weber State University increased by 26 percent or \$808.

Rowland said she saw the relatively small proposed tuition increases as good news, but said those costs come on top of the increases of past years.

"We need to put our monies where our mouths are," she said.

Silberman said that despite the increases, the cost of tuition at Utah's schools remains lower than the average costs for the region and other peer institutions. She said Utah's schools have demonstrated a commitment to keeping tuition affordable by requesting no, or minimal, second-tier increases.

"The goal has always been to keep the increases to a minimum and because the Legislature approved funding to higher education we were able to do that," she said.

During the most recent Legislative session, lawmakers approved an additional \$18 million in mission-based funding to the higher education budget, as well as more than \$10 million for employee retirement and health insurance costs.

State Commissioner of Higher Education David Buhler described the tone of the session as very positive toward higher education. He said lawmakers had met the top priorities of the board of regents but added that more funding would be necessary to reach the goal of two-thirds of Utah's adults holding a degree or certification by the year 2020.

"In the future, if we're going to be serious about it, we're going to need more funding to address capacity," Buhler said.

E-mail: benwood@deseretnews.com

Copyright 2013, Deseret News Publishing Company