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U. of Illinois adopts tuition control measure

By DAVID MERCER - Jan 21, 2011

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University of Illinois trustees voted Thursday to adopt a policy designed to limit tuition increases, but the cost of housing is still going up at the school's three campuses.

The policy will link tuition increases and other factors in a way that's intended to limit the size of increases. The new policy requires the university to weigh potential increases against the rate of inflation and other things, such as the availability of state funding.

While Illinois law guarantees students at public universities pay the same tuition each year as they pursue undergraduate degrees, the university raises tuition most years for the incoming class. The increase adopted for the current academic year was 9.5 percent, a rate intended to help the school cope with state funding shortfalls but high enough that it generated complaints among many parents and students.

"The Board's hope is to keep tuition flat on an inflation-adjusted basis," trustees Chairman Christopher Kennedy said in a statement. "Inconsistent increases and unpredictable timing on when rates will be set hinder short- and long-term planning for students and their families, as well as administrators."

Last year's tuition increase was accompanied by cost-cutting moves such as requiring employees to take unpaid furlough days and leaving some jobs open to help deal with the state's fiscal crisis. The state government's budget deficit led it to fall far behind in payments to institutions such as the university, a situation that continues.

That increase led to complaints and a protest outside the meeting where the decision was made by state Sen. Martin Sandoval, a Chicago Democrat.

On Thursday, Sandoval praised the university's shift in tuition policy but said the University of Illinois and other schools must make further cuts in their expenses that would help keep college more affordable.

"Universities must get their ridiculously high administrative salaries in line with what the public

demands," Sandoval said in a news release. "They also must lower their fees, not just tuition, and set a policy for fees based on hard justifications for these costs."

Also Thursday, trustees raised the cost of housing for the next school year on all three campuses.

The highest increases will be on the flagship campus in Urbana-Champaign, where the cost of dorm room shared by two people and a meal plan will increase 4 percent to \$9,452 a year. Some locations and plans will cost a little more or less.

A typical double-occupancy dorm room at the Chicago campus plus a meal plan will cost \$9,862 for the year, with slight variations by location.

In Springfield, a room in Lincoln Hall will cost \$6,520 for the year, a 1.9 percent rise, and a Founder Hall room will be \$6,670, 1.7 percent more than this year. Meal packages would add \$2,200 to \$3,150 to the cost.

Also at Thursday's meeting, Kennedy was re-elected as chairman of the board of trustees. He's been chairman and a board member since September 2009, when his predecessor, Lawrence Eppley, resigned during a scandal over the influence of political connections on admissions at the Urbana-Champaign campus. New trustees Patricia Brown Holmes and Ricardo Estrada also were sworn in Thursday after their appointments Wednesday by Gov. Pat Quinn.

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