

Tuition has risen 1,120% since '78

Increase far outpaces
food, health care rise.

Construction, salaries
and less state aid cited
as reasons for hikes.

By Meagan Pant
and Abby Smith
Staff Writers

Every year, Kelsey Redmond spends the equivalent of a new Toyota Prius on her education at Miami University in Oxford.

Over four years, that \$25,000-a-year tab for tuition, fees, room and board would be enough to buy a small house.

That's a far cry from the few hundred dollars her father spent on tuition when he was in college. The question is, what is she getting that he didn't get? And why has the cost increased by so much so fast?

In 35 years – roughly a generation – college tuition has risen by 1,120 percent, according to national statistics. That is nearly twice the percentage increase for medical expenses (601 percent) and more than four times the increase for food (244 percent), according to a comparison by Bloomberg.

Tuition at Ohio State University, the state's flagship school, has gone from \$975 in 1978 to \$10,037 this year, university records show. That's an increase of 929 percent.

Tuition continued on A10

Many extras have been added

Tuition

continued from A1

Annual inflation over this period was 3.81 percent, meaning the 1978 tuition rate was the equivalent of \$3,604 in 2013, or less than the cost today of a single semester.

Colleges have become major economic engines for the region, with nearly \$3.3 billion in economic impact. They employ about 36,700 people and attract the spending power of more than 120,000 students each year, according to the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education.

But the rising cost of college — coupled with a tight job market — has left many graduates with low job prospects and high debts. Although the escalating costs have caused many students to question the value of their college education, Redmond is not one of them.

The Cincinnati native, who will be a junior this fall, said her family still believes a college degree is worth the investment.

"It is so competitive with jobs," said Redmond, who plans to continue into law school after she graduates. "If it's just a high school degree, you can't really move up too high or get a job in the first place."

'Arms race'

There is no easy explanation why tuition is so much higher for today's students than it was for their parents, said David Creamer, Miami University's vice president for finance and business services and treasurer.

"Most of the time people want one simple explanation so that it's better understood and it's easily fixed," Creamer said. "It's more complicated than that."

Rising salaries, additional services and an "arms race" for the best facilities have bloated costs, experts say. At the same time, public universities are getting fewer dollars from the state, so students bare more of the costs, Creamer said.

There is, of course, another reason, say those who have studied the rising costs: The public is still willing to pay.

Even as 75 percent of people say college is too expensive for most Americans to afford, 94 percent of parents say they expect their child to go to college, according to the Pew Research

"Students are beating down the doors to get in," said Ron Ehrenberg, an economist at Cornell University. "There's no reason to hold down price."

Parents may be shocked and frustrated by the costs, but it hasn't stopped them from opening their pocketbooks as wide as it takes to send their children to college, said Paul Partridge, co-founder of CompleteCollegePlanningSolutions.com.

Some explanations for the rising costs are in dispute.

Richard Vedder, director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, said federal student loan programs have grown exponentially in recent decades, providing little incentive for colleges to lower costs because they figure students can borrow what they need.

"Colleges don't have any skin in the game," he said.

But Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, dismisses this argument, saying financial aid programs such as Pell Grants and student loans are the difference between getting an education or not getting one for many students. Furthermore, cutting those programs would not keep tuition at bay, he said.

Melanie Corrigan, a director of national initiatives for the American Council on Education, agreed. She said "study after study" has shown no correlation between tuition and borrowing, though people often believe they are related.

"The cost of milk has gone up too, but no one is going to suggest that the cost of milk drives up college tuition," she said.

For now at least, students seem willing to gamble that the debt they take on will pay off with a job — one that Pew says could earn them an extra \$650,000 in their lifetime over someone with a high school diploma.

Chris Carlson, who graduated from Miami Valley School in Washington Twp. before attending Case Western University, acknowledged the school's \$41,420 tuition tab is a high hurdle.

But, he said, "It really comes down to what kind of job you're trying to get. Is the juice worth the squeeze?"

Carlson graduated in 2012 and is now pursuing an advanced degree in hydrogeology at Clemson University, where he said the entire program costs less than one semester at Case Western.

Cost was a factor when Jonas Kiessling of Springfield decided to attend Wright State University. The school's \$8,542 annual tuition is among the lowest in the state.

Kiessling, who graduated in April, said he owes only about \$6,000 in student debt after monitoring his expenses, living off-campus in modest housing, and using his savings from working 40 hours a week during high school.

He also held jobs in the summer and took extra classes each semester to graduate with three years of classes instead of four. His military benefits will help him pay down his debt too, he said.

"I think I got a lot more than I paid for," he said. "You walk away with a car payment, not a house payment."

'The right balance'

Partridge said the bigger is better mentality has driven tuition costs some ten-fold over what his parents paid for his freshman year at Notre Dame University 30 years ago.

"Today a modern classroom is a cross between an IMAX theater and Houston control," he said. "When I went to school... there was a blackboard and a piece of chalk."

For a recent column in Forbes magazine, Partridge compiled a list of items that contribute to the high cost of college. They included state-of-the-art recreation facilities with Olympic-size swimming pools and rock climbing walls, "award-winning" food in din-

ing halls, endless new construction, students earning multiple majors, technology everywhere from washing machines to wireless Internet, the push to study abroad and extra resources like writing help centers.

Staff costs also contribute. Campuses have more support staff now and the pay for college presidents is "exponentially" higher, Partridge said.

He said universities need to give students more ways to lower their costs, including tiering prices based on usage.

"Why does everyone have to get the premium model?" he said. "Is there an option that will allow me to say, 'OK I want to go to this school, but I don't need the expensive gym membership or the climbing wall or the four types of gelato?'"

Creamer said public universities like Miami have had to adjust to less income from state taxpayers even as they take on a greater role in economic development and research activities.

Miami, he said, receives the same level of support it did in 1990, and that money now makes up just 10.9 percent of the university's budget.

About 80 percent of the school's budget goes toward wages and benefits, he said.

While Creamer acknowledged there is an additional cost to provide attractive facilities, they are part of the reason students choose a school.

"It is a conundrum for colleges," he said. "What's the right balance?"

Disorderly conduct

For most, the question of whether college is too expensive depends on personal experience.

"If you can get that good job right after school... it will pay off," said Redmond, the Miami University junior to be. "But I know a lot of people just graduated and can't get jobs. So what's the point of getting \$100,000 in debt and getting a job you didn't even need a high school degree for?"

Tuition increases were such a hot topic at Ohio University in April that four students were arrested after disrupting a board of trustees meeting.

After the board authorized a 1.6 percent tuition increase, about 15 protesters approached the board, read aloud a statement that included the phrase "no raises and no bonuses for six-figure earners," and unfurled a banner that said, "Education is not a commodity."

After refusing to leave, four of the protesters were arrested and charged with disturbing a lawful meeting.

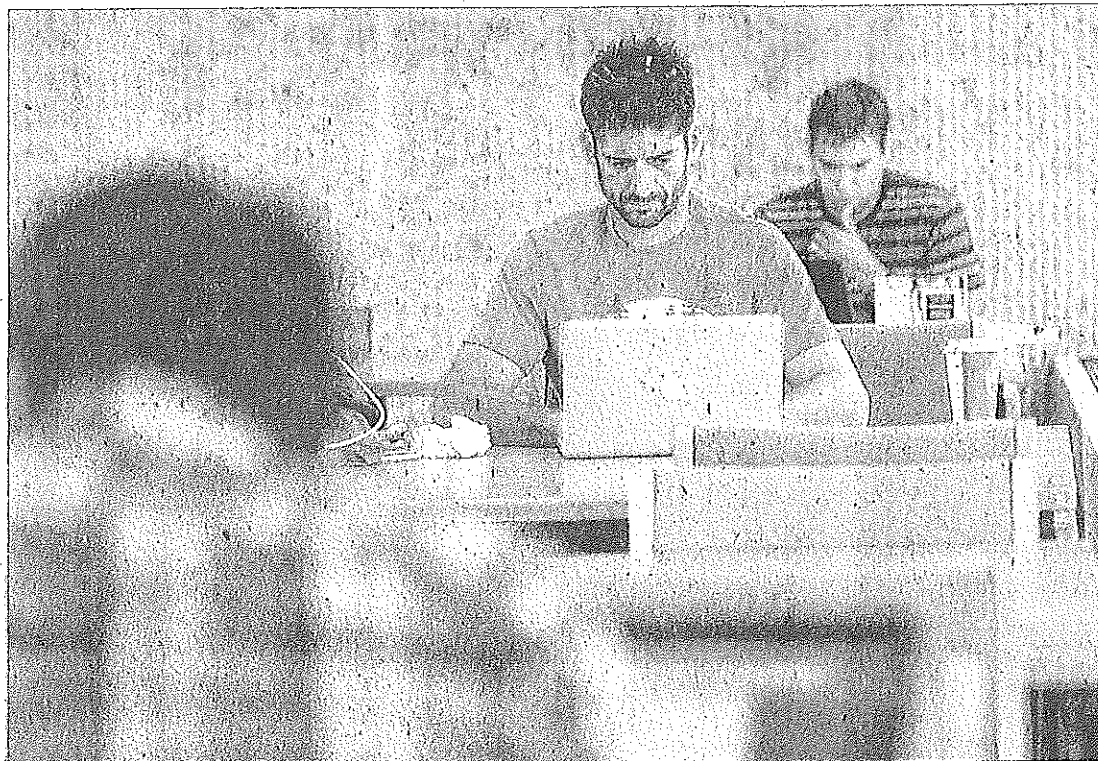
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Jessica Lindner, one of the four, said the protest was about fairness. The school raises tuition "and then they turn around and give themselves a pay raise," said Lindner, who is on a full scholarship.

The board's action raised tuition for the 2013-14 school year to \$10,380, with fees and room and board adding about \$11,000 to that total, according to school officials.

Lindner, who paid more than \$200 for a fine and court costs on the misdemeanor charge, said the protest was worth the penalty to make a point.

"Even if they didn't take it well at the meeting, now they know where we stand," she said. "We're very serious about that."



Wright State University students (from left) Abdullah Freiwan, Ryan Ritchie and Will Trotti study with their laptops in the Wright-Dunbar Library. Technology is one factor driving up costs. TY GREENLEES / STAFF

TIPS FOR SAVING ON COLLEGE

■ **Commute.** Living off campus can cut living expenses in half, said Amy Barnhart from Wright State University. For instance, basic room and board at Ohio State University is \$10,392 a year.

■ **Take more classes.** Most universities charge a flat rate for a full-time student's tuition, whether that is for 11 credit hours or 18, Barnhart said.

■ **Find the right fit.** Transferring between universities can be expensive if credits don't translate, Barnhart said. But starting at a community college might be a good choice. Barnhart said this year, Wright State launches a program for students to begin at Sinclair Community College for general education requirements and receive dual advising from both schools. Students only have to apply once, she said.

■ **Evaluate spending.** Take time to review spending, like whether you are under-utilizing your meal plan, and adjust, said John Rogers III, director of orientation

at Wright State. Also try renting textbooks instead of buying and developing a personal budget.

■ **Consider "comfort" needs carefully.** Many colleges now offer additional services (like laundry, air conditioner or refrigerator rental) for an additional fee, said Brent Shock, Miami University's director of student financial assistance. Can you live without these services to save a few dollars?

■ **Get a job on campus.** Minimally working a few hours each week provides you with a chance to build marketable skills and make a few bucks, Shock said.

■ **Stay on track.** Visit with your professors and academic advisors often. Graduating on time not only saves you from an extra semester (or year) of tuition, room and board costs, but also increases your lifetime earning potential. Staying an extra semester or year could result in a year's worth of lost wages, Shock said.

College costs rise faster than others

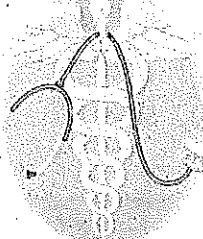
College tuition and fees have increased four times faster than growth of the consumer price index, Bloomberg found. Since 1978, costs have increased...

COLLEGE TUITION AND FEES



1,120%

MEDICAL EXPENSE



601%

FOOD



244%