

Biennial budget to increase 16%

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Despite a small decline in enrollment, the university's state-appropriated budget for the next two years will increase 16 percent, \$31 million, because the Legislature allotted more money to higher education.

The university will receive \$99.4 million for year 2000 and \$100.7 million for 2001, compared to \$168.5 during the last biennium. University President Robert Witt cautioned that while there is an increase as

Legislature approves \$200.1 million for university; bill sent to governor's office

compared to the 1998-99 budget, an exact percent increase comparison shouldn't be made because some of the increased funds must be used for specific purposes. Witt also said the state allocation is only a portion of the university's total budget.

"Overall, I am very pleased with the legislators' efforts to support higher education

and believe that with the resources provided by the Legislature, UT Arlington will be able to make significant progress in the upcoming biennium," he said.

Dr. Witt said he expects to receive budget preparation guidelines and a draft budget from the UT System Wednesday, or perhaps late today.

A state budget approved by the Legislature allotted universities an additional \$433.6 million for 2000-01, awaits Gov. George W. Bush's signature.

Sen. Bill Ratliff, R-Mt. Pleasant, who chaired the Senate Finance Committee, said the university will also receive \$9 million to be used for capital improvements. He said the resources were provided by moving the university, and five others, to another fund. Currently, the university participates in the

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Permanent University Fund, a state fund that is dependent on the oil industry. That fund has provided less money; as a result, universities in that fund have received fewer resources for capital improvements.

Universities that participate in the state's Higher Education Assistance Fund have received steadier funding. This session, legislators moved the university into the HEAF fund, increasing its state capital improvements allocation by \$3.2 million per year.

"We tried to bring some equity to UTA, UTEP (UT El Paso), UT Dallas, UT San Antonio, UT Permian Basin and UT Tyler through the HEAF fund," Ratliff said. "Those schools were getting the short end for some years because they were not in HEAF, but they didn't participate fully in PUF."

A larger tax pool created by a strong economy and a \$1.9 billion tobacco settlement provided more funding for legislators to allocate. Higher education institutions, including community colleges, universities and health science centers saw a net increase of \$940.9 million.

"We had more money to spend, and one of the highest priorities was education," Ratliff said.

One priority for legislators was to have more professors teaching lower-division classes than graduate students, he said.

"We did continue an increased incentive for putting professors instead of graduate students in the classroom," he said. "The formula rewarded higher education institutions for putting graduate students in classrooms; we're trying to reverse that trend."

Ratliff said in the 1998-99 budget, higher education institutions received a 5 percent bonus when tenured or tenure-track professors taught classes. In the coming budget, he said, that incentive increases to a 15 percent bonus.

"I think it's just a presumption that if you're paying \$50,000 for a professor, we hope that the professor is better," he said.

As for faculty salary increases, the Legislature did not provide for those specifically this session, Ratliff said.

"Administrators would probably still tell you that we're not as competitive as our peer states with regard to faculty salary increases," he said, adding that staff, however, will see a pay increase.

All non-faculty state employees will receive an additional \$100 per month, he said.

Witt said, in addition to the staff pay raises, faculty and staff will receive merit raises funded by the university.

The university also received an additional \$1 million for the two-year period for the Automation and Robotics Research Institute.

Engineering Dean Ron Bailey said ARRI has had a \$600 million-plus impact on the Metroplex since its 1997 creation.

"I think the assistance they provide to both small and large companies is very valuable to the economic development of this community and to the outreach of this university," he said.