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Rising costs driving hordes of students out of college

Cuttack, Nov 30: There are a lot many students who are not in a position to afford exorbitant tuition fees, spiralling hostel charges and costly textbooks. Let's face it: Colleges are getting more and more expensive. Educational expenses are the largest single investment many families make. However, two out of every three students manage to get at least some financial aid to clear their college dues.

First-year engineering student Nikita Sahoo says, "This semester, I was unable to clear my tuition fees and I fear I will be kicked out."

She is one of the hundreds of students in different universities in the State who were unable to clear their dues in time. Many students have paid virtually nothing and have failed to respond to requests to contact the authorities. The rest have paid their fees in installments.

Darshan Dash belongs to the latter category. "My university has written to me several times demanding my fees and informing me that I cannot register next year. It regards me as someone who is unwilling to pay, but I can only afford half the fee," he says.

Suman Debi whose father is a farmer says, "I have always thought education should be a right, not a privilege, but I am not prepared to become a martyr and lose my place here. I have been doing really well and have passed all my exams. But I can't afford the exorbitant fee. People think engineering or medical students are all public school students, but there are many like me. My parents are trying their level best but such a costly education is becoming financially unviable for me," she rues.

Archita Sahoo, Counsellor of a university, says, "It is not a university's pol-

icy to chuck out students who haven't cleared their fees. We are prepared to help students who are in real difficulty. If a student seeking to re-register owes university some money his case must be considered in a just way."

"Students are offered a combination of grants, loans, scholarships, or work-study jobs to help sustain college costs. Don't ignore a college just because of its 'sticker price'. If a college is charging high fees, students of that college are also often given financial aid to help cover the extra cost," says Abid Ali Khan, Professor and Dean of Biju Patnaik Institute of Information Technology and Management Studies.

Looking for financial aid is probably not the way most teenagers want to spend their free time, says Reshmi Tripathy, Professor at the Eastern Academy of Science and Technology.