

Op-Ed by University of Wyoming President Tom Buchanan: Tuition

For the past three years, while tuition for non-residents and graduate students has increased modestly, tuition for in-state undergraduates at the University of Wyoming has remained the same. During that time, with support from the governor and Wyoming State Legislature, we have continued to build UW's academic enterprise.



I do not believe UW should raise tuition for resident undergraduates unless there is a compelling reason to do so. If a compelling reason exists, then revenue from the tuition increase should be expended solely for that purpose. And we need to make it clear to students and Wyoming residents that the money is going where we promised.

I believe a compelling reason exists to propose tuition increases for resident undergraduates. Earlier this year, like all other state agencies, UW cut its budget by 10 percent to meet the state's declining revenue expectations. My primary goal was to maintain our instructional workforce, and we were successful in doing so. But among the cuts I made were recent state funding increases for UW's libraries and for instructional excellence -- the expenditures in the classroom, lab, and studio that are not for personnel. That decision delayed UW's application for membership in the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), a mark of a quality research university, and took needed tools and resources out of the hands of faculty and students, which they need to ensure a top quality educational experience.

Projections tell us the state of Wyoming won't see an improved revenue picture for two or three years, perhaps longer. So it makes sense to approach planning for tuition over a time horizon of about four years or so rather than trying to respond to the fiscal situation in any given academic year.

UW's Board of Trustees has asked for and is being provided fiscal information about a range of options. Before the board meets in November, I will provide them my recommendation. Not surprisingly, I believe tuition increases should be low. But I also strongly believe that UW should plan for consistent increases over time and that those increases be devoted to achieving specific goals and objectives, not just general increases in UW's budget. I also believe that a predictable slate of increases will help families plan for their students' expenses.

The governor and legislature have both supported the goal of UW achieving GWLA membership, as well as increased funding for instructional excellence. My recommendation will specify that every dollar from increased tuition revenue for undergraduate and graduate students will be devoted exclusively to achieving GWLA membership and the target for instructional excellence by 2014. Tuition revenue alone won't be sufficient to achieve those goals, but it will keep us on the right track.

Many of our resident undergraduates at UW have been able to use the Hathaway Scholarship program to defray most, if not all, of the cost of tuition. Even with modest increases, students with the top level of the Hathaway scholarship will still receive enough to cover their tuition. Remember too that for the majority of our resident undergraduates, the Hathaway scholarship is the foundation for a larger total financial package that UW provides. Even with modest tuition increases, UW will continue to have among the lowest tuition costs for public research universities nationally.

I don't take this action lightly, and I take it so we can continue to build on our accomplishments.

Photo:

UW President Tom Buchanan

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