

PCC Fights to Make College Affordable

continued ▲ from Metro

our society. We have to encourage people to utilize that which is affordable to us," Gatewood said. "Better education becomes better jobs which becomes better lives."

For PCC Cascade in north Portland, an urban neighborhood with a diverse minority population, it's important that everyone, regardless of financial need, have access to higher education.

"Students of color have the most struggles in access to education. This (budget cut) is just another barrier," said Leah Gibson, president of PCC Cascade Associated Students.

Those interested in signing the petition online or learning more about the issue can visit www.unionvoice.org/campaign/ussa2 or call 800-574-4243.



Algie Gatewood

Leah Gibson, president of the Associated Students of Portland Community College (far left), joins PCC Campus Student Leadership Coordinator Kendi Esary and PCC Cascade President Algie Gatewood in a forum discussing federal financial aid cuts.

PHOTO BY KATHERINE BLACKMORE/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Calculating the Cost of a Higher Education

Student loans offer repayment options

As fast as children grow, so does the cost to educate them more than tripling in the past 20 years. In fact, experts predict that 18 years from now the cost of a public college education will be more than \$100,000, and a private college could cost twice that.

The most common way to finance an education is with a student loan. While most student loans do offer attractive repayment options, many students are dismayed when they are still paying for their education five, 10 and even 20 years after graduation. According to data from the Department of Education's National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 64 percent of students graduated with student loan debt in 2000. The average student loan debt has nearly doubled over the past eight years to

\$16,928.

If you are having trouble paying for your education, waiting it out is not an option. There is no statute of limitations on government-guaranteed student loans, giving Uncle Sam unlimited time to collect. Fortunately, Money Management International has noted a few options:

-Consolidation. You may be able to consolidate several loans into one. Many consolidation loans offer students the opportunity to repay their loans over a 30-year period at a favorable interest rate. While consolidating your loans may decrease your monthly payments, keep in mind that increasing the length of time it takes you to repay them may increase the total cost of repaying your loans.



-Deferment. You may request a deferment, or temporary suspension, from your lender if you meet certain criteria such as being unemployed or re-enrolled in school. Depending on the type of loan, you may not have to pay interest during deferment. If you apply for a deferment, you must be able to make all payments until deferment is granted; you are not able to get any type of deferment on a defaulted loan.

-Forbearance. If you are not eligible for deferment, you may request a temporary suspension or reduction of payments. Forbear-

ance can also be an extension of the time you have to repay your loan. Unlike deferment, interest accrues, and you are responsible for repaying it, regardless of the type of loan you hold.

-Cancellation. Perhaps every student dreams of having their loans dismissed and, in some rare cases, it is possible. For example, your student loan may be cancelled if you become permanently disabled or if your alma mater closes before you complete your payment program. Keep in mind that cancellations are not granted for financial difficulty.

Finally, it is important to realize that ignoring your student loans only makes matters worse. For more information on student loan repayment, visit the US Department of Education's website at www.ed.gov.

Students Increasingly Relying on Loans Grants, tax breaks and other sources can help

For students and parents, it's the first sliver of good news about college costs for several years: price increases slowed this year, growing at the lowest rate since 2001.

But the bad news is the 7.1 percent increase at public four-year universities remains well above the general inflation rate, and drove the "list price" of tuition and fees at those schools to an average of \$5,491, according to an annual survey released last month by the College Board.

Prices at two-year public colleges, which educate nearly half of American college students, rose 5.4 percent to \$2,191. At four-year private, nonprofit colleges, costs rose 5.9 percent to \$21,235.

Most families don't pay the full list price, thanks to grants from the government and other sources, as well as tax breaks. Typical net costs: \$11,600 at private four-year schools; \$2,200 at public four-year schools, and just \$400 at community colleges.

Yet students at four-year public colleges are paying an estimated \$750 more than just two years ago. And while total financial aid is increasing, loans accounted for more of the growth than grants for the third consecutive year, the College Board said. Students have to pay back loans, but not grants.

James Boyle, president of the group College Parents of America, said schools and policy-makers aren't working hard enough to hold down costs.

"The beat goes on with increases in colleges costs and parents are growing weary of the same old tune," he said.

Average debt for undergraduate borrowers is now \$15,500 - a figure experts consider manageable for most students, given that college graduates can expect to earn nearly \$20,000 more per year than high school graduates. Still, increases in borrowing raise concerns that some students will be priced

out of college, drop out, or graduate but stay away from low-paying public service jobs so they can repay debts.

"We have deserving students who are being kept out of college or have difficulty completing degrees because of a lack of money," said Gaston Caperton, president of the nonprofit College Board, which also owns the SAT college entrance exam.

The results come as Congress is negotiating a new version of the Higher Education Act, which would set federal financial aid policy for the coming years. A House version passed last month increases some

"Basically, they are subsidizing the education of middle- and upper-income families," said William Kirwan, chancellor of Maryland's university system, citing as an example the Georgia Hope Scholarship program, which covers tuition and fees at a Georgia public university to any student with a B average.

While state spending on need-based aid has increased, merit-based aid has grown faster in recent years, College Board and university officials noted. Merit aid went from 10 percent of all state aid in 1993 to 26 percent by 2003, the most recent year for which figures



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—James Boyle, College Parents of America

grants, but critics say it would harm borrowers by cutting \$9 billion from student loan programs.

College Board officials and university presidents devoted much of a news conference announcing the results to concerns over college access for poor students, who - even if they have high test scores - earn college degrees at significantly lower rates than rich students. They also criticized the proliferation of popular state programs that award college grants based on merit, not need.

are available. Including charges for room and board, published costs at public four-year schools rose 6.6 percent to an average of \$11,376. At private four-year nonprofit schools, they rose 5.7 percent to \$27,465.

However, nearly half of students at four-year schools attend college where tuition and fees are less than \$6,000. There is also considerable regional variation: in New England, the average published price for four-year public colleges is \$7,277, while in the South it's just \$4,433.

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