



## PAR: Give boards more tuition control

By Nick Todaro  
[ntodaro@thenewsstar.com](mailto:ntodaro@thenewsstar.com)

June 24, 2007

Higher education tuition and fee rates should rest more in the hands of the state's colleges and universities, according to a recent report by the Public Affairs Research Council.

Louisiana and Florida are the only states where the Legislature is the primary authority for establishing required charges at all higher education institutions. PAR recommends giving state's higher education system boards the ability to increase prices if they meet standards in the state's new strategic plan for higher education, currently under development.

Wresting some control from the Legislature would reduce the politics behind the tuition question, said PAR President Jim Brandt.

"We're not suggesting total control we're suggesting a combination of legislative oversight and higher education institution control," Brandt said. The current policy is "very restrictive, hard to plan for, and doesn't allow universities and colleges to keep pace."

Commissioner of Higher Education Joe Savoie said PAR's analysis is better than a similar proposal put forth by the Board of Regents in 2005 that was rejected.

With two primary sources of income for universities — tuition and state appropriations — funding universities to provide quality services is a balancing act between taxpayer and student dollars.

"You can't compete on a long-term basis without good faculty members, good facilities and good technology," Savoie said. "Those cost money. There's a fine balance between raising resources necessary to improve colleges and universities and maintaining affordability."

Louisiana needs to catch up on the tuition side to reach the average for the South. PAR's report rates Louisiana 13th out of 16 southern states for tuition and fee rates. The state's passage of the budget last week ensures full state funding this year.

"We're very low on the tuition side," Savoie said. "Thankfully this year we'll catch up on the state side. But the combination of the two still doesn't provide colleges and universities with a comparable total amount of dollars as other states."

The report states that if such policies had been in effect in 2004-2005, annual tuition and fees could have been from \$276 to \$613 higher at the state's four-year institutions.

Those who argue that tuition is too high already are not looking at the data that shows where Louisiana ranks, Savoie said.

"It doesn't mean that the state shouldn't adopt a policy of low tuition," Savoie said. "But when a state does that, in order to maintain competitiveness, it has to compensate with high state subsidy."

State Rep. Hollis Downs, R-Ruston, said he also supports the idea and he supported the idea in 2005. The problem, as he sees it, is the desire by some legislators to micromanage.

"I'm not into micromanaging," he said. "That's what we create boards for. That's why we have Joe Savoie and (University of Louisiana System President) Sally Clausen."

It could also be concerns with the state-funded TOPS program, which pays tuition for college students who meet program standards.

"Some thought it might cause TOPS to get out of control," Downs said.