How much do in-state students pay in tuition and fees to attend four-year public universities?

Published in-state tuition and fees at public four-year universities averaged $10,440 during the 2019–20 school year, compared with $36,880 at four-year, private nonprofit universities. These prices rarely reflect the actual cost students pay.

On average, in-state students at public four-year institutions paid just $3,870 in tuition and fees during the 2019–20 academic year, compared with $14,380 at four-year, private nonprofit universities. This cost, known as average net price, reflects the actual cost of tuition after scholarships, grants, and tax benefits have been taken into consideration.

Financial aid can reduce out-of-pocket costs to attend most universities. A full-time student at a public four-year institution received an average of $6,570 in grant aid and tax benefits during the 2019–20 school year. Grant aid includes federal programs like Pell Grants and veteran’s benefits, as well as state and institutional grants and scholarships.

AN INVESTMENT, IN PERSPECTIVE

A college degree is a long-term investment in a student’s future. College graduates experience higher earnings, expanded career opportunities, enhanced job security, and more dynamic skill sets than individuals who have only earned a high school degree. Graduates begin reaping those benefits soon after completing their degrees and they continue to accrue over their lifetime. In fact, median lifetime earnings of bachelor’s degree recipients are 65 percent higher than those with only a high school diploma.

While public universities continue to provide the most affordable path to a quality higher education and the associated benefits, steep cuts in state funding have pressured public institutions to increase tuition in order to make up some of the loses in state funding. During the six year period of 2006–07 to 2012–13, after adjusting for inflation, four-year public universities experienced state funding cuts of $2,370 per student, while tuition and fee revenues increased by only $1,940—a net loss of $430 per full-time student.

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Average net and published prices at universities:

- **In-state public 4-year:**
  - Published: $10,440
  - Net: $3,870

- **Private non-profit:**
  - Published: $36,880
  - Net: $14,380

Average change in state funding per student: **-$2,370**

Average state cuts universities have absorbed per student: **$430**

Out of 11.6 million jobs created in the post-recession economy, 11.5 million went to workers with at least some college education.

Public colleges and universities educate the vast majority of students:

- **2-year:** 39%
  - Public: 77%
  - Private non-profit: 16%
  - For-profit: 7%

- **4-year:** 38%

Public universities are the most affordable, accessible option for low-income students.

2.5 million students with Pell Grants attend public universities.

Source:
- College Board Trends in College Pricing 2019, Figures 9 and 10
- National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); 2017-18
- Johnson and Yanaguira, How Did Revenue and Spending per Student Change at Four-Year Colleges and Universities Between 2006–07 and 2012–13
- National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

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