

State won't commit to higher education

BUDGET: The Legislature avoided slashing the budget for higher education, but the figures are still falling short

By Landon Hall
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon's higher education system is about to snap a six-year financial losing streak. But the state's seven public colleges and universities aren't in the mood to celebrate.

The state Legislature's contribution to higher education has been on the decline since 1991, a year after voters passed the Measure 5 property-tax cut. The slide continued until three weeks ago, when the Senate approved a \$1.9 billion budget that included a two-year freeze on undergraduate in-state tuition and limited salary increases for faculty members.

By legislative standards, the budget was a landslide winner, passing by a unanimous vote. Many lawmakers praised the budget, saying they had turned the corner on supporting college students in Oregon.

But higher education observers say lawmakers have only stopped the bleeding, not treated the wound.

Following up on the gory analogy, Oregon State University political science professor Bill Lunch said the state falls woefully short in its commitment to students.

"We've had Legislatures that

have successively chopped off various limbs, either with surgical procedures or an ax," Lunch said. "I'm glad we're not losing as many fingers and toes this year, but it's not a budget that restores much of anything."

Since 1990, Oregon State has had to cut several programs, and students are taking their business elsewhere: Enrollment has dropped from about 16,500 in 1990 to 14,000 this year.

If the House approves the Senate budget, the state's share of the higher education pie will be \$577 million, up by about 10 percent from the previous budget. Schools make up most of the rest from tuition, fees and federal funds.

But the state's contribution has dwindled from about 14 percent of the general fund in 1989 to 7 percent today.

Sen. Tom Hartung, who as a member of the Ways and Means Committee helped draw up the higher education budget, acknowledges the current contribution isn't nearly enough.

"Because we disinvested for such a long time, we have a lot of catching up to do," the Beaverton Republican said.

Hartung said the budget will be augmented with separate increases for engineering programs and new educational technology.

John Moseley, Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Oregon, said program cuts might be on the way unless

the state comes up with more funding next session.

"While this is the best budget we've seen in a long time, it still leaves the University of Oregon at the lowest level we've seen in our peer institutions," Moseley said.

Oregon belongs to the American Association of Universities, a group of 30 institutions. Of those schools, Oregon is 29th in terms of financial commitment from its state Legislature.

The University took in \$100.3 million in tuition and fees in 1996, and \$44.8 million from state allocations. That's a state contribution of 31 percent of total revenues.

Contrast that with the University of Florida. Despite a much larger enrollment, Gator students paid out \$89 million in tuition last year, while the Florida Legislature contributed \$416 million or 82 percent.

Only Colorado University fared worse than Oregon, with 29 percent of its budget coming from the state.

Students will get some relief with the tuition freeze, which Gov. John Kitzhaber had sought after an 80 percent increase over the past six years. Tuition at the University of Oregon is \$3,540 for undergraduates.

Denyse Moore, a graduating senior at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, said the tuition freeze will help students make ends meet.

"I think that's a first step," said Moore, a 21-year-old speech communications major. "Students are having a heck of a time with loans. Now they can start catching up."

Observers are more concerned about faculty salaries. The Senate's budget would raise salaries 2 percent across the board. Educators say 3 to 4 percent is needed to keep the best faculty from leaving the state.

"We run the serious risk of losing the talents and ideas of many of our valuable and experienced teachers as they move to states that recognize their value," said Joseph Cox, chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education.

Full professors in Oregon earn an average salary of \$60,900 per year, compared to \$70,900 in Washington state. All faculty members make an average of \$46,800, about \$14,600 less than the average among the 30 schools in the Association of American Universities.

Hartung hopes the latest budget proposal represents a trend toward increased financing for higher education.

"I expect our economy to continue to grow, so I expect there will be additional funds," he said. "Of course, it won't be at the level people in higher education think it should be. It never will be."

New proposal would protect privacy of Web users

INTERNET: Computer companies are developing a format to limit the automatic sending of personal information to Web site operators

By David E. Kalish
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Netscape Communications Corp. and other high-tech companies plan to propose a global standard to protect the privacy of World Wide Web users while sharpening the ability of marketers to target them.

The companies planned to announce a common format on Tuesday that would enable Web surfers to stop personal information from being sent automatically from their personal computers to Web site operators.

The proposal seeks to ease privacy advocates' worries that personal information is

gathered by Web site operators without computer users' approval.

Web site computers now have the ability to plant nuggets of information — known as "cookies" in Web parlance — into a user's PC.

When users first visit a Web site, they may give their name and other personal information. The Web site computer stores that information in the user's hard-drive so that during the next visit to the site it will retrieve the cookie and greet the user by name.

But that same technology can do much more. It can track which Web sites are visited, what pages are looked at, even a user's hobbies, then link the data to people's names and addresses. Site owners can sell the information to advertisers and other interested parties, without the consent or knowledge of users.

Under one possible application of the new system, people who visit Web sites could see a box pop up that asks them to specify what information they want to share. For example, a user can specify that his or her name and electronic mail address be available but no personal hobbies.

In addition, each time a new site is visited the Web surfer would be told what personal information is being requested and can opt to block it.

The method aims to help marketers target people more efficiently. For example, "junk" e-mail would only be sent to those Web users potentially interested in a specific product.

Internet businesses hope that making users more confident and secure about the data they send online will boost their use of the Internet for buying products.

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