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State Budget Constraints, Rising Cost of Instruction Cause MSCC to Increase Tuition

Dwindling state appropriations, rising costs of educational technology, and the need for additional staff to sustain and enhance high-quality instruction have led Mid-South Community College to increase tuition beginning this fall.

MSCC's Board of Trustees unanimously approved a \$5 per credit hour increase (to \$65) for Crittenden County residents during its regular meeting in June. Similar percentage increases have been applied to tuition for out-of-county/in-state, out-of-state, and international students.

"One of the things that we have always prided ourselves on is being able to keep our costs as low as possible," said Dr. Glen Fenter, MSCC President. "But when we keep our costs too low, the state tells us we're not charging enough and that our appropriations could be adversely affected."

"Raising tuition is the last thing we want to do, but we really have no other choice. For us to maintain and sustain what we have and to provide much-needed educational enhancements, we must generate additional revenue."

The State of Arkansas has established a minimum tuition rate of \$70 per credit hour, and MSCC will be close to that figure when student fees are added to the equation. That will keep the college from jeopardizing the funding it receives from the legislature.

"Basically, if you're not charging at least \$70 an hour total, it costs you money," Dr. Fenter said. "The state has determined that there is a certain local investment that needs to be made in higher education, and it expects each institution to ask students to meet that portion of the overall expense."

Most colleges and universities in Arkansas and surrounding states have raised tuition for the 2010-2011 academic year. In April, the University of Arkansas system

announced increases at all 12 of its campus, and Arkansas State University did the same at its four campuses a month later.

In Tennessee, the Business and Finance Committee of the Tennessee Board of Regents voted unanimously earlier this month to approve recommendations for increases at five regional universities, the University of Memphis, and all state community colleges (6.3-11.4 percent at two-year institutions). Fourteen of the 15 community colleges in Mississippi have approved tuition hikes.

“Colleges and universities throughout the nation are struggling with increasing costs and decreasing state funding, and Mid-South Community College is no exception,” Dr. Fenter said.

More than 90 percent of MSCC students receive some form of financial assistance, either through scholarships or grants, so the tuition increase will have minimal effect on the vast majority of them. And with the expanded Arkansas Challenge Scholarship (boosted by proceeds from the Arkansas Lottery), more students should be eligible for assistance.

Dr. Fenter pointed out that some people mistakenly think the Arkansas Lottery money will solve higher education funding issues.

“The lottery scholarship program is going to help our students, which is great, but our institution will not receive any additional money for the overall educational process,” he said.

“In our case, roughly one-third of the cost of educating a student comes from tuition. So even if we have more students because of the scholarship, the gap between what tuition covers and what it doesn’t will continue to grow.”

MSCC’s tuition will remain comparable to what East Arkansas Community College, Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, and Arkansas Northeastern College charge. The expense of attending MSCC will also remain far below what other two- and four-year schools in the tri-state region are charging.

In addition to the tuition change, MSCC has made some adjustments in its fee structure, lowering some and raising others.

“The fee conversation is relatively simple because most of those costs can be quantified,” Dr. Fenter said. “In some areas, we have actually been losing money because

we have not been charging enough to cover our expenses. We have also reached the end of several grants that have helped us subsidize the costs of lab materials for specific courses, so we have found it necessary to make changes in those fees.”

Unlike many institutions of higher learning, MSCC does not charge application, general access, building use, quality improvement, vehicle registration, or parking fees.

“We have sometimes struggled to meet the challenges of continuing financial constraints, but we remain committed to educational quality and value,” Dr. Fenter said. “Our goal will continue to be the provision of a quality education at the most reasonable cost possible.”

MSCC’s Fall 2010 semester is scheduled to begin Monday, Aug. 23, and Regular Registration will be held Aug 16 and 17.

For information about life-changing learning opportunities at Mid-South Community College, visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis, call (870) 733-6728 or toll-free 1-866-733-6722 (6722), or see the website at www.midsouthcc.edu.