

Students Struggle to Keep Up as Tuition Soars

I did not have the luxury of picking any school I pleased.

For many college students, selecting a university is a delicate balancing act between academic aspirations and financial realities. Scholarships and financial aid often play a decisive role in these decisions, offering some relief from the intimidating price tag of higher education. But what happens when the cost of tuition rises faster than the scholarships?

When I committed to college, every dollar impacted my decision. Susquehanna University was my top choice throughout my college search thanks to the academic programs and beautiful campus. Still, I hesitated to submit my decision until I ensured my education here would be the most cost-effective of my options and took comfort in being told the presidential scholarship I received would cover the majority of my tuition.

That no longer feels true.

Across campus, students are becoming increasingly frustrated with the rising tuition, especially when they realize their merit will no longer help make up the gap.

“It’s bull****.”

For the 2023-24 academic year, Susquehanna lists the total cost of attendance before aid to students as \$76,000. For the current year, that figure has climbed to \$79,000. The \$3,000 difference marks an increase of nearly 3.95%, just over the national average of 3.9% for non-profit private universities. By comparison, the average rate of inflation in the United States throughout the first 10 months of 2024 has been 2.99%. The numbers don’t add up, with a gap between tuition increases and inflation that leaves students questioning the university’s priorities. “If the school plans to raise tuition costs due to inflation, then I don’t see why the scholarships wouldn’t rise in proportion to that,” said one senior. “We have to pay more and more each year, and this is not the number I agreed to.”

Scholarships tied to a fixed amount fail to account for inflation or increases in tuition, leaving students and their families scrambling to cover the difference. This situation is especially dire for students from low-income backgrounds who are already relying on scholarships and financial aid to make college affordable. “Many people needing or using scholarships are already just scraping by while also piling on tons of debt,” one student noted. “This needs to change, especially if the school keeps trying to preach inclusion and accessibility.”

Upperclassmen feel exceptionally affected by the uptick. “It’s unfair,” one senior writes. “I could afford school when I first came to campus but now my family and I are struggling to make tuition for my last year.” When the class of 2026 was admitted to Susquehanna, the maximum merit scholarship offered to students was valued at \$40,000 per academic year. The current first-year class, however, was offered \$43,000 for the same accomplishments, with no extra stipend offered to the previous classes. “The extra \$3,000 offered to our peers is not enough,” one junior

said, “but if the presidential scholarship is being increased, the higher amount should be offered to all students who receive it.”

The financial strain caused by rising tuition doesn’t just affect current students; it also threatens the university’s ability to attract and retain a diverse student body. As one student pointed out, “If people can’t afford to go to the school, they’re not as likely to enroll, therefore the school is potentially losing more money than if they were to give out a larger scholarship.”

While one student argued that scholarship amounts are entirely up to those who grant them, several are hurt by the lack of merit increase. “It leaves students behind and struggling with loans when we committed thinking our scholarships would remain effective in funding our education.”

Some are also starting to wonder where their money is going. “Why are we increasing tuition by \$3,000 each year without any more benefits?” lamented one junior. In an article published by The Quill earlier this year, a student highlighted the swell of pressures students face.

“Susquehanna has increased all its prices for students in both academics and the basic needs for living on campus,” she wrote. “The future and what Susquehanna decides to implant over the next few months will reveal whether the rise in expenses is worth it.”

For students like me, the rising cost of college is more than just a financial burden — it’s a broken promise. We must recognize the urgency of this issue. Adjusting scholarships to reflect a percentage of tuition costs, increasing transparency about how tuition dollars are spent, and committing to maintaining a consistent merit scale for all academic years are essential steps toward rebuilding trust with students.

Sources

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