

## 2011 Survey of Differential Tuition at Public Higher Education Institutions

American colleges and universities have historically charged the same tuition levels for all of their undergraduate majors (with the exception perhaps of laboratory fees). However, economists have long suggested that academic institutions might plausibly seek to charge different tuition levels for different majors based upon the cost of providing an education in each major and the income earning prospects that the major offers.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, institutions might plausibly charge higher tuition levels for students who are further along in their programs, because the cost of educating advanced students (smaller classes) is often higher and because advanced students are more likely to complete their programs and thus to achieve the economic rewards from their programs. Faced with financial cutbacks, a growing number of public academic institutions are adopting differential tuitions by college or major, or by year of enrollment in the program.

To gauge how prevalent this trend has become, from November 2010 to March 2011 CHERI research assistants poured through the web pages of virtually all public academic institutions that offer bachelor's degrees searching for information on differential tuitions. Table 1 summarizes their findings.<sup>2</sup> In total, they found 143 public academic institutions with some form of differential tuition. The percentage of public institutions with differential tuition in 2010-2011 was highest, at 41 percent, at the doctoral institutions. If one further narrows the doctoral category to flagship doctoral institutions, the percentage increases to over one half.

Differential tuition for these doctoral institutions is typically by college, or by major, although a smaller percentage of them have differential tuition by year of enrollment, with upper-level students being charged more per credit hour than lower-level students. At the public master's institutions, differential tuition is almost always by college or major. In contrast, at the public bachelor's institutions, when differential tuition policies arise they are equally likely to be by college or major as by year of enrollment.

The most common majors for which differential tuition charges occur are business, engineering, and nursing. The CHERI research assistants also collected data from institutional web pages on the magnitudes of the differential tuition charges. Examples in 2010-2011 include a \$75 per engineering course fee at the University of Maine (a 9.4% increase over the in-state tuition of \$801 for a three credit course) and a

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Stephen A Hoenack and William C. Weiler, "Cost Related Tuition Policies and University Enrollments", *Journal of Human Resources* 10 (3, 1975): 332-360 and John Siegfried and David Round, "Differential Fees for Degree Courses in Australian Universities" in John Pincus and Paul Miller eds. *Funding Higher Education: Performance and Diversity* (Canberra, Australia: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1997)

<sup>2</sup> An earlier version of table 1, which appeared in Ronald G. Ehrenberg, "American Higher Education in Transition: *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26 (Winter 2012), contained slightly different numbers than appear in the current version because we discovered some coding areas in our data after the earlier version had been published.

\$460 per semester nursing program fee at the University of Kentucky (a 10.7% increase over the in-state lower-division semester tuition of \$4,305).

The process by which differential tuition policies have arisen and been spread across American public higher education institutions has not been examined. Neither has there been any research on the possible consequences of differential tuition policies. For example, does differential tuition by major influence students' choice of majors? Do higher tuition levels for upper-level students affect students' persistence and graduation rates? If such effects exist, are they larger for students from lower-income families and how do such effects interact with state and institutional financial aid policies?

To help provide information necessary to answer these questions, during the summer of 2011 CHERI surveyed the 120 public institutions or public systems that our search of institutional web pages indicated had differential tuition in 2010-2011.<sup>3</sup> Under the condition that their individual responses would not be made public, we asked them to provide us with information on the year that they first instituted differential tuition and the dollar levels of their differential tuition in each year.

Seventy eight of the 120 public institutions or systems responded to our survey for a 65% response rate. While these are the institutions for which we have good data on the magnitude of differential tuition levels over time, we were able to obtain data on the presence of differential tuition each year for all but 14 of the institutions from information contained in several years of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDs). We emailed these 14 institutions, and 5 responded with the year they first started charging differential tuition. Thus, of the 143 institutions that had a form of differential tuition in 2010-2011, as of February 15, 2012 we have information on the year of first adoption of differential tuition for 134 of them.

Figure 1 illustrates how the number of institutions adopting differential tuition per year has changed over time. The height of the bar for each year is the number of the 143 institutions that adopted a form of differential tuition in the year. Figure 2 shows the total number of institutions that had a form of differential tuition in each year. While there are year to year variations in the share that first adopted in each year, peaks in the adoption rate occur in 1980 (1980-81 academic year), 1987, 1997 and 2002. These figures treat each campus as an observation, even if tuition is the same for the entire system. The later spikes are then due to several campuses from a university system all adopting differential tuition at the same time. The earlier spikes (1980 and 1987) may be statistical artifacts caused by the wording of the questions about differential tuition found in IPEDs.

A list of the institutions that we determined had a form of differential tuition in 2010-11 from our search of the institutional web pages appears in Table 2.

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<sup>3</sup> This number is less than the 143 institutions with differential tuition for two reasons. First, in some state systems, for example, the California State College system, tuition policies are uniform at all institutions within the system. Second, at others, for example the Pennsylvania State System, tuition levels may differ across institutions but there was a single Institutional Research contact for the whole system.

Table 1

Percentages of 4-Year Public Institutions with Differential Undergraduate Tuition  
in 2010-2011

	Doctoral	Masters	Bachelors
Number of Institutions	174	271	126
Percent with any Differential Tuition	41	11	29
Percent with Differential Tuition by College or Major	39	10	21
Percent with Differential Tuition by Year Enrolled	10	4	21

Source: Author's calculations from search of institutional web pages during the November 2010 to March 2011 period. Bachelors institutions exclude public colleges that offer primarily associates degrees.

Figure 1

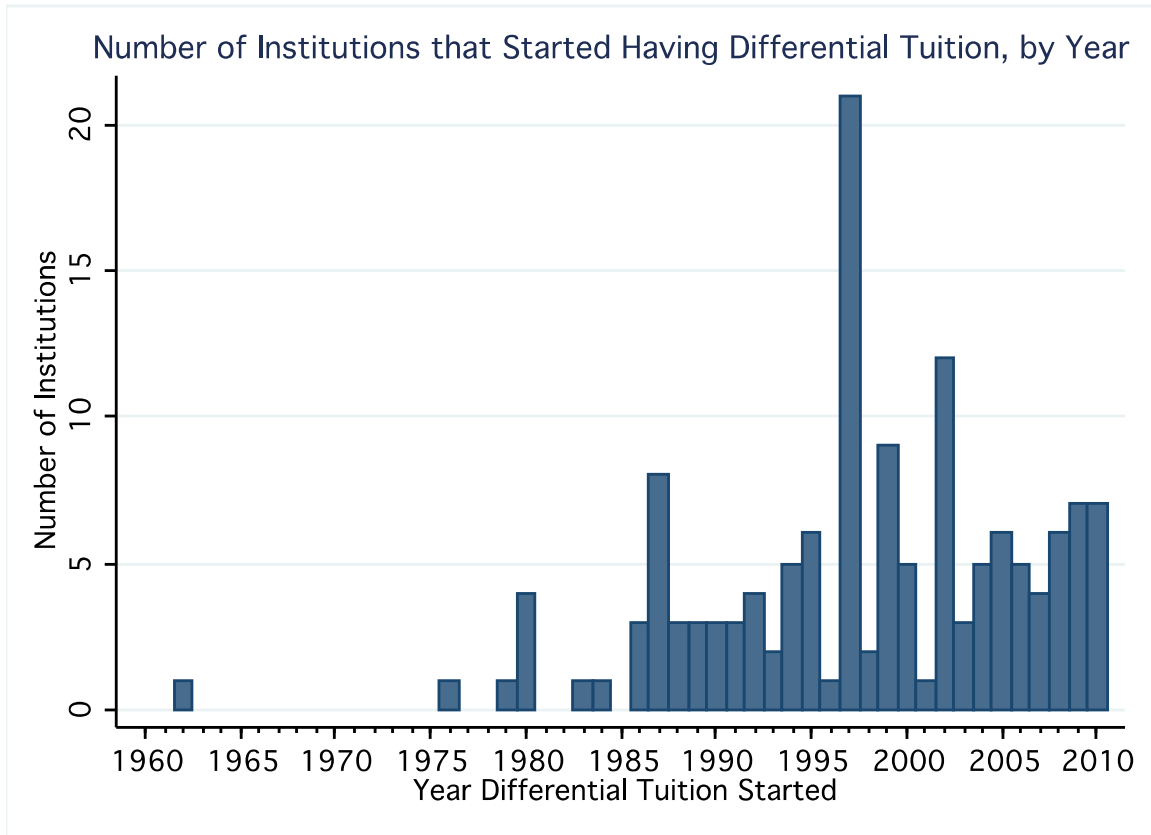
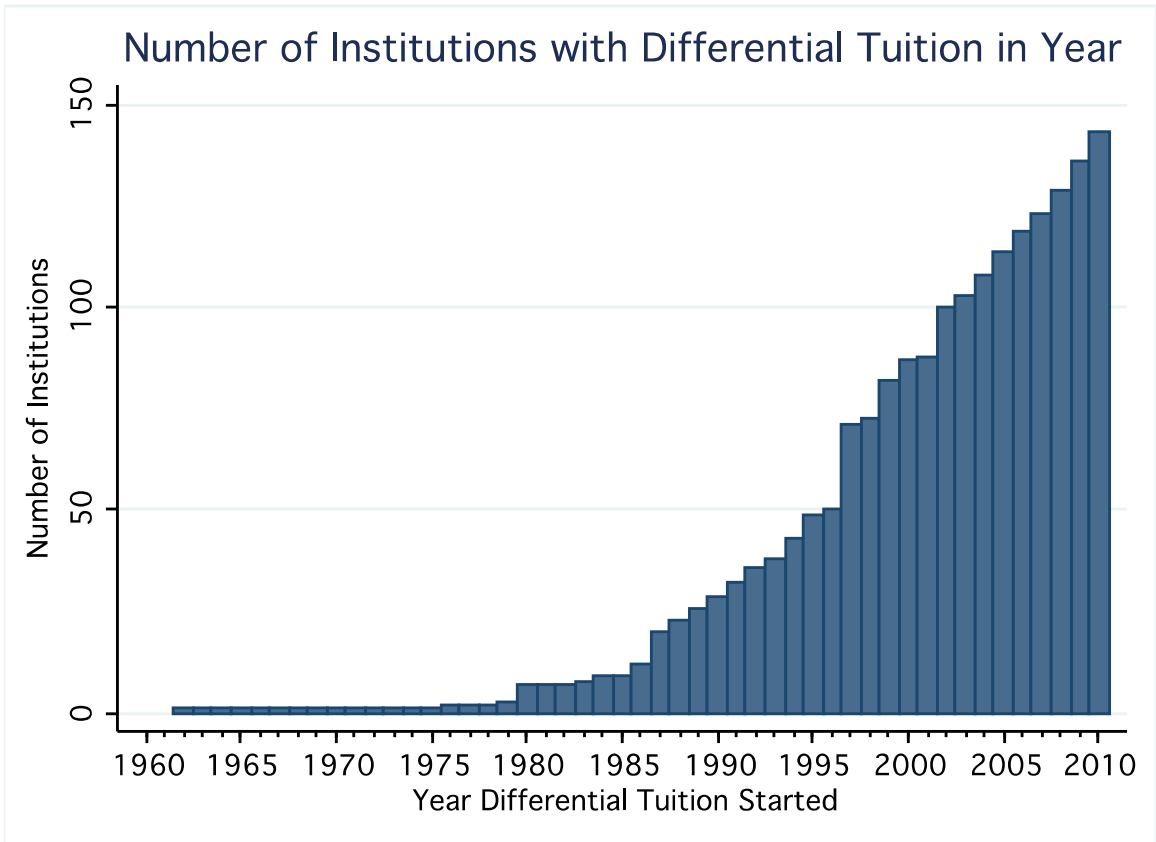


Figure 2



**Table 2**

**Public 4-Year Universities which charged differential fees or tuition for students in a particular year (lower division or upper division) or major (or for selected classes in a major) in 2010-2011**

(Source: Search of institutions' tuition/fees webpages)

University of Alabama in Huntsville  
University of Alabama  
University of South Alabama  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
University of Alaska Fairbanks  
University of Alaska Southeast  
Arizona State University  
University of Arizona  
University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
University of Arkansas  
Arkansas State University-Main Campus  
California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo  
University of Colorado Denver  
University of Colorado at Colorado Springs  
University of Colorado at Boulder  
Colorado State University  
University of Northern Colorado  
Colorado State University-Pueblo  
University of Georgia  
University of Hawaii at Hilo  
University of Hawaii at Manoa  
University of Idaho  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Ball State University  
Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis  
Indiana University-Kokomo  
Indiana University-South Bend  
Indiana University-Bloomington  
Indiana University-Southeast  
Indiana University-East  
Iowa State University  
University of Iowa  
University of Northern Iowa  
University of Kansas  
Kansas State University  
Pittsburg State University  
Washburn University  
Wichita State University

University of Kentucky  
Louisiana Tech University  
University of Louisiana Monroe  
University of Maine at Augusta  
University of Maine  
University of Massachusetts-Lowell  
University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth  
Eastern Michigan University  
Grand Valley State University  
Lake Superior State University  
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor  
Michigan State University  
Michigan Technological University  
University of Michigan-Dearborn  
University of Michigan-Flint  
Northern Michigan University  
Oakland University  
Saginaw Valley State University  
Wayne State University  
Western Michigan University  
Bemidji State University  
Metropolitan State University  
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities  
University of Minnesota-Duluth  
Saint Cloud State University  
Montana Tech of the University of Montana  
The University of Montana  
Montana State University-Northern  
The University of Montana-Western  
Great Basin College  
University of New Hampshire-Main Campus  
Rowan University  
Rutgers University - Camden  
Rutgers University - Main Campus  
Rutgers University - Newark  
University of New Mexico-Main Campus  
Northern New Mexico College  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
University of North Dakota  
North Dakota State University-Main Campus  
University of Cincinnati-Main Campus  
Cleveland State University  
Kent State University Salem Campus  
Ohio State University-Lima Campus  
Ohio State University-Mansfield Campus  
Ohio State University-Marion Campus

Ohio State University-Newark Campus  
Ohio State University-Main Campus  
Ohio University-Eastern Campus  
Ohio University-Chillicothe Campus  
Ohio University-Southern Campus  
Ohio University-Lancaster Campus  
Ohio University-Main Campus  
Ohio University-Zanesville Campus  
University of Toledo  
University of Central Oklahoma  
University of Oklahoma Norman Campus  
Oregon State University  
Portland State University  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Erie-Behrend College  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State New Kensington  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Shenango  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Wilkes-Barre  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Worthington Scranton  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Lehigh Valley  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Altoona  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Beaver  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Berks  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Harrisburg  
Pennsylvania State University-Brandywine  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Dubois  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Fayette- Eberly Campus  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Hazleton  
Pennsylvania State University - University Park  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Greater Allegheny  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Mont Alto  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Abington  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State Schuylkill  
Pennsylvania State University-Penn State York  
University of Pittsburgh-Bradford  
University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown  
University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus  
Temple University  
Clemson University  
Francis Marion University  
South Dakota State University  
University of Memphis  
University of Tennessee  
University of Houston  
Texas A & M University  
The University of Texas at Arlington  
The University of Texas at Austin



Texas Woman's University  
Utah State University  
University of Utah  
Castleton State College  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Marshall University  
West Virginia University Institute of Technology  
West Virginia University  
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Purdue University-Main Campus