

Lowered hopes for higher education

Budget plans would include tuition hikes, job cuts, pay freezes

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When the state Senate and House released their proposed budgets Monday and Tuesday, they delivered a cold blast of bad news to Washington universities and community colleges.

Ten thousand college slots could be cut, the Senate's budget said — about 4 percent of total slots. Salaries would be frozen and 2,500 jobs possibly eliminated. Tuition would increase by at least 7 percent at the four-year colleges, and possibly 14 percent if some university leaders get their way. That translates to \$952 extra annually for resident undergraduates at four-year colleges.

All this, the Senate budget states, "when tens of thousands of Washingtonians are seeing their jobs lost, their wages cut and their college savings dwindle."

On Thursday, the only good news Ann Daley, executive director of the state's Higher Education Coordinating Board, could muster was that very low-income students wouldn't lose work study grants. Middle-class students, she lamented, would be further squeezed.

"Ours ... is a very well-educated population that's going to be aging out of the work force," Daley said. "When we compare ourselves to other states and

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other nations, we're behind."

Compared with other states' budgets, Washington is also behind. Michigan, widely considered the epicenter of the recession, has proposed cutting 3 percent of its higher education budget. In Washington, four-year schools could lose between 10 percent and 17 percent.

In the last two years, Daley and her staff have been tasked with increasing the number of Washington state residents attending college.

"That would be an ambitious goal under normal times," she said. "Now, we're stepping back

a good decade in terms of funding levels."

Daley has seen dips in state revenue in the 1970s, '80s and '90s. In the recession of the early 1980s, higher education took about a decade to recover, she said.

This time, the recession was "sudden and deep," she said, the worst she's seen.

Woes at WSUV

Hal Dengerink, chancellor at Washington State University Vancouver, said the campus has spent years planning for an electrical engineering program. But the proposed House capital budget designated no funds for the program's anticipated building.

And he's worried about serv-

ing as many students with less money. The state pays for part of a student's education; tuition covers the rest.

"If all we get to teach them with is tuition," Dengerink said, "then I'm in trouble."

At WSU Vancouver, there are 200 slots for next year's freshmen. The university received 340 applications — a huge increase over last year, Dengerink said. He believes that's because more students are choosing to stay home to attend college to save the cost of relocating.

That's this year. Next year, Dengerink believes cuts may be deeper.

"The state used stimulus dollars for part of the coming year, to cover our expenses," he said. "The money goes away in the second year, with no plan of

what they're going to do."

Clark impact

Students at Clark College and the state's other community and technical colleges are sure to face significant changes by next autumn.

State funding reductions of 9 percent and 13 percent are proposed under the Senate and House budget plans, respectively. That would be partially offset by higher tuition rates for students, who would pay 5 percent to 7 percent more.

Those students also will likely find more crowded classrooms, where instructors have voluntarily agreed to increase their load. They could find longer waiting lists for a seat in a popular class because few, if any, new class sections will be added.

Heavily sought courses, such as English 101 or psychology 101, could be pushed from the classroom to online-only learn-

ing.

Other classes, or entire academic programs, may be on the chopping block.

"Broadly, what it means is, there's going to be more on the table for reductions," said Bob Williamson, administrative services vice president at Clark.

Previously, Clark reduced 4.3 percent of current year spending by trimming travel and other administrative expenses.

Campus officials have already calculated what reductions between \$2.9 million and \$3.6 million (from a \$48.5 million budget in 2008-09) might look like. Now, they await legislators' action.

Administrators have solicited ideas and suggestions online from employees. Clark will hold four open campus forums between April 8 and 14 to hear directly from faculty members, staff and students.

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BUDGET IMPACTS

■ **Pell Grants:** The federal Pell Grants will increase from a maximum of \$4,731 a year to \$7,133 if students attend all four quarters during the school year.

■ **Washington Scholars:** House and Senate budgets cut off the coveted, full-ride scholarships, after this year. Current scholars will continue receiving award money.

■ **College Bound scholarships:** The House proposed a \$7.4 million contribution to future tuition payments for current, low-income middle school students. The Senate would send no money to the program.

■ **Clark College financial aid:** Every year, 3.5 percent of tuition dollars go to the Clark College financial aid office. That money — and increased Pell Grant money — means the college will be able to give more financial aid. Karen Driscoll, head of financial aid at the college, said applications for assistance are up 20 percent over last year.