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Isle colleges affordable, uncrowded

By Craig Gima

Despite charging the fifth-lowest tuition in the United States, Hawaii's community colleges lost significant enrollment between 2000 and 2005, according to a new report.

The 12.5 percent decline in enrollment put Hawaii community colleges second from the bottom among states in enrollment growth over the five-year period, according to the report from the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government.

The numbers come as no surprise to John Morton, University of Hawaii vice president for community colleges.

Morton said one of the main reasons community college enrollment declined is because of the low tuition.

"When your tuition is low and you can't cover the cost of the class with tuition, then you can't add classes," Morton said.

He said the Legislature provided additional funds to pay for more community college classes last year, which helped boost enrollment this fall by about 3 percent. Spring enrollment was up 8 percent over last year, Morton said.

The Board of Regents also approved a tuition increase in 2005 that will nearly double the cost of going to a community colleges by the fall of 2011.

For the coming fall semester, resident tuition is \$71 per credit, or about \$213 for a three-credit class. Tuition will increase to \$97 per credit in fall 2011. Tuition was \$49 a credit in 2005.

The higher tuition is also accompanied by an increase in financial aid, Morton said.

Community College Data

The Rockefeller Institute report on community colleges looked at a number of factors to compare states and their community college enrollment between 2000 and 2005, including:

- Tuition (for two years): U.S. average: \$2,017 Hawaii: \$1,395 Hawaii rank: 46
- Growth in enrollment over five years: U.S. average: +11.5% Hawaii -12.5% Hawaii rank: 47*
- Community college growth versus growth at public four-year universities: U.S. average: -1% Hawaii -37.2% Hawaii rank: 47*
- Community College share of college enrollment: U.S. average: 27.7% Hawaii 26.8% Hawaii rank: 20
- Population 18 and over attending community college: U.S. average: 2.8% Hawaii: 2.3% Hawaii rank: 25

* Information from two states was not available.

The Rockefeller Institute report compared community colleges in all 50 states.

The report suggests low tuition has some effect on enrollment at community colleges, but notes that some states with low tuition do not have high rates of enrollment.

In 2005, for example, Hawaii community college tuition would only have cost 1.5 percent of the median family income, second only to California with costs of 1.1 percent of the median.

But while 2.9 percent of everyone in the state 18 and older attended community college in California; only 1.4 percent of those 18 and older went to a community college in Hawaii.

Nationally, an average of about 27.7 percent of college students attend community colleges, the re-

port found. Hawaii is close to the national average with about 26.8 percent.d fuel state vehicles, and other information.