

College costs increase over last decade by 40 percent

By Steve Giegerich
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Steady increases in the cost of going to college have worsened in recent years as cash-strapped states have cut back on education funding, according to a new report that says tuition and fees at the nation's four-year colleges are up more than 40 percent from a decade ago.

The College Board's annual Trends in College Pricing study, released Tuesday, revealed that public two- and four-year schools, which rely more on government money, have been particularly hard hit.

David Ward, the president of the American Council on Education — which represents the nation's leading higher education institutions — called the findings troublesome.

"We are in the middle of a very difficult period in financing higher education," Ward said in a statement. "I remain greatly concerned about the long-term viability of the social compact that has served students and families so well for more than 50 years."

Using inflation-adjusted dollars, the average cost of tuition and fees at state-supported four-year schools is now 47 percent higher than it was 10 years ago,

the study said. The average cost of tuition and fees at private colleges and universities, also adjusted for inflation, has grown by 42 percent over the same period.

The College Board, a non-profit that owns the SAT, said tuition for in-state students at four-year public campuses jumped 14.1 percent to \$4,694 this fall. However, a dip in the price of room and board — assessed separately from tuition and fees — means that students living in residence halls are actually paying \$10,636, only 9.8 percent more than they did in 2002-03.

The price hikes weren't limited to four-year state schools.

The study found that the average tuition and fees assessed by public two-year colleges went up by 13.8 percent to \$1,905.

And it now costs \$26,854 to attend a four-year, private school, including tuition, fees, room and board: that's up 5.7 percent from last year.

The report said that 60 percent of undergraduates are using financial aid packages to help pay for college. While student loans comprise a large portion of the aid, over \$40 billion in state and federal grants that do not have to be repaid were distributed in 2002-03.

College costs rise

The average cost of college has risen over the past ten years. Here is how it breaks down by institution type:

1993-94 2003-04

Tuition and fees	Percentage change
2-yr. public	39%
4-yr. public	46%
4-yr. private	44%

Total charges

Total charges	Percentage change
2-yr. public	39%
4-yr. public	32%
4-yr. private	37%

NOTE: Adjusted for inflation to 2003 dollars; all data are unweighted averages.

SOURCE: The College Board

"It's critical that families realize a college education is still in reach because of financial aid," said Gaston Caperton, the president of the College Board.

Northern Ireland peacemaking stumbles

By Shawn Pogatchnik
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BELFAST, Northern Ireland — A day billed as a breakthrough for Northern Ireland peacemaking descended into a diplomatic shambles Tuesday as Protestant leaders rejected the Irish Republican Army's biggest-ever disarmament move as too secretive.

The prime ministers of Britain and Ireland, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, came to Northern Ireland to launch a Nov. 26 election for the province's empty legislature, the intended bedrock of a joint Catholic-Protestant administration for this British territory.

Their mission was supposed to have been bolstered by the IRA's first act of disarmament in 18 months. But it ended late at night with their acknowledgment that an agreement between the two key parties — the IRA-linked Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionists, a major British Protestant party — had slipped away.

"Yes the election's going ahead, but we want it in a positive atmosphere," Blair said. John de Chastelain, the retired Canadian general trying to coax the IRA and other outlawed groups to disarm, confirmed that the IRA had allowed him to inventory and "decommission" a cache of automatic rifles, explosives and other weapons Tuesday. He said the amount of weaponry was "considerably larger" than on the previous occasion in April 2002.

Blair and Ahern soon found themselves leading an emergency negotiating session after Ulster Unionist chief David Trimble — whose British Protestant party is essential for any revival of power-sharing — lambasted the IRA for insisting on keeping its latest act of disarmament maddeningly vague.

"We had made it very clear to the (British and

Irish) governments and General de Chastelain that what we needed was a transparent report of major acts of decommissioning," said Trimble, who emphasized that Protestant voters needed to know the detail. "Unfortunately we have not had that."

De Chastelain said the IRA wouldn't allow him to specify the volume or type of weapons discarded, nor the method of disposal — the same point enforced during the IRA's two previous weapons-shedding moves, in October 2001 and April 2002. As a result, Trimble backed away from his intention to declare that the Ulster Unionists wanted to resume power-sharing with Sinn Fein based on the latest IRA moves. Such a declaration was to have been the last step in a string of choreographed statements and events Tuesday.

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams called Trimble's decision "deeply disappointing," but defended the IRA's determination to keep its handover of weaponry secret — which is seen as a face-saving measure. "I don't know how this can be fixed in the short term," said Adams, who has been a senior IRA commander since the mid-1970s, according to several histories of the Northern Ireland conflict.

Adams dismissed the possibility of a genuine misunderstanding between Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionists. He suggested instead that Trimble may have lost his nerve and that his party won't be satisfied by anything the IRA does.

"There could not have been, under any circumstances, any misunderstanding at all. Do you think the (British) prime minister and the taoiseach (Irish prime minister) would have flown in here once again if there had not been an agreement and an agreed sequence?" Adams said.

Ahern said he found the day's unraveling web "deeply frustrating and annoying," and poked fun at the Ulster Unionists' concerns.

"I'm not a soldier and I don't want to be, and quite frankly I don't care about the brand name of the guns and that sort of thing," he said.

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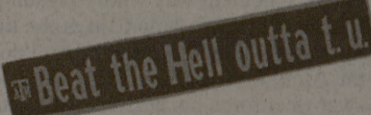
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