

By David C. Sweet, President
Youngstown State University

Raising tuition is an action that the Board of Trustees and I do not take lightly.

I recognize that, as tuition increases, many students and their families must make difficult financial sacrifices to fulfill their higher education dreams.

The fact of the matter is, however, that as state support for public higher education has dropped, the obligation of paying tuition has switched dramatically to students and their families.

And it is not just in Ohio. At the University of Texas at Austin, for instance, tuition jumped a remarkable 37 percent this academic year, according to the College Board. Tuition for schools in the California State University system leaped 30 percent last year. Overall, tuition at four-year, public universities went up 14 percent last year and another 10.5 percent this year.

At YSU, state funding has nose-dived from \$47 million in 2000 to \$40.5 million in 2005, a loss of \$6.5 million. Only four years ago, state support represented nearly half of YSU's general fund revenues. This year, state support is down to 35 percent.

With cuts of that magnitude, YSU – and other public universities in Ohio and elsewhere – have had little choice but to increase tuition if we want to maintain academic excellence.

Even so, YSU has been diligent in keeping student costs as affordable as possible. Our tuition is the lowest among the state's 11 major public universities and 20 percent or \$1,500 less than the state average. Our rate of tuition increases over the past two years is the lowest among those institutions. Our tuition is even nearly 3.5 percent lower than similar institutions in neighboring Pennsylvania.

In addition, working with the YSU Foundation, we have been successful in providing scholarships and grants to help lower out-of-pocket costs. Nearly 90 percent of first-time undergraduates at YSU receive some financial aid. As a result, the average YSU student actually pays 46 percent of stated tuition. That is the best ratio in the state.

And, we also are among the most efficient. A recent report showed that YSU spends less per student than any other public university in the state, and YSU also

traditionally has had the fewest number of employees per student. Yet, we offer nationally-accredited academic programs and services – and highly qualified, distinguished faculty – that equal and, in many cases, exceed other universities.

Affordable. Efficient. Productive. In the face of continued state budget cuts, we believe YSU is exemplary in all three areas and, in my opinion, is without question the best buy in public, undergraduate higher education in Ohio.

Tuition and the related expenses necessary to earn a college degree should also be viewed as an investment in the student's future. In addition to the intangible return in the form of intellectual and personal growth, the facts demonstrate that the return on investment for an individual with a bachelor's degree are lifetime earnings of \$1 million more than those for an individual with just a high school diploma.

Our hope is that Ohio lawmakers will recognize those benefits and find a way to re-commit the state to sufficiently funding public higher education, thus helping to curtail student costs. It is only through such a commitment that Ohio will remain competitive intellectually and economically in the 21st century.