

## Degrees of pain

*Colleges nationwide are asking students to pay more for their education.*

"NO ONE should go broke because they chose to go to college," Barack Obama said in January in his state-of-the-union speech. But American college students worry they might, thanks to recent fee increases at technical colleges and universities. On March 4th students and disgruntled faculty staged protests at around 100 campuses in over 30 states, calling on state legislators and university administrators to put a halt to recent tuition hikes and funding cuts. In Oakland, California, student protesters marched onto a big highway and stopped the traffic. Elsewhere students carried coffins to symbolise the death of affordable education.

According to the Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities, a think-tank, at least 39 states have decreased their funding for public colleges and universities or increased their tuition charges. In California some public universities have increased fees by more than 30%. At the same time they are cutting back on their offerings. Many have tried to save money by laying off staff, closing academic departments and reducing the number of classes offered. Some are admitting more out-of-state students, who pay higher fees.

Several institutions have also started to cut the number of students they enroll in order to save money. California State University (CSU), a public university system that has 23 campuses in California, will reduce enrolment by 20,000 students next academic year, because it has lost \$564m, or around 20%, of its state funding.

It is not just public universities that are finding themselves in a tricky spot. Some of America's richest private universities are increasing their charges, because their endowments have suffered steep losses. Yale recently announced that its fees will go up next year by nearly 5%, to \$49,800, although it promised to spend around 10% more on financial aid for needy students.

These increases may signal a permanent shift in the cost of higher education, analysts say, which could dissuade poorer people from considering college. It is unlikely that fees will return to pre-recession levels once the economy recovers. "There is no law of gravity in higher education pricing," reckons Kevin Carey of Education Sector, a think-tank. "What goes up never comes down."

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