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Carolina Covenant continues to impress

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Despite the state constitution's specific enjoinder that the "benefit of the University of North Carolina and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the state free of expense," the cost of attendance at UNC has been rising inexorably.

Tuition has gone up to cover budget deficits and the General Assembly's unwillingness to fulfill its fiduciary responsibility. Tuition has risen to increase the salaries of faculty members whose wages have lagged behind those of their colleagues at other institutions. Tuition has increased because the cost of a quality college education has gotten pricier, for a variety of reasons.

This academic year, the full cost of an education at UNC Chapel Hill has risen to nearly \$14,000 for an in-state student. That means the cost of going to Carolina simply has outpaced the ability of many families in this state to pay the bill. North Carolina, after all, despite its research parks and its increasing urbanization, remains poor -- with a median family income worse than 35 other states and more than \$5,000 below the national average.

It is to UNC Chapel Hill's great credit, then, that it continues to try to do something about the awful dichotomy of rising tuition costs and lowered ability to pay.

In his recent State of the University address, Chancellor James Moeser enunciated the most recent effort. Moeser announced the expansion of the Carolina Covenant program, which gives low-income students the opportunity to get a debt-free education at Carolina.

The Carolina Covenant made it possible for 225 students from low-income families to attend Carolina this year. All each of the students had to do was work 10 to 12 hours each week in a federal work-study job. After that, a combination of federal, state and university monies, along with private grants and scholarships, would pick up the difference, leaving the students' families debt-free after graduation.

By easing the financial requirements for qualification and adding and shifting resources to pay for it, the university will be able to enroll 120 more students in the program next year. That's an increase of 50 percent in the number of Carolina Covenant Scholars and means nearly 10 percent of next year's incoming freshman class will benefit from the program.

It will mean a class that is more diverse and a university that is more welcoming and more responsive to

its home state. In other words, everyone benefits.

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