Budget: College students will pay a higher percentage of education expenses

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Education and General Program appropriations increased 4 percent, or $22 million, from the 2003-05 appropriations, but funding is still down 11 percent, or $51.9 million, from the 2001-03 biennia.

An Executive Summary issued by Oregon University System shows that the students' share of higher education costs of over the next two years is 55 percent, compared to 41 percent in 1999-2001, an increase of 14 percent. The state's share of higher education costs has fallen from 51 percent in 1999-2001 to 35 percent over the next two years, a decrease of 16 percent.

Rep. Vicki Walker, (D-Eugene) called the legislature's biggest disappointment the inability to come together on education funding issues.

Funding to the Oregon Opportunity Grant was increased in an effort to aid college affordability. The grant started in 1970 as Oregon's primary financial aid program to improve college affordability for all eligible students and, for the first time, will allow part-time students access to the grant.

The 77 percent increase will cover up to 11 percent of the total college costs for an additional 11,000 full-time and 4,000 part-time resident undergraduates at public institutions.

"This was certainly one of the successes," Saunders said.

Overall, 2005-07 General Fund Budget increased education spending 5.2 percent or $35 million over the 2003-2005 budget. This is down 8.1 percent or $61.9 million from the 2001-03 budget.

"We have a long way to go before we get back to the 1999-2001 levels," Saunders said.

OUS was also looking for enrollment funding increases, something the education budget has not seen since 1999-2001.

"OUS was hoping for funds for increased enrollment because universities are not providing state allocations for each student. We're up 8,000 students since the last enrollment allocation." These enrollment appropriations fund the costs of having more students on campus.

Statewide public services programs and capital construction funds, covered in the General Budget, saw the largest increased investment at $410 million.

The University of Oregon will receive $26.65 million for capital construction projects over the next biennia, the largest state-funded bond investment in 30 years.

"OUS is pleased about the construction budget, it's the best increase we've seen in the past couple decades. This budget will allow for campuses to address critical issues," Saunders said.

One project affected by this increase is Campaign Oregon: Transforming Lives, a $600 million fundraising effort to bring investment capital to the University.

University President Dave Frohnmayer calls Campaign Oregon "the most important legacy of my UO presidency."

Other building projects impacted include allocations of $19.4 million to the College of Education complex, $3.95 million for the James F. Miller Theatre Complex and $3.3 million for Gilbert Hall at the University's Lundquist College of Business.

Chris Coughlin, executive director of the Our Oregon Coalition, a statewide alliance of more than 100 organizations in Oregon, said the coalition's main concern with the Legislative session was a balance of priorities.

"We're concerned that legislature continued to expand tax loopholes for corporations while they ignored increases in education investment since the 2001 budget," Coughlin said. "While they did not take steps backward, we still want to be moving forward. These steps are still a long way from providing what's needed."

Coughlin said she would have liked to see an increase in the minimum $10 corporate tax as well as a 10 cent increase in cigarette taxes.

"These should have been done so more money could have been put into education," Coughlin said. "The higher education budget's Opportunity Grant funding is the biggest change, but I still don't think that we have enough slots for children to start with what they need (nor does) higher education have what they wanted."

Our Oregon advocates for "stable and adequate funding for public services while ensuring efficient use of taxpayer dollars," according to its mission statement.

A statistical compilation of Oregon state and federal tax distribution done by Citizens for Oregon's Future shows that universities and colleges are allocated 3.8 percent of the combined local, state and federal tax dollars. National defense accounts for 11.1 percent (excluding veterans' benefits) and 12.5 percent goes to Social Security.

Oregon Education Association President Larry Wolf said he was disappointed by the difference in funding allocated for K-12 in comparison to what the Legislator's Quality Education Model said the state would need to provide quality education for Oregon students.

"The $5.24 (billion) appropriated will be a number that will hurt a lot of schools in Oregon," Wolf said. In an interview Wolf discussed the Legislature's Quality Education Model that they use to judge how much money the state will need in K-12 appropriations to pay for quality instructors, materials and general resources for schools. The 2005-2007 QEM set the budget at $7.1 billion.

"I'd go along with the QEM model if I were to say how much money schools should have received," Wolf said, "the money just wasn't there. But ideally, Legislature should strive to meet the QEM."

Recognizing low salaries for Oregon faculty and staff, Legislature gave $1 million "to support recruitment and retention efforts related to losses of top faculty in recent years," according to the Executive Summary 2005-07 OUS Budget. This is in addition to a 2 percent salary increase in the next two academic years. The 2003-05 budget set a salary freeze for faculty and staff.

"Legislature recognized salaries are too low, but funding just wasn't there," Saunders said. "It's a disappointment because that $1 million won't add up to much once it's divided by seven," the number of universities are in OUS.

Campus Public Services funding took a cut. The Universities Labor Education Research Center will feel the effects of this $1 million cut, as well as a population studies programs at Portland State University and the Small Business Development Centers at Southern Oregon University and Eastern Oregon University.

Supplies and Services saw a $3.4 million cut from all OUS universities.

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IN BRIEF

Education board expands Executive MBA program

At its Aug. 5 meeting, the State Board of Higher Education approved a plan to move the Oregon Executive MBA program from its current home in Beaverton, Ore., to a more accessible location in downtown Portland.

The program, which has been in place for 21 years, allows working professionals in or near Oregon's largest population center to study for their MBAs on a schedule that accommodates their working lifestyles.

The board has signed off on a 10-year lease for a 10,391 space on the 200 Market Place Building for the program.

The OEMBA program is a joint effort of the University of Oregon, Oregon State University and Portland State University. The three major universities collaborate in curriculum development and faculty selection for the program.

In the same meeting, the Board also authorized Southern Oregon University to develop and establish a course of study that would allow educators to study for their Initial Administrator License. Furthermore, the board discussed long-term planning strategies and fixed tuition rates for the 2005-06 school year.

— Gabe Bradley

Clouds keep Discovery shuttle aloft extra day

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Low clouds kept shuttle Discovery and its crew of seven from making their much-anticipated return to Earth, and NASA vowed to bring the spacecraft down Tuesday in Florida, California or possibly even New Mexico.

"We will attempt to land somewhere," flight director LeRoy Cain said after Monday morning's two unsuccessful landing attempts.

The delay disappointed the astronauts' families, who were waiting at Kennedy Space Center for their loved ones' return after nearly two stressful weeks in orbit.

It is the first shuttle flight since Columbia's catastrophic re-entry in 2003, and the mission experienced a series of problems that required emergency spacewalk repairs and constant engineering analysis.

More cloudy weather was expected at Kennedy Space Center on Tuesday with a chance of rain, but it remained NASA's first choice for an early morning touchdown. Edwards Air Force Base in California's Mojave Desert was the next choice, followed by the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico, the absolute last resort.

New study examines euthanasia in Netherlands

CHICAGO — A study released Monday sheds new light on euthanasia in the Netherlands, the first country to legalize it for terminally ill people, finding that nearly one in eight adult patients who requested mercy killings decided not to go through with it. Nearly half of the euthanasia requests were carried out.

The study comes at a time of heightened scrutiny of euthanasia — especially in the Netherlands, where officials acknowledged last year that they had carried out mercy killings of terminally ill newborns.

Belgium has since enacted a euthanasia law similar to the Netherlands. In the United States, Oregon is alone in allowing physician-assisted suicide, but its law is expected to be argued before the U.S. Supreme Court this fall.

The study, appearing in Monday's Archives of Internal Medicine, consists of a survey completed by 3,614 Dutch general practitioners who were asked to describe the most recent request for euthanasia they received during the previous year.

—The Associated Press

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