

Tuition rise leads some to creative alternatives

By Tara Flockhart / Daily Staff Writer | Monday, April 3, 2006 2:00 AM CDT

With tuition costs on the rise, many ISU students have felt the impact of having to work long hours to help pay off their college education.

Recent figures show ISU students may have to work a little harder in the end, graduating with \$13,600 more education-related debt than their peers nationally. A study conducted by ISU student government group ActivUs, in coordination with the Student Debt Alert campaign, showed average 2004-05 graduates left Iowa State nearly \$29,500 in debt.

At the University of Iowa, the average debt for graduating seniors was \$27,235 compared to the \$24,291 at the University of Northern Iowa, according to Iowa Board of Regents data.

John Gish, a native of Menasha, Wis., is one of several out-of-state students battling even higher tuition costs. Now a second-year freshman in political science, his solution is to go to school even longer.

"I figured out that if I work more than go to school my first year, I can declare residency here and pay in-state tuition," he said. "Unfortunately, that means I have to go to school an extra year, but it's worth it."

Roberta Johnson, associate director of financial aid, sympathized with the lack of federal funding at a roundtable discussion Thursday, but stressed that financial literacy is key to reducing students' debt.

"I'm going to continue doing everything in my power to educate," she said, suggesting that money management classes should be incorporated as early as middle school or high school.

Sen. Herman Quirnbach, D-Ames, was equally concerned about financial literacy, stating his desire to see the university take a more aggressive stance in educating and lessening credit card availability among students. In addition, he said he is working on helping to pass legislation that would raise the minimum wage and put funding behind work study programs.

Warren Madden, vice president for business and finance, urged students to be educated consumers.

"Part of these costs depend on lifestyle - where you live, how you want to spend your time and resources," he said. "Students need to know their options and the consequences."

Although several problems and solutions were addressed at the discussion, only three were selected as recommendations to be made to Congress. These included making more funding available, specifically by increasing the maximum Pell Grant award available; helping to increase student jobs through better funding in work-study programs; and expanding the Stafford loan program to more universities nationwide, putting money back into the system and allowing graduates to use an income-contingent repayment plan.

"If we take these steps we'll hopefully get closer to making school more accessible, affordable and excellent," said Henry Alliger, member of ActivUs and senior in animal science.

Repayment after graduation has led many students to seek better-paying professions opposed to lower-paying public interest careers. Devin Hartman, campaign coordinator for Student Debt Alert and junior in political science, said it is typically considered unmanageable for a person to spend more than 8 percent of their monthly payments on student debt.

"The increased tuition is definitely a problem, but student loan [reformation] is key," he said.

Student Debt Alert was created to raise awareness about college costs and the consequences of relying on

loans. Located in Boston, it is supported by the Institute for College Access and Success and is a part of the Partnership to Reduce the Burden of Student Debt.