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## Editorial: College fee increase leaves many out

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A study released this week verified what 17,000 students at Chico State University already know: Fees at California State University schools are rising much faster than the national average, and light years higher than the inflation rate.

Fees last year at the CSU's 23 campuses hit an average of \$3,521 annually, an increase of 10 percent from the year before.

The increase in the national average was 6.6 percent. The inflation rate was 1.96 percent.

The study by the College Board also showed that the state's other public university system, the University of California, raised rates far higher (9.7 percent) than the national average for public universities.

Both the CSU and UC systems handed out hefty raises to executives and professors in the past year and — sorry, students — you have to pay for those raises somehow. Just trying to keep up with the Joneses, CSU trustees said.

Unfortunately, the university system has forgotten its mission of providing an affordable, quality education to all Californians who qualify. California was once the model for affordable higher education. Clearly, the mindset has changed.

In 1981, annual fees at Chico State University were \$220. This year, fees are \$3,710. Add books, room and board, and other expenses and a Chico State student can expect to pay nearly \$17,000 a year. Take five years to graduate and the higher-education bill comes to \$85,000. That's a huge bill when the state's median household annual income is about \$50,000. Clearly, higher education is becoming out of reach for more and more families. And keep in mind, a CSU school is a cheap option.

The CSU administration will argue that it's still a bargain, and maybe it is. That's little consolation to the students and parents who have to put up with double-digit increases.

The CSU and UC leaders also like to complain that the system is "underfunded" by millions by the state Legislature — but they still find ways to give executives, presidents and professors big raises that far outstrip those in the private sector.

It's time to return to a philosophy that students come first at public universities. Our state depends on an educated populace. Let's not let costs drive young people away from a chance at a better life.

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