



Getting Less For More

A Report Card on Illinois State Higher Education

The Problem

Tuition at Illinois's state universities is becoming less affordable for Illinois families. From 2002 to 2007, in-state tuition and fees jumped by an average of 56 percent, with no campus increasing rates by less than 42 percent and two campuses increasing rates by more than 70 percent [in inflation-adjusted dollars]. In just five years, these increases in tuition have negated nearly all of the tuition relief once provided through the state's much-publicized Monetary Assistance Program.

Moreover, serious questions continue to surface about the governance at these historic institutions. A new report from the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI) and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) gives Illinois's public university system a failing grade in cost, as well as governance, general education and intellectual diversity:

- **Well Governed Universities?** There are serious shortcomings in university governance in Illinois. Neither universities nor the State Board of Higher Education maintain authoritative lists of programs funded by the universities – part of a larger problem wherein state government simply does not know how many active programs it has. Moreover, at the University of Illinois, the administration refused to disclose regular minutes from 2009 monthly meetings of the Board of Trustees until September.
- **Rich Core Curriculum?** No state university in Illinois requires its students to take courses in history, American government, literature or economics.
- **Academic Diversity?** Researchers commissioned a poll of students on campus at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Southern Illinois

University Carbondale. Nearly a third of all students felt significant pressure to conform their political views to those of their professors in order to receive a good grade. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that on-campus protections of free speech and in-class academic diversity were almost entirely unknown to students.

The Solution

Tuition hikes have been used to fuel increased spending at state universities. From 2002 to 2007, non-tuition revenues at state universities were relatively flat, increasing by 2.5 percent. Tuition revenue, however, grew by almost 52 percent. A lack of transparency makes an evaluation of this spending difficult.

State lawmakers should eliminate provisions in the Freedom of Information and Open Meetings Acts that allow public bodies, including universities, to keep meeting minutes private for an indefinite amount of time. Moreover, universities should be required to regularly account for their programs, so that those programs can be easily evaluated by taxpayers and outside organizations.

University trustees should make good on their claims of a well-rounded curriculum by requiring courses in core subjects including economics, history, and American government.

As students raise questions about their universities – as well as the wider political and economic climate – they should feel free to express their ideas. Trustees should make academic freedom a visible priority, beginning during freshman orientation activities.

Why This Works

As increased spending at universities drives tuition hikes, students and the public deserve to know how these schools are spending their money. Universities claiming a well-rounded curriculum should offer one that includes history, government, economics and literature. And students should feel free to debate these topics freely as they ask questions of their universities, their government, and the world at large.

