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AFTERSHOCKS

Three students affected by the regents' enormous tuition hike.

by Doug Stevens

Tuition increases are like death and taxes — they're inevitable. Reasonable college students have learned to expect reasonable tuition hikes, even if they fail to see any increase in the quality of their education from year to year. But thousands of students attending Iowa's regent universities were surprised this year when the Iowa Board of Regents' annual tuition increase was the largest in a decade, about 10 percent. Although the increase isn't the board's fault and has much more to do with GOP-sponsored tax cuts in Des Moines, that still leaves many students wondering where they are going to find an extra \$300-\$1,000 next year to pay for their schooling. This question is especially daunting for those students with extenuating circumstances. It's easy for Suzy U. Bill and Johnny Frathouse to call up daddy and ask for a few more C-notes to cover the increases, but what about students who come from large families or live out-of-state? How about poor students getting by on a patchwork of scholarships, grants, and loans, or the married couple trying to scrape by so someday they can be secure enough to start a family?

It was with these folks in mind that student leaders here at Iowa State joined with those from the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa last summer and fall to try to convince the regents to lower the increase. (Editor's note: The finks from the U of I ended up backing out of the student counterproposal to actually support an increase larger than the university president, Mary Sue Coleman, was endorsing. So give your Hawkeye friends a kick in the butt if you see them over Christmas break.)

Throughout their campaign for a lower increase, GSB collected stories from students who said the tuition hike would mean bad things for them. To this end, hundreds of personal accounts were collected from all sorts of Iowa State students. Each story began with the same sentence, "This is how a significant increase in tuition would affect me."

Sandra and Patricia Wenk

Sandy, 20, and Trish, 18, as they preferred to be called, are enrolled in their sophomore and freshman years, respectively, in Iowa State's agricultural programs. Sandy is majoring in both agricultural engineering and mathematics, and Trish is starting on a major in agricultural education. Both are paying their bills with government loans

Sandy and Trish are the oldest of a family of seven children. Their parents own a 520-acre farm near the southeast Iowa town of Douds. Like many kids growing up in rural Iowa, the two sisters didn't have much to do except work on the farm. The nearest towns where local teenagers could find entertainment were Fairfield and Ottumwa. Both towns were 45 minutes to an hour away, depending on which

sister you ask. Fox Valley, the local school district, educated students from several communities, but was still very small.

"Since it was such a small school, we were able to be in a lot of different things," Trish says. "Some of the bigger things, like football and debate, we didn't have."

Sandy has yet to meet a single person at Iowa State who had a smaller graduating class than her class of nine. Of those nine, five are currently attending Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, where both sisters could have had full scholarships. However, going to the smaller school was never a consideration for either one.

"I really wanted to get away," Sandy says. "Indian Hills didn't have the things that Iowa State has to offer."

Trish has wanted to be an Iowa Stater her whole life.

"Mom graduated from here," she says. "Since I was three, I was like, 'This is where I'm going.' For me, it was never a question."

Now, with tuition going up, the "what if?" question keeps popping up. The Wenke family, like many small farm families in the Midwest, has been feeling the pressure of poor farm prices for several years. Recently, their father has had to find extra work to make ends meet, leaving their mother to take care of the farm, sometimes for days at a time. Neither sister could get a summer job until after graduation because they were needed on the farm, so the opportunities to build up savings were slim. Another Wenke sister, Jacqueline, 17, will be attending Iowa State in another two years.

"I always knew tuition was going to increase, but I never expected this much," Trish says. "It's just more stress trying to find where the money is going to come from."

Andrew Danenhauer

Andrew Danenhauer, 24, is an adult student beginning his freshman year at Iowa State in pre-architecture. Andrew and his wife of six months, Sabrina, moved from Cedar Rapids to Ames this fall so Andrew could go back to school.

The road back to school has been a long one for Andrew. He dropped out of high school six years ago after fathering a child. He got his G.E.D. equivalency and started working right way.

Andrew is paying child support for a son, 5, and a daughter, 2. He has no visitation rights for either child and does not have the resources to pursue a custody claim. Since he left high school, Andrew has worked several jobs including a position at the Menards store in Cedar Rapids where he met Sabrina.

"The main reason I came back to school was for Sabrina, so that we can more than just get by," Andrew says. "We expect to have a family. This is the only way we are going to be able to do that."

There was a time in Andrew's life when the

thought of going back to school wasn't even in the picture.

"Before going to school, I had few goals," he says. "I just wanted to make enough money to have fun with and just overnight, my mind changed. Now I want a house and a family."

Going back after so long was a hard decision. Being 24 in a college classroom changes things quite a bit. Some of Andrew's friends make good money in skilled labor jobs and have houses and families already, but he says that there are some benefits to seeing the world from his newfound perspective.

"It's a lot easier for me being older than everyone in my class," Andrew says. "I've seen what's out there without a college education, and it's not much."

The tuition increase will bring some added challenges to Andrew and Sabrina's new marriage. Andrew is paying tuition and fees with loans and Sabrina works a full-time job at Menards in Des Moines to pay other bills. Both say it's a balancing act between survival and financial suicide with the debt piling up from student loans. That's not even taking into account time the couple has to consciously set aside time for each other.

"It's hard sometimes," Sabrina says. "I support him going back to school because I know in the long run it will benefit both of us."

Although neither Andrew nor Sabrina is ready to throw in the towel just yet, another double-digit increase could derail Andrew's dream of opening his own architectural firm.

"If I couldn't stay at Iowa State, I would go back to Cedar Rapids and Kirkwood," Andrew says. "Hopefully, I'd be able to stay with drafting, but I could never be a licensed architect like I want to be."

And though the increase will only make his life more difficult, Andrew does see some good in the board's decision.

"I guess there's just one thing," Andrew says. "If you're going to raise it, use it judiciously."

Although some students at Iowa State will grudgingly admit that tuition increases are necessary, very few share Andrew's understanding.

Next year's tuition increase will affect all Iowa State students, some more than others. But even if you are not one of these unlucky few, it is important to understand that increasing tuition doesn't mean finding more money for some people. For some, it means finding a different life.

The regents always say it is a difficult decision when they have to raise tuition. But what about Trish, Sandy, and Andrew? Would even one of the regents be able to look them in the eye and say, "See you at Kirkwood?" If they can, they're bums, and if they can't, they're even worse.

Doug Stevens is a freshman in pre-journalism. This is his first article for Ethos.