

OCC tuition cap nets student tax credit

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Students at Oakland Community College again will be eligible for a state income tax credit because the college held the inflation line on tuition and fees. "After passage of the millage in June of 1996, the board voted to maintain the same tuition rate," said George Cartsonis, OCC's director of college relations. So for the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, the rates have been \$46 per credit hour for in-district students, \$76 for other Michigan residents and \$109 for non-Michigan residents. Last month, OCC Chancellor Richard Thompson said his

administration likely will recommend keeping the same rate for 1997-98.

The credit amounts to 4 percent of tuition payments and a maximum of \$250 a year. Only persons paying the full shot at the University of Michigan, however, would qualify for the maximum \$250 credit.

A full-time OCC student would get about a \$47 credit. That calculation is based on 12 credit hours, a \$25 registration fee and a \$10 technology fee times two semesters, or \$1,174 in tuition and fees in a single school year.

Cartsonis said the average student takes six credit hours and would get roughly a \$25 credit. Voters in mid-1995 pumped

about \$30 million in new money on top of the former \$72 million budget. The 0.8 mill property tax was for seven years.

Altogether, 30 Michigan public institutions of higher education have kept tuition at or below the consumer price index rate of 2.8 percent per calendar year. The list includes 10 of 16 universities and 20 of the 29 community colleges.

Under PA 7 of 1996, college officials each year file an affidavit with the state that they have met that target.

College officials statewide are circling Jan. 27 on the calendars - when Gov. John Engler gives his state of the state address, followed shortly by his budget mes-

sage.

Students, parents, grandparents and even non-relatives can take advantage of the income tax credit as long as their household income is less than \$200,000. Anyone claiming the credit must itemize, using the MI 1040 long form.

The credit, passed by the Michigan Legislature early in 1995, was sponsored by Sen. Loren Bennett, R-Canton. His goal was to give public higher education an incentive to put a lid on tuition increases.

"The \$250 tax credit - which anyone, I think, would be thrilled to receive - is not going to make a difference in the affordability of college," Bennett

said late in December. The real savings to students will come if the law encourages colleges to hold down tuition. He said it's law seems to be working.

Glen Stevens, executive director of the Presidents Council for State Universities of Michigan, said colleges and universities were trying to hold down tuition increases even before the tax credit.

"That has been a high priority of the schools in recent years, and you're beginning to see the

results," Stevens said.

Nationwide, tuition costs about \$9,000 a year for public colleges and universities, and four times as much for private institutions.

Michigan undergraduate tuition averaged \$3,816 for the 1996-97 fiscal year, according to state figures - a 3.8 percent increase from last year and an 8 percent increase in the last two years.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Substance abuse coalition offers grants

A partnership of the Coalition of Healthy Communities, involving Birmingham, Troy, Clawson and Royal Oak, is participating in a pilot project funding program to increase local involvement in substance abuse prevention.

The program will provide a one-time, non-renewable fund of \$250 to \$4,300 to organizations or groups to expand an existing service that addresses a docu-

mented alcohol or other drug abuse prevention or intervention in the one of the four communities.

Originally begun in the City of Troy six years ago, the coalition was so successful in that community, according to Diane Dovicic, that it was expanded to the other three communities with federal funds.

Dovicic, who works with the central coalition and who heads the local Royal Oak

group, said the organization operates with a budget of \$300,000 for five years.

Local groups operate to meet their own needs regarding eradicating use of drugs and alcohol.

Also provided was a breakfast for business persons, helping them to learn to recognize signs of substance abuse, how to deal with it, and asking how the coalition can be of help to the business community.

The Coalition of Health Communities meets monthly. Dovicic said, with the dual focus of continuing education and with a shift in the way substance abuse is dealt with.

"We're looking at it in a more positive way," Dovicic said. "We're looking at ways we can enhance our assets, such as the library expanding its selection of substance abuse materials."

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