

FINANCIAL WOES:

the uncertainty of it all

Possibly as few as seven days from now, state representatives in Salem will make a decision that could significantly change what it's like for a student to go to school here in the next two years. They will set aside a certain amount of money to pay for Oregon's next two years of higher education. Instructors and administrators are afraid the allotted sum won't be enough to provide education for students at an adequate level. And if the sum isn't enough, the student will be the loser.

That sum, called the biennial budget, is determined every two years by legislators in Salem. How it is determined is a lengthy process.

The Oregon State Board of Higher Education, which controls all of the four-year universities and colleges in the state, first submits a set money amount to the Legislature as a proposal for what is needed in the coming two years.

Oregon Governor Tom McCall then submits what is called the Governor's Budget, which is advice to the legislators for what the State Board's budget should be.

After the State Board's budget and McCall's advice to the Legislature are submitted, the legislators start to work. Most of the research and study done on the budget by the state representatives is done in the Senate-House Joint Ways and Means Committee. That committee reports to both the Senate and House. Then, the House and Senate vote on the budget. This vote is usually taken in late May or early June.

When the vote is taken, the budget decision is made, and instructors and administrators around the state must hurriedly plan for the coming fall. They have a little more than two months to decide on what money is going where.

This year, the State Board proposed a two-year budget to the Legislature amounting to \$176.5 million.

Gov. McCall recommended the amount be \$154.3 million.

And the legislators in Joint Ways and Means are still studying what the amount should be.

Legislators and administrators are predicting that the budget sum will be voted upon by mid-May, less than two weeks away.

So, what are instructors and administrators doing at the present time? The answer: they're just waiting.

However, waiting breeds speculation. Students as well as instructors and administrators realize that money is tight at the Oregon Legislature. Attempts to tax Oregon citizens more have failed. And other methods of raising money have been tried. To no avail.

Knowing this, students are speculating about next year. To them, if the sum upon which the Legislature decides is not enough, it could mean:

- Fewer TAs for classes.
- Courses offered less often.
- Sequences offered every other year.
- Poorer service for students in the Student Health Center, the University Counseling Center, the Student Employment Service, the University Placement Service and the three museums on campus.

Graduate students are also speculating. If the money upon which the Legislature decides isn't enough, the number of teaching assistantships given to graduate students could be cut.

And instructors are speculating. They don't like what they see, either. The University Dean of Faculties has asked each department, school and college on campus to predict where they would cut back their programs if the budget decided by the Legislature is 5 per cent lower than this year's operating budget.

To many instructors, this request has only created tension, because they feel that

their departments don't even have enough money to work with now. A 5 per cent budget cut would just aggravate this situation, they say.

Administrators are speculating too, but they say they're not as worried as everyone else is. They say that if the Legislature decides on an amount which is close to what McCall recommended, the University will suffer minimally.

But administrators are also informally discussing what would happen if the Legislature cuts the budget by 10 per cent.

They feel, however, that extreme worry on the part of students, graduate students and instructors is mere over-reaction. The ratio of students per instructor will not be much worse, and the overall quality of education won't be noticeably slighted, administrators say.

They will admit, though, that the amount of money spent per student by the University will decline as it has in the past 10 years.

So, while everyone is waiting, everyone is also speculating. And the speculation is not very hopeful.

When the Legislature decides on the Oregon higher education budget later this month, all of the questions that students and instructors have been plagued with will be answered.

And from the speculation on campus, it looks as if no one will really like those answers.

