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Top News

Students balk at higher tuition

Says one ESF graduate student of a 41 percent increase, "It's crazy."

January 21, 2003

The Associated Press

The catalog for the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry lists costs per semester, with one important note before the figures: Tuition is subject to change.

Make that a big change if a proposed increase by the State University of New York Board of Trustees is adopted by Gov. George Pataki and the state legislature. The board voted 10-2 Friday to raise undergraduate tuition for state residents by 41 percent starting this fall, from \$3,400 to \$4,800 an academic year.

Students are reacting with disbelief.

"It's crazy. It's much, much higher than I would have thought," Pete Smyntek, 23, a graduate student in environmental chemistry at ESF, said Sunday on his way into a lab. "A lot of people are going to be pretty upset if it goes through."

"I think it's absolutely appalling that a body of people who are supposed to represent SUNY and their students would propose that we should pay another \$1,400," said Joel Kelsey, a junior political science major at SUNY New Paltz. "I'll have to seriously reconsider whether or not I will be able to continue my education or take a year off to save up money."

The proposed increase, part of a zero-growth budget proposal from

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SUNY, would apply to 34 campuses that serve 161,500 full- and part-time undergraduate students. The City University of New York system, where tuition is \$3,200, is also looking at a tuition increase.

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"That's a lot of money to raise tuition by, especially when you have an idea already of what tuition's going to be for the school you chose to go to, and then this increase is out of left field, so to speak," said Jodi-Ann Salmon, 18, a sophomore business major at SUNY's University at Buffalo. "We're not too happy about it as students.

"I'll probably have to move off campus to save money, more hours at work, definitely, maybe get a second job," Salmon said.

The last time SUNY raised tuition - a \$750 increase eight years ago - enrollment dropped by nearly 8,000 over the next three years. Student advocates predicted another drop in enrollment if costs rise again.

ESF President Cornelius "Neil" Murphy said he is hopeful the impact on ESF's enrollment would be minimal.

"Usually these kind of things are hard to predict," Murphy said. "We're just going to work as hard as we can to do what's right for the students."

If a tuition increase is approved, Murphy said college officials will work closely with students to help them take full advantage of financial aid, such as the state Tuition Assistance Program.

According to the College Board, the average cost of a public four-year college in the United States, including tuition and fees, is \$4,081 per academic year. The tuition increase would put SUNY's cost higher than the national average, not counting the fees that all SUNY campuses add to students' bills.

The SUNY Board of Trustees said increases in graduate school tuition and tuition charged to students from outside New York, now \$8,300, could be next on the list for an increase.

SUNY community colleges are not included in the tuition proposal. SUNY has capped community colleges' tuition at \$2,500 per academic year, although some community colleges have sought and received SUNY approval to raise their tuition.

Onondaga Community College President Debbie Sydow said it's too early in the college's budget process to know if it will seek approval from SUNY to increase tuition. Staff writer Nancy Buczek contributed to this report.

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