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The Gettysburg Tuition Dilemma

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The Gettysburg Tuition Dilemma

Abstract

My project delves into the cost of attending Gettysburg College over the years and what exactly has caused tuition to increase such as new construction projects, increase in upkeep, among a variety of other factors such as enrollment.

Keywords

Tuition, Gettysburg College, Finance, Spending, Money

Disciplines

Education Economics | Higher Education

Comments

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The Gettysburg Tuition Dilemma(1970-2020)

By Jason Dubrasky

The Problem

Gettysburg College has long been a beacon of the individual education that a Liberal Arts institution ought to provide. It is fair to say that the rigor of its courses and schooling is not for the faint of heart and neither is its tuition and fees. As of the 2023-2024 academic year, the total amount that a traditional residential student pays at the college for their education at Gettysburg sits at \$79,760!¹ a tad higher than its original price of \$18.25 in 1840. such an alarmingly high number is sure to dent even the deepest pockets of tuition-payers. This begs the question; How did Gettysburg College tuition get so expensive? While it is difficult to pinpoint the answer over almost 200 years of history at the institution; the 1970s-Present Times offer the most modern answer to the modern problem.

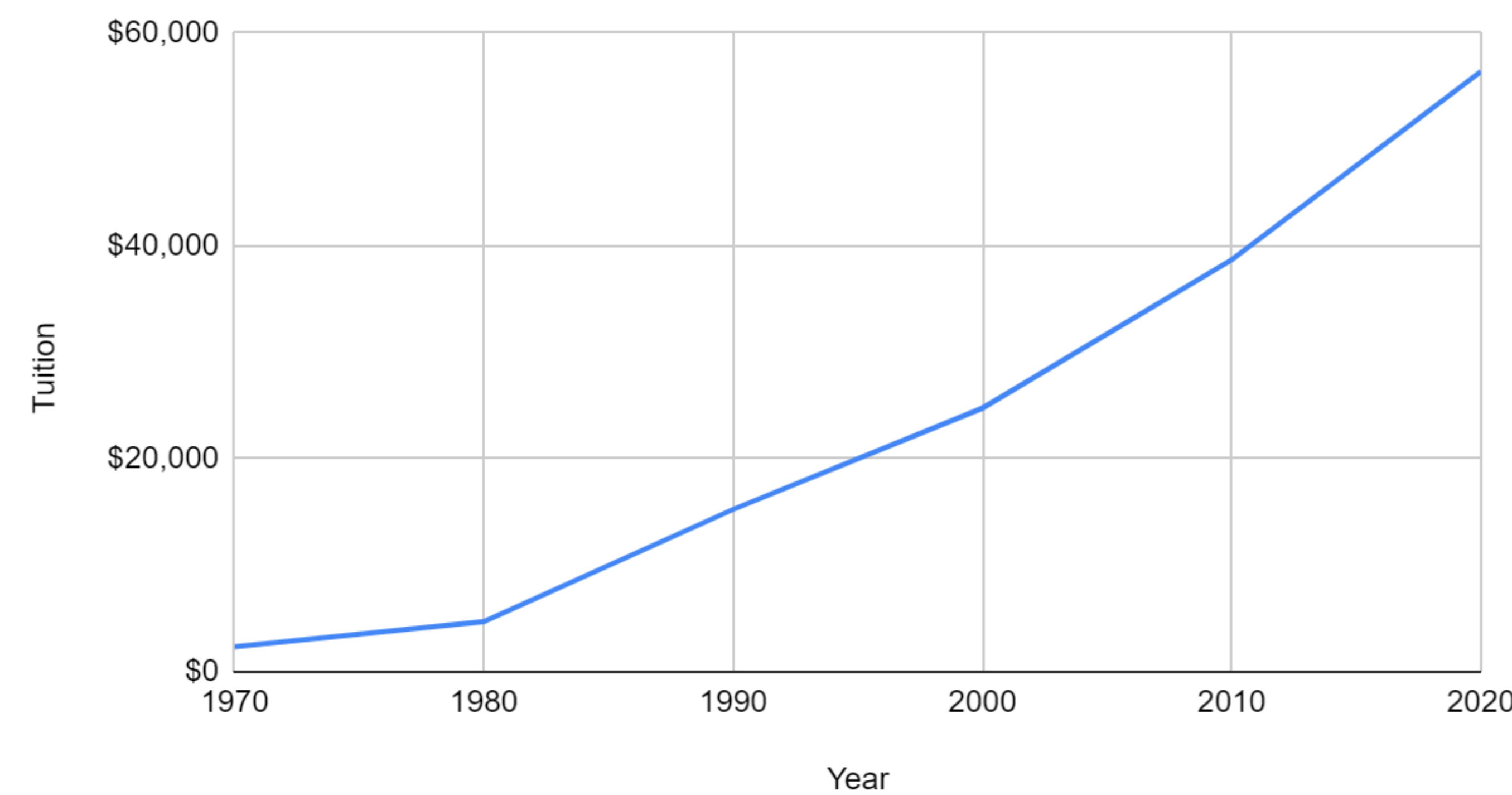
1970's

In 1970, Gettysburg College's tuition stood at \$2,350³ per year; more than double what it stood at just a decade prior. This decade was a rather precarious time at the college as it looked to expand, build, and reconstruct new projects with resources that the institution did not possess (in fact, Gettysburg was still paying off a forty-year loan amounting to \$3,280,000 that they took out between 1956-1958). The largest of which was the authorization of the construction of a new library in 1973. The library was set to cost Gettysburg \$5,000,000; a price well worth it to create a pristine and intricate center of education. On top of the project, the passing of Title IX just a couple of months prior required the college to improve facilities in Women's sports to match the quality of the men's programs. This entailed the hiring of more coaches, new jerseys, improved practice facilities, etc. To make fiscal matters even worse, the United States found itself in a recession between 1973-1975 which saw the inflation rate skyrocket to as high as 12.3% between 1974 and 1975. The college's response to such dire economic circumstances was rather peculiar as the institution surprisingly decreased tuition that academic year by \$102 from \$2,880 to \$2,778; the result saw a severe reduction in the budget of the college for the remainder of the decade. The construction of the library ended up seeing a six-year hiatus when it received donated funding from the Musselman Foundation. By the end of the decade, the college had completely reversed its handle on its tuition control.

The Outlook/Possible Solutions

As of the 2023-2024 academic year, tuition stands at \$64,230¹ while enrollment sits at 2,324 students³ which is over 300 students less than the highest enrollment of 2,635 in 2010. It seems that Gettysburg College has somewhat dialed back its control on tuition and has shifted its focus on possibly its ranking as an educational institution as is evident by the class of 2027 having the lowest acceptance rate in the college's history at just 48%. Without reinstated government funding tuition control or change in priorities and spending, lowered or even controlled tuition pricing may simply be a fantasy of the past as time moves on. Without a change, tuition pricing will undoubtedly follow the trend that it has in the prior fifty years leaving more and more Gettysburg Students reliant on financial aid to pursue an education that many have already been priced out of.

Gettysburg College Tuition 1970-2020



1980s

The 1980s were a financially unstable decade at the college. The particularly concerning issue affecting the college was its endowment fund during the decade which only yielded about two cents on the dollar in pure income⁵. To offset these costs and continue Gettysburg's quest to expand and improve its facilities, the college resorted to increasing the tuition to almost double of what it was approximately five years prior to \$4,720³. Most of the budget, approximately two-thirds, was derived from tuition which was double of the national average of one-third. This meant that Gettysburg College's elasticity towards its tuition was double that of the average college making the college's cost much more susceptible to sudden and abrupt changes due to increasing expansion costs, upkeep, or inflation than other institutions. The increased tuition allowed Gettysburg to pay for the upkeep and expansion and building of many of the facilities that currently make up the campus. One of the most influential of which being the expansion of the Gettysburg College dining hall, colloquially known as Servo, which involved the Grill on Lincoln and the Atrium dining center as well as numerous new seating areas needed to accommodate an influx of new students. The purchasing/construction of other buildings during the period such as common-interest housing and department-specific offices like Economics House and particularly the construction of the Civil War Institute and Constitution Hall added new upkeep, staffing, and housing costs that the college could only possibly afford with increased tuition.

2010s

The 2010s were a tumultuous time at Gettysburg College. Tuition had grown by about \$14,000 between 2000 and 2010 to a total of \$38,690³; despite the fact that enrollment actually increased by over 300 over the period. Perhaps the most glaring reason is the Great Recession. The Great Recession saw increased inflation rates and a severe cut in higher education funding by the United States government in an attempt to mitigate spending. The result of this was the remaining bill falling on the pockets of students and their families. Another factor that may bear responsibility was the completion of Gettysburg College's most expensive project to date: The completion of the Jaeger Center. The cost of undergoing the challenge was a sum of twenty-five million dollars. While the project resulted in new and improved facilities for the athletes of the institution such as a new swimming pool as well as the Robert Ortenzio Fitness Center it undoubtedly came with a hefty price that students ended up paying for in the long run. The rest of the decade was a slow-paced era for the college as it did not attempt to construct any new facilities or buildings. This was perhaps attributable to the road to recovery from the Great Recession as Gettysburg College attempted to control tuition given the new strenuous economic atmosphere.

1990s

The 1990s saw perhaps the largest ten-year tuition pricing increase in Gettysburg College's history as it watched its tuition skyrocket to \$15,260³ at the dawn of the decade. The 1990s also saw Gettysburg College fulfill the repayment of its 40-year loan which was used for the construction of the five dorms in the East and West Quads consisting of dorms such as Paul, Stine, Rice, Musselman, and Hanson. One of the particularly concerning trends was that although tuition increased by nearly 400% between 1980 and 1990, enrollment increased by 403³ new students between the decade. Traditionally, Gettysburg was able to keep its tuition pricing under control by expanding its enrollment to mitigate the impacts of inflation, higher upkeep costs, and the construction of new buildings. This decade marked the first time in Gettysburg's history that the method that they had used for 150 years had seemingly failed them. Expansion-wise the 1990s were a very stationary time at the college. No new projects or construction broke ground besides a couple of renovations on Glatfelter Hall that were completed in 1991 which included the installation of a new elevator and stairwell and a reconditioning of the top floor. Besides that, the only significantly new expense that the college incurred during the decade outside of basic upkeep was the hiring of additional faculty to accommodate the increase in enrollment.

2000s

The 2000s saw tuition grow only further as it stood at a shade under \$25,000 at \$24,761³ at the turn of the century. What is perhaps the most interesting facet of this decade is that it was the first ten-year period in the college's history that saw its enrollment actually decline³. This is important to note as it may explain part of Gettysburg's decision to up the tuition price perhaps to recover losses from a lower enrollment. Aside from just enrollment, the expansion that Gettysburg College undertook during the first ten years of the 21st century required a great deal of funding. This included the construction of West Hall, Corkran Hall, Hazlett Hall, Haaland Hall, and The Science Center⁴. The expansion and construction of the aforementioned residence halls allowed Gettysburg College to further support itself financially by providing itself with an increase in the capacity of students that the college would be able to accept and house leading to a greater enrollment. Additionally, Gettysburg College underwent a project that involved a complete renovation of the Majestic Theatre which alone cost the institution twenty million dollars from start to finish. The combination of stagnant enrollment and venturing into new construction projects left the institution with no choice but to raise tuition prices to fund its new expansions and renovations.