

investment as a way of supplementing the college's PERS budget.

Both board members concluded that regardless of the current cost, it is a fixed issue. Though benefits can be lowered for current employees, those who have already retired must receive the benefits they were promised, making it difficult to reduce the cost PERS places on the school today.

"PERS is just one factor contributing to tuition increases," said Alissa Mahar, the vice president of College Services at CCC in an email. "It is one of the largest expense increases in the college's expense budget, but also enrollment and state funding play a part in tuition rates. Because all community colleges in Oregon have the same funding model, it should be noted that all community colleges are facing continued decline of state funding support."

Like Hunt, Mahar noted property tax revenue as an issue, stating it has been flat, without a supplemental increase in funding, leading to less revenue

available for the college to use. She also noted a slight decline in enrollment at CCC, which has led to an additional decrease in available funds.

"Finally," Mahar said, "state funding has not kept pace with inflation and the costs of current service levels community colleges need. Without increased funding from the state legislature and property taxes, community colleges must either make cuts, raise tuition or a combination of both."

Mahar did note that when the college observed the escalation in PERS payout projections several years ago, a reserve fund was set up to preserve a surplus in the general fund.

"At this point," Mahar said, "the fund has reached \$3 million to help offset the future impacts of PERS increases. However, this fund will not last long without increased funding from the state."

Mahar, unfortunately, did not grant much hope to those who hope for

tuition costs to stabilize.

"In order to keep pace with inflation and increased costs associated with providing the services students need," Mahar said, "along with uncertain funding from the state, it is expected tuition will continue to rise. However, the college is always looking for ways to help students save money, such as the free shuttle service, reduced transit passes, financial aid resources, scholarships and the Oregon Promise."

Mahar also stated that it is important to remember that PERS impact is state-wide, resulting from past management and policies.

"These past actions are impacting today's workforce and employers from a cost containment standpoint," Mahar said. "Students are seeing the impacts of past PERS decisions now, because increased revenues are needed to cover increased expenditures."

Tim Cook, CCC's president, reiterated some of the same concerns as the other members of the college leadership.

"In my mind, PERS is a state issue that's been around for, gosh, I've been hearing about PERS since the early 2000s and what an issue that was going to be," Cook said.

Though a state issue, Cook said that the issue impacts the college, specifically college tuition.

"It's part of this overall kind of issue about the cost of the college and is the college paying for its share," Cook said, "and it's not, the state is not paying for its share."

Both Hunt and Chaimov suggested student involvement as one of the best ways to elicit a response from Oregon legislation, specifically regarding the lack of funding for community colleges from the state. Each suggested students try to contact their legislators, perhaps even make the trip to Salem to speak with them directly if it is within their means.

The college board of education will discuss the proposed tuition increase at its meeting on March 13.

Since the early 2000s, college tuition has more than doubled as a result of multiple issues including PERS and a decline in state funding.

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