

**Kate Ripley, Director**  
Office of Public Affairs  
206 Butrovich Building  
P.O. Box 755340  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-5340  
(907) 450-8102  
FAX (907) 450-8101  
email: [kate.ripley@alaska.edu](mailto:kate.ripley@alaska.edu)



UNIVERSITY  
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# News Release

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For Immediate Release  
Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2005

## **Regents Wrestle with Tuition and Budget Issues**

The University of Alaska Board of Regents voted Wednesday to raise the age for free tuition for senior citizens from 60 to the age of Social Security retirement benefits, which start at 65.

The measure was part of a proposal by UA President Mark Hamilton, who additionally proposed a 50 percent discount instead of a full waiver, with the income earned going toward financially needy students. The regents declined to accept that aspect of the proposal.

"We received more public testimony on this issue than any other matter that's been before the board in recent history," said Brian Rogers, chairman of the board. "It's clear Alaskans feel pretty passionately about our seniors."

The regents agreed to grandfather in students eligible under the old policy as of Sept. 21, 2005.

Hamilton had proposed the adjustment to the senior waiver program in an effort to control costs. The university expects to ask the governor and Legislature this year for an additional \$47.4 million from the state treasury, with the lion's share of that increase going toward escalating retirement, health and negotiated wage increases. Hamilton called on students, seniors and others to show support of the university in Juneau.

At the same meeting, board members reluctantly approved the fourth 10 percent tuition hike for UA students in four years. However, officials noted that, even with the increase, UA tuition is still lower than many public institutions in the Lower 48.

The increase would bring a semester's worth of tuition for most undergraduates to \$1,530 for the 2006-2007 year. Regents deferred action on a 7 percent increase, which would have gone into effect for the 2007-2008 academic year.

"This isn't an easy decision for us to make," Regent Cynthia Henry said of the tuition increase. "We realize this affects every student at the university. I think the students understand the need for it."

The regents also rolled back the price of tuition for UAA's Master's in Social Work program, which at \$366 per credit hour is \$122 per credit higher than the cost for many other graduate programs. The change goes into effect this spring.

The so-called "super tuition" was cited by many students as onerous, in particular for fields like social work, which historically pays quite low.

The regents directed the university administration to periodically review other programs charging "super tuition" as well.

Student tuition pays for roughly half the actual instructional cost at UA, compared with the national average of 60 percent. When the increases were first put into effect in 2003, tuition covered 43 percent of the actual cost.

"The best scenario for everyone is to increase opportunities for financial aid," Hamilton said. "No student should be prevented from attending college at one of our campuses because it's too expensive."

The university has increased efforts to promote financial aid with its "February FAFSA Frenzy," in which the Free Application for Federal Student Aid is highlighted in a series of events and activities. The program last February resulted in an increase of 1,700 FAFSA applications on the Anchorage campus last year, university officials said.

Nationally, 63 percent of all undergraduates received some form of financial aid for the 2003-2004 year, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers. In Alaska, the number is currently at 51 percent.

"Alaska students just don't apply for financial aid as much as their counterparts in the Lower 48," said Saichi Oba, interim associate vice president for Student and Enrollment Services. "We're trying to change that."

In addition, regents approved several construction projects, including the Cold Climate Housing Research Center on the Fairbanks campus, an industry partnership with UAF; the \$21.5 million School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences Facility at Lena Point, near the Juneau campus; and upgrades to the UAF Physical Plant.

In other business, regents, dignitaries---including Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich---and university officials attended a luncheon ceremony in which the former Business and Public Policy Building on the UAA campus was renamed Rasmuson Hall for longtime university supporters, Ed and Cathy Rasmuson.

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For more information call Kate Ripley, 907/388-3506

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