

## Editorial

# Universities face more competition

**A**n announcement last week by the University of Dayton is causing a stir around the country: The private Catholic university is promising prospective students that they will pay the same amount for each of the four years they attend.

In what is going to become a much more competitive race to attract students, this is the sort of innovative, consumer-oriented thinking that colleges will have to engage in to keep their enrollments up.

As demographics shift and people grow more wary of assuming large debts, traditional institutions are facing tremendous pressure.

The true price tag for college often is a mystery for families, thanks to the variables of financial aid and miscellaneous fees. So to remove that uncertainty, the University of Dayton will send letters to students that detail the cost for the full four years, and there won't be any hidden fees.

If tuition goes up, the school promises the freshmen of fall 2013 that their grants and scholarships will increase dollar for dollar.

These price quotes still might cause some sticker shock — tuition this coming fall at Dayton is \$35,800, which doesn't include room and board — but there's something to be said about having certainty and being able to budget ahead four years.

This is not an easy time for colleges. They are vying for a shrinking number of high-school graduates; experts predict that the number of graduating high-school seniors in Ohio will drop by an estimated 9 percent to 18 percent by 2021.

These students have an increasing number of higher-

education options, but at the same time, many are questioning college, having heard stories of graduates saddled with student-loan debt for years, with no viable career to help pay it off.

Also, every traditional college revenue source is hurting: alumni gifts, research money, state funding and investment earnings. Because of these challenges, Moody's Investors Service this month issued a negative outlook for the next 12 to 18 months for the higher-education sector.

There's pressure building from technology, too. Colleges are viewing what they call "MOOCs," or massive open online courses, with some trepidation. Services such as Udacity, edX and Coursera offer people around the world free college classes online from the nation's top universities.

These classes generally don't yet count toward degrees, and the founders are still looking for ways to make the business model work. But judging by the millions who have registered with these services, and the tens of thousands around the world who sign up for the most popular classes, it's a safe guess that this technology will be a part of education's future.

Traditional colleges are just as necessary as ever, but evolution seems inevitable. The way forward for them is to focus on what people want and need, and to adjust creatively.

