



Texas Universities Make Big Moves



Texas has made a big move to assist low-income families with achieving their higher education goals. Two major universities, the University of Texas at Dallas and the University of Texas at Arlington, have revealed a plan to award free tuition to in-state undergraduate students whose families' household incomes fall below \$25,000 per year.

An effort to make prospective students believe that attending college is possible and affordable is the leading motivator behind this new program. As more studies are beginning to show that college enrollment drops when tuition rises, schools nationwide have begun to step forward to rally the state's youth to strive toward college degrees. The two exemplary schools in Texas are part of a system-wide push.

The two universities will compensate their budgets for this program by tapping into existing financial aid resources.

In a recent *Dallas Morning News* article by Jay Parsons, the university system's chancellor spoke of the recent push to quell anxiety over high-priced education. "Low-income families need clarity," Chancellor Mark G. Yudof said. "This has a major impact on families when they sit down at the dinner table and say, 'We'd love for John or Jane to go to college, but we don't know if we can pay for it.'"

In order to actualize a happy ending to the chancellor's example, the university will need to allocate 20% of revenue from tuition increases for financial aid. If everything runs smoothly, then the yearly increases should pay for most of the additional expenses. The program seems to allow for cyclical increases in tuition, but it attempts to give back to students who wouldn't have the opportunity to attend college otherwise, ultimately perpetuating the availability of funding within the university, community, and state.

"It's not without risk," Yudof said. "If I'm right, there will be a lot more students applying. We constantly have to make sure we can afford it."

Eligibility is contingent upon economic circumstances, application by the set deadline, and meeting the criteria for the federal Pell Grant. The last requirement excludes illegal immigrants. Students must also be enrolled at least half-time, taking six credit hours, to be eligible at UT Arlington. UT Dallas will require that students be enrolled full-time, taking at least 12 credit hours, to be eligible.

As for how many students this plan could help annually, estimates gather that approximately 500 applicants could gain assistance in the next year.

"Very often, the public has sticker shock and don't realize that after the financial aid is applied, the very real cost of education is less than what people think," UT Arlington Provost Dana Dunn said.