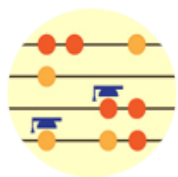


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Admissions and enrollment.

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Seton Hall U. Announces Merit-Based Tuition Cut

Tomato, to-mah-to. Tuition cut, merit aid.

Whatever you choose to call it, Seton Hall University announced (<http://www7.shu.edu/admissions/public-tuition-rate-program.cfm>) a new strategy on Wednesday that would lower its \$31,400 annual tuition rate for applicants who meet specific requirements. Starting next fall, the Catholic institution, in South Orange, N.J., will offer Rutgers University's current in-state tuition rate—about \$10,000 a year—to incoming freshmen who earned a 3.0 grade-point average or higher, ranked in the top 10 percent of their high-school class, and scored at least a 1200 on the SAT's math and reading sections, or a 27 on the ACT. To qualify, applicants must also apply by the university's December 15 nonbinding "early action" deadline.

"We're trying to make private education as affordable as a public one," said Alyssa McCloud, Seton Hall's vice president for enrollment management. "We're very conscious about the fact that there's a lot of confusion about bottom-line costs in education. We wanted to be part of the solution ... to make the bottom line more clear."

Moreover, the policy might just make Seton Hall appealing to more desirable applicants. Gabriel Esteban, Seton Hall's president, told The New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/29/nyregion/seton-hall-university-to-offer-steep-tuition-discounts.html>) that the policy "probably will help us in attracting a certain quality of students." Had the new policy been in place this year, 16 percent of the university's 1,000 freshmen would have qualified.

The new discount will not weaken Seton Hall's commitment to helping lower-income families, Ms. McCloud said. Students who qualify for the reduced rate would still receive need-based aid, if eligible. The university spent about \$60-million on aid this year, awarding about 40 percent on the basis of need.

Under the new program, students who enroll next fall will pay the reduced rate for all four years as long as they maintain at least a 3.0 grade-point average. The discounted rate would increase annually by 3 to 5 percent, pegged to Seton Hall's tuition increases, Ms. McCloud said.

On Wednesday, a few admissions experts suggested that Seton Hall's experiment might not cost the institution that much if the types of students who would qualify are already receiving the institution's hefty merit awards. To some degree, the discount might just be a new way of marketing what the university is already doing.

Nonetheless, some observers found the announcement interesting. "It does make the price more predictable for a lot of people," one financial-aid expert wrote to me in an email. "Maybe if other schools follow suit it will be a sign of the current discounting model falling apart and being replaced by something more straightforward."

David A. Hawkins, director of public policy and research for the National Association for College Admission Counseling, said Seton Hall's announcement might escalate the merit-aid debate. "Since research on the effectiveness of merit-aid policies on the fiscal health of the institution is anything but conclusive, and since there is heightened public scrutiny over the allocation of scarce institutional and federal aid dollars, institutions would be well-advised to make a move like this with caution," Mr. Hawkins wrote in an e-mail. "But market pressures, for students and for tuition revenue, tend to invite colleges to look for a way to get out in front of their competitors to set themselves apart."