

OCC guarantees a limit to tuition rate for 3 years

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Students at Oakland Community College are guaranteed their tuitions won't rise faster than the rate of inflation or 3 percent for the next three school years.

The board of trustees made that promise Nov. 17 on a 5-2 vote. The rate of inflation is defined as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' consumer price index (CPI), which has been running around 2.7 percent in the mid-1990s.

"I'm uncomfortable with three years," said board vice chair Janice Simmons of Rochester Hills. She cast one of the dissenting votes, along with board chair Judith Wisner.

Wisner, of West Bloomfield, pointed out that with tuition caps, students and their families will be eligible for state income tax credits. The 1995 law allows credits for tuitions paid to public universities and colleges that hold their tuition hikes below the CPI rate of increase.

Trustee Jeanne Towar of Royal Oak won an amendment providing that tuition rates will be hiked only "if sufficient revenue is not generated by other means." OCC gets about 22 percent of its revenue from tuition, 20 percent from state aid and nearly 60 percent from property taxes.

Currently, resident students pay \$46 per credit hour. Assuming a CPI increase below 3 percent, they would pay \$47.40 in fall of 1998, \$48.40 in fall of 1999, and \$50.30 in fall of 2000.

Michigan non-OCC residents pay \$78 and would see their rates go to \$80.30, \$82.70 and \$85.20 over the next three years.

The tuition hikes, if enacted, would produce about \$500,000 of new revenue per year for budgets that will rise from a current \$102 million to \$112 million in 1999-2000.

OCC last raised its tuition in fall of 1994 and has kept rates flat since then. Voters in mid-1995 nearly doubled the property tax rate for seven years, helping keep tuitions down and pumping in \$35 million a year for renovations and equipment.

Arguing for some tuition increase, trustee Sandra Ritter of Waterford said, "If we renew the millage, we have to show taxpayers that students are paying their share."

"The college has been able to hold down tuition rates by a combination of factors," said Chancellor Richard T. Thompson, "including careful ongoing review of staffing needs, prudent use of revenues from the 1995 millage, and cost-saving measures."

One measure, vocally opposed by employee unions, has been not to fill 60 job vacancies. Thompson also pointed to \$300,000 worth of payroll reductions by attrition. His goal is to hold payroll at 80 percent of the "charter millage," the 0.82 mill property tax approved by voters when OCC was founded in 1964.

Without cost-cutting, OCC's budget, like those of most colleges and universities, would outstrip revenues every year. Reason: Colleges deal with a "higher education price index" (HEPI), which exceeds the CPI because colleges buy a different marketbasket of goods compared to families.

Since 1994, the CPI has risen 11.79 percent while the HEPI has risen 12.58 percent, Thompson said.

Unions react

Charles Neumann, math instructor who heads the OCC Faculty Association, said the union can support either a one-year or three-year cap on tuition. He added that OCCFA is providing 50 student scholarships currently and will add another this year.

On the other hand, Teamsters Local 214 representative Mike Khirallah, a dean on the Royal Oak Campus, complained that members are frustrated at not being able to reach a contract agreement nearly two years after winning a certification election.

And Rose Couture, representing classified employees in AFSCME Local 2042, said it would file class-action grievances against the college. Cases involve subcontracting bargaining unit work, transfers and job postings.

Footnote

Literally, the OCC board resolution promised to cut tuitions 97 percent. It promised "tuition rates" would not exceed the CPI or 3 percent. "Everyone knows what we meant," said Ed Callaghan, vice chancellor for human resources and communications. The resolution meant tuition increases would be held to the CPI or 3 percent.

OCC trustees like literacy project

Oakland Community College board briefs from Nov. 17:

Literacy project

Trustees applauded the work of student Christina Barrow, a mother of two, in the "America Reads Challenge" literacy project.

"The goals are to have all third-graders reading at a third-grade level and to improve adult basic literacy," said Carolyn Harrison, co-chair of the project. Harrison is director of campus services on the Royal Oak Campus.

Barrow, studying mental health and social work, told trustees she helps young students who "fell between the cracks and just didn't learn" to read.

Barrow also said she works with students taking English as a second language. "She teaches me about her culture, too," she said of one student.

Tutoring began in the fall of 1997. OCC's Royal Oak and Southfield campuses work with the Oakland Literacy Council in a pilot program. They use work-study funding and scholarships provided by the OCC Foundation to train and pay OCC students.

Students like Barrow are trained as readers for children in campus child care centers and as ESL basic literacy tutors.

Hackett honored

Former trustee David Hackett of Rochester Hills will be given a lifetime membership in the American Association of Commu-

nity College Trustees by vote of the board.

"Dave was a role model for me," said board vice chair Janice Simmons, who proposed the honor. "We should give people their flowers while they can still smell them."

OCC will pay \$1,000 for Hackett's membership and send him to a San Francisco convention next year.

New Jobs

Simmons started work Monday as director of women's services for the Detroit Medical Center. She is now a Rochester Hills resident.

Trustee Jeanne Towar, formerly a news media consultant, has been appointed executive director of the Royal Oak Chamber of Commerce.

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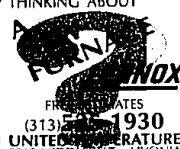
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