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45°

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Tuesday, January 30, 2001

Funding restrictions may hurt Kent State

By Dave Schafer
Daily Kent Stater

COLUMBUS: It looks like higher education is getting more funding in Gov. Taft's proposed budget, but Kent State may not see many of those dollars.

The governor unveiled his two-year budget for Ohio yesterday. These suggestions from the governor will be approved by the Ohio General Assembly after the details are haggled over and changes are made.

As the budget stands now, the big pot that Kent State receives 39 percent of its state funds from is going to take a hit, increasing by less

than the rate of inflation. The money being moved from that pot will go to schools that focus on research, development and commercialization of nano-, bio- and information technology.

The science and technology programs given the extra money focus on "the piston that moves the engine of Ohio's economy," President Carol Cartwright said. "We've been working with those challenges."

Cartwright said the university will benefit from the research done at the Liquid Crystal Institute and the Institute for Cyber Information. Kent State also has the second most Ohio Instructional Grant students in the state.

"We'll see our fair share" of the research money, Cartwright said.

While Kent State has the Liquid Crystal Institute, Ohio State and the University of Cincinnati are considered the "premier" technology-research schools in the state. They are expected to take large chunks of the money.

As a source close to the Board of Regents said, Taft's proposal for funding higher education is like "robbing Peter to pay Peter."

Ohio universities were expecting a much bigger increase in the generic chunk of money that is divvied up among universities, said Pat Myers, director of government relations for Kent State.

Late last semester, the Board of Regents, the lobbying group for Ohio public universities, told the state how much it thought universities would need to run smoothly.

Included in that recommendation was a more than 5 percent increase in each of the next two years into that big chunk of money. That chunk, along with tuition, makes up the majority of the funding for teaching and administration.

Taft's proposal calls for only a 2 percent increase in each of the next two years. David Creamer, Kent State's vice president of business and finance, said with enrollment growth over

that time, the increase actually comes out as less than 2 percent.

Because the generic money coming in from the state is so low, the only additional money Kent State can expect for its day-to-day operations will most likely come from tuition, Creamer said.

A tuition increase is likely to make up for the lack of state funds.

The university's overall education and instruction will suffer because of the 2 percent increase, said Jim McCollum, executive director

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Restrictions: Funding may affect Kent State

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of the Inter-University Council. The council is an association representing Ohio's 13 public universities and two freestanding medical colleges.

The only way to get more money is to get better at what Taft has prioritized.

To get the specialized funds Taft's big initiative focuses on, the university must reach certain plateaus in research or academic standards. This continues a four-year trend toward specializing where funds for higher education go.

Tim Keen, assistant director of the Ohio office of budget and management, says the idea of these initiatives is to achieve targeted objectives that the governor believes will help the economy of Ohio.

Keen says these specialized initiatives will not force universities to change their directives.

"By far, the largest state support is unrestricted aide," he said. "We are talking about the edges here. I don't necessarily think we are shaping the way the universities proceed."

But by putting more money in the specialized initiatives, the money is taken from the unrestricted funds.

And the amount of unrestricted funds Taft is proposing "isn't enough to solve Ohio's (higher education) problems," McCollum said.

Cartwright said what's in the budget doesn't even cover the "miniature expenses of the university."

"We're pleased with the priority of higher education (given by Taft), but there are some specific things that we need to work through legislature," she said.

Sen. Eric Fingerhut, D-Cleveland, said he feels the state has underfunded higher education for some time.

"For a number of years we've talked a good game," he said, "but we talk about investing a dollar and we invest a dime.

"They (the governor's administration) put good adjectives behind it, but not the money."

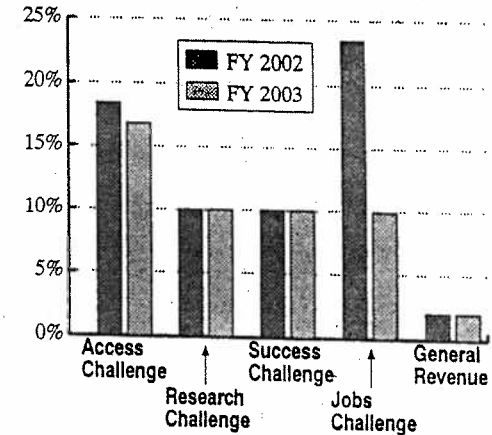
But the news is not all bad.

Kent State will benefit from some of Taft's increased spending for specialized programs that contribute to "state goals," particularly the programs for the regional campuses.

But Creamer said not to worry yet because the state is still in the early stages of approving a budget.

Uneven growth in funding?

Taft's proposed budget shows his priority to increase funding for "challenge programs" instead of giving money to universities' general funds. Challenge programs require universities to reach certain standards to get money.



- **Access Challenge** funding is provided to allow Access campuses to hold tuition flat for the next two years.
- **Research Challenge** funding is provided to reward universities for attracting external research dollars to their campuses.
- **Success Challenge** funding is provided to encourage universities to serve at-risk students in meeting the academic standards leading to graduation and to reward universities for student completion of undergraduate programs on a timely basis.
- **Jobs Challenge** funding is provided to support expansion of the non-credit and other custom designed training requested by industry and businesses.
- **General Revenue** funding is the "generic pot" all universities dip into when getting state funds. It is the largest form of funding the universities get from the state.

SOURCE: State of Ohio Executive Budget Graphic by Jamie Wells/Daily Kent Stater

Next the budget proposal will be reviewed by the Ohio General Assembly.

The Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate will come up with their own versions of the budget. Then they will meet

to work out a final version, which is then submitted to the governor for final approval.

Approval of the final budget is expected in late June or July.

Andy Netzel contributed to the reporting of this story.