

## Smart Bombs: Sticker Shock 101

Gary Crooks / Staff writer

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In pushing for large tuition increases over the next two years, Gov. Chris Gregoire invoked many of the arguments made over the years for a high tuition-high aid model for higher education. The idea is to keep tuition high but backfill with financial aid, so that a college education remains accessible for students from lower-income households. The Economic Opportunity Institute studied how that has played out at four universities, and the results are not encouraging.

At the University of Michigan, enrollment has dropped among low-income and minority students. In one year, the University of Miami-Ohio experienced a 13 percent drop in in-state enrollment and a 10 percent drop in out-of-state enrollment. Student debt increased, because financial aid didn't keep pace with tuition hikes. The average debt incurred nationally by graduating students is \$19,400. At the University of Washington, it is \$16,481. At high-tuition Michigan, it's \$25,586.

Other findings: Quality suffered, because tuition revenue didn't completely make up for a lack of state funding. Private schools were better able to compete for the best students, because the tuition gap had narrowed. Middle-income students were hit the hardest, because they don't qualify for means-tested financial aid.

"There is no example of this model that doesn't squeeze the middle very hard," says Patrick Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Sounds to me like the promise of education is being broken.

**The Terminator.** Across-the-board budget cuts sound fair, and they fit the KISS test: Keep It Simple Stupid. But sometimes they're simply stupid. Seven states – California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio and Oregon – are forcing 2,700 Social Security Administration workers to take the same furloughs that other state employees are taking. These workers evaluate disability claims to see whether applicants qualify for benefits. If applicants qualify, they are sent checks. Presumably, the beneficiaries would spend some of that money, which would stimulate the economy. Since Social Security workers are being forced to take time off, the applications are stacking up.

Here's the strange part: The federal government fully reimburses states for the pay of these furloughed employees. When the feds pointed this out to California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, he replied robotically in a letter, "I was forced to make some tough choices, including furloughing state employees," the San Jose Mercury News reported.

When it was pointed out that the state will be forgoing millions in federal dollars without saving itself a dime, his office replied, "There's an equity issue there."

Hasta la vista, common sense.

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