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## **Tuition increases raise college costs sky high for S.C. students**

### **Families can hardly bear rising burden; charges lower at many of Southeast's best schools**

By WAYNE WASHINGTON

A wave of tuition increases has smashed ashore again in South Carolina this year, pushing the state's highest-in-the-region cost for a college education even higher and raising questions about how long schools can lean on students and parents in dealing with state budget cuts.

"Our support for institutions of higher education has fallen," said state Rep. Chip Limehouse, the Charleston Republican who is chairman of a higher education subcommittee in the House of Representatives. "However, the general idea of government now is to go leaner. They need to make their cuts like we've made our cuts. They don't want to hear that."

South Carolina's tuition increases, which ranged from 4.5 percent this year at Lander University to 14.75 percent at the College of Charleston, left some schools with curious sticker prices when compared to other notable colleges and universities in this region.

For example, a South Carolina student going to Winthrop University this fall will pay more than twice in tuition and fees what a North Carolina student will pay at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, widely regarded as one of the best public universities in the country.

In-state students this fall will pay more in tuition and fees at Clemson University than Virginia students will pay at the University of Virginia.

Clemson officials have publicly used media rankings as a measuring stick of the performance of their university. This year, those rankings showed Clemson tied at No. 22. Virginia was tied for second.

Tuition and fees at the University of South Carolina at Beaufort – which, at \$7,940 per year, is the least expensive public, four-year school in the state – will cost South Carolina students 37 percent more than Florida students will pay in tuition and fees at the University of Florida.

Florida was tied for 15th in the U.S. News and World Report rankings. USC Beaufort was not considered by the magazine to be in the same category as the large public schools like Florida that topped its national rankings.

The University of South Carolina at Columbia, which was in the same category as Florida and was ranked No. 55, also charges in-state students more in tuition and fees (\$9,786) than Floridians pay at their flagship school. And that's after Florida raised its tuition by 15 percent this fall.

There are other eyebrow-raising price comparisons.

In-state tuition and fees at South Carolina State University (\$8,898) and the University of South Carolina Upstate (\$9,072) are higher than the \$8,736 Georgia students will pay at the University of Georgia, which was ranked No. 21 by U.S. News.

Excluding the Medical University of South Carolina, whose costs vary widely for its specialized programs, tuition and fees at South Carolina's public, four-year colleges and universities will cost an average of \$9,613 per year.

No public school in the Southeastern Athletic Conference will charge in-state students that much this fall. In fact, other than USC, no public school in the conference will charge in-state students even \$8,800 in tuition and fees.

While in-state tuition in South Carolina is far more expensive than it is for residents of other states, South Carolinians would still pay more to attend out-of-state schools. That's because public schools charge out-of-state students a great deal more than they charge students from their own state.

Still, based on cost alone, residents of other states are getting a better deal when it comes to higher education.

George Hynd, provost at the College of Charleston, said there is an obvious reason for the difference in cost between schools in South Carolina and those in other states.

"The level of support for higher education in other states is generally higher," Hynd said.

### **Sagging state support**

When Clemson announced its 7.5 percent in-state tuition increase last month, the school released a series of statistics underlining a single point: South Carolina's General Assembly has not matched its peers in the Southeast in support for higher education.

Per-student appropriations for higher education in South Carolina was at \$5,700 in 2009, according to data compiled for the State Higher Education Officers, a national association of high-ranking school officials.

South Carolina's per-pupil spending is far lower than per-pupil spending in Mississippi (\$7,316), Arkansas (\$7,955), Alabama (\$8,102), Georgia (\$8,765) and North Carolina (\$8,844), association figures show.

The General Assembly cut higher education funding to South Carolina schools this past fiscal year by an amount that roughly equals the amount in stimulus money they received from the federal government.

Next year, that stimulus money will run dry, and there are no plans to restore those stimulus-matching state cuts.

Stephen Osborne, the College of Charleston's executive vice president for business affairs, said the loss of stimulus money and the unlikely prospect that state funding would fill that hole were important considerations for school officials there.

"Absolutely, we looked at the stimulus funds," Osborne said. "In building our financial model for the future, that was clearly a factor."

### **Demand still high**

Even with the tuition increases in recent years, the number of applications at South Carolina's public colleges and universities has continued to rise.

For the second year in a row, USC Columbia this fall is expected to welcome the largest freshman class in its history.

School officials, however, have said tuition is not a faucet they can continually open as they wrestle with reductions in state funding.

The ultimate solution, they argue, is a combination of approaches:

- A recognition of the importance of higher education and a corresponding restoration of some of that lost state support
- More success in getting federal grant money
- More money from out-of-state students
- Cost-cutting that does not cripple the mission of the institution

"USC, like other universities, is seeking alternative funding sources to help offset state budget cuts, in addition to carefully reducing our costs," said William T. Moore, USC's vice president for finance and planning. "Cost-cutting must be done with utmost care so that the university continues to meet its mission with excellence. Our task as financial planners is to manage in these very difficult times without allowing tuition rates to increase to the point where demand for admission to USC is eroded."

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