University, students won't escape budget ax

Just how hard the budgetary ax will fall on higher education in the state and nation has yet to be determined. But one thing is certain—the ax is falling; and when it does, no institution will escape unscathed.

Richard Eakin, executive provost for planning and budgeting, said any attempt to analyze the effects of state and federal budget cuts upon Bowling Green is only a guess at this point. Student financial aid and research grants may be the hardest hit, however, under proposed federal legislation.

Those cuts, when combined with almost certain reductions in state aid levels, paint a bleak picture for Bowling Green, its students and their parents, and colleges and universities throughout the nation. According to Dr. Eakin, the message higher education is receiving from both the state and federal governments is that students and their parents must bear a heavier burden for the cost of postsecondary education.

The federal government has proposed legislation that would curtail the amount of money available through federally-funded student aid programs such as Pell Grants and Guaranteed Student Loans. At the same time, the state is basing subsidy appropriations on recommendations from Gov. Rhodes that state-assisted colleges increase their instructional fees by up to $100 per quarter.

"Students and their families are really getting a "double whammy" under all the proposed legislation," Dr. Eakin said. Washington, however, appears concerned with preserving access to financial aid for students who have a real need, he added.

The intent of the federal government in reducing its support of student aid programs is to stop the flow of money to individuals with marginal or no financial need as determined by standard formulas, Dr. Eakin said.

He pointed to a number of factors which have contributed to the current dilemma facing colleges and universities.

"There has been a cooling of the love affair of the public with higher education," he said, noting that Ohio's colleges do not have the public support they need and cannot compete very favorably for tax dollars with other state-funded social programs, such as welfare.

The University also was "surprised" by the current mandated economies at the state and federal levels.

"We had planned carefully for an enrollment decline during this decade, but no one anticipated the economic downturn which has cut so drastically into state and federal revenue," Dr. Eakin said.

In addition to the message which realizes the responsibility of students and their parents to assume the cost of higher education, Dr. Eakin said college and university administrators are hearing that it is time to strengthen ties with the private sector to increase financial support.

Although current conditions in higher education could persist as long as five years, Dr. Eakin does not think withdrawal of financial support for universities is a trend. "We are the victims of economic circumstances," he said. "During the last 25 years, higher education has received a tremendous shot in the arm from the federal government." That came, he said, in the post-Sputnik years when America felt threatened by Soviet science supremacy.

"Noting that the public no longer views space age supremacy as vital, Dr. Eakin said, "Who knows what event will trigger that same kind of support again."

In spite of decreasing revenues, however, Dr. Eakin said the economy has been a "mixed blessing" for Bowling Green. Because high school graduates have not been able to find jobs, the supply of students has been ample at the University.

If current financial trends continue, however, Dr. Eakin predicts higher education will sustain a significant blow.

"If our financial problems continue longer than the next two to five years, we will see institutions in our state and across the nation adopting drastic measures to cut costs," he said. "The richness of the education currently available may be reduced to a 'bread and potatoes' kind of experience."

Edwards urges commitment to quality, not quantity

University Vice President Richard Edwards has urged the Ohio Board of Regents to establish a new standard of quality for higher education in Ohio; draw public attention to some of the excellent research and public service programs at Ohio colleges and universities, and place greater reliance on public television in providing learning opportunities for Ohioans.

Edwards made his remarks while testifying March 30 during a hearing the Regents held at the University of Toledo on updating the state's higher education master plan.

Noting that the master plan should establish a new standard of quality that has nothing to do with growth in numbers, Edward said, "For too long we have been caught up in the 'more is better' syndrome. In the future I believe we can and should place more emphasis on the quality and success of the teaching and learning process as measured by its impact on individual learners and through them the whole society."

Closely related to establishing new standards of quality was Edward's recommendation that the Regents index information that would alert the public to universities' significant research and public service undertakings and their outstanding instructional programs.

"Such an indexing system would not only serve to inform the taxpayers that they are receiving some return on their investment, but would also serve to bring to the attention of the public those areas where Ohio is deficient in comparison with other states of similar size and diversity," Edward said.

The all too familiar "crying wolf" approach which attempts to dramatize how poorly Ohio is faring when compared with other states simply has not worked, Edwards said.

Referring to public television as "one of the better kept secrets" in Ohio higher education, Edwards urged the Regents to consider placing greater reliance on university- and community-based stations in providing learning opportunities for Ohioans.

Noting that the stations are "seriously underdeveloped in terms of instructional program offerings for a growing adult learning public," Edwards said, "I believe we can do a much better job melding the benefits of the 'tube' and the classroom. Ohio is far behind other states in devising just such a system."

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Anyone who has observed the economy of the University Library during the past few years is aware of the growing challenges it confronts. The budget for books and periodicals, which has risen significantly in recent years, continues to pose a major problem for the Library. The annual cost of books and periodicals has quadrupled since 1968, with inflation and budget cuts making it even more difficult to keep up with the demand. In addition, the cost of acquiring and maintaining current subscriptions has also increased, making it necessary to find alternative ways of acquiring and distributing resources.

The Library is currently facing a number of challenges. First, the cost of acquiring new books and periodicals is increasing at a rate that is difficult to meet with the current budget. Second, the Library is facing a decline in the number of available funds for acquisitions. Third, the Library is having difficulty keeping up with the rapid growth in the number of students and faculty. Finally, the Library is facing a number of other challenges, including the need to improve access to electronic resources and to improve the overall user experience.

To address these challenges, the Library is looking at a number of possible solutions. One option is to increase the number of subscriptions and to focus on acquiring a smaller number of high-quality resources. Another option is to explore new ways of acquiring and distributing resources, such as through digital libraries and open access. Finally, the Library is looking at ways to improve the overall user experience, including through the use of new technologies and services.

In summary, the Library is facing a number of challenges, but it is working hard to find ways to address them. By focusing on strategic acquisitions and on improving the overall user experience, the Library hopes to be able to continue to provide high-quality resources to its users.