

## HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING MAY NOT MATCH GROWTH

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Utah State University used to call itself a state-supported institution of higher learning.

More recently, it called itself state-assisted. "The joke now is that we're state-located," said Joyce Kinkead, associate dean of the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

State funding accounts for less than half of USU's budget, supplemented by federal dollars, grants, donations and tuition. Every cent is precious, crucial to delivering quality education.

That goes for all of the state's nine public colleges and universities. But current funding may not keep up with future growth.

Consider:

Utah's higher education enrollment exceeded 116,000 in fall 1996. Over the next 10 years, the Utah System of Higher Education projects a 14 percent increase to 132,000 students. But American Demographics Magazine recently projected enrollment to jump 40 percent: the fastest growth rate in the country and more than three times the national average. Utah higher education officials say they'll review their growth projections over the next few months.

In funding crises, students may be forced to carry the load with increased tuition. In a worst-case scenario, some would be priced out of an education.

That leaves higher education with some difficult choices: continue juggling or change education's delivery and management to look beyond new buildings.

Officials suggest a handful of ways - many of which are underway - that higher education can deliver quality education without requiring much additional money:

- Juggle schedules, perhaps by implementing more Saturday classes
- Help students stick to a four-year graduation regimen
- More efficiently use existing buildings
- Leap into cyberspace.

The latter suggestion has received widespread discussion, as Gov. Mike Leavitt pitches his online Western Governor's University (WGU).

In cyberspace, students can take courses at their convenience, without crowding campuses. But some cringe at the thought of replacing humans with a desktop box.

"I think the WGU is a good beginning at looking at how we can change the traditional ways of education," said Senate minority leader Scott Howell, D-Granite, member of the Executive Appropriations Committee.

"But the proof of the pudding has yet to be determined. . . . It's too new of a technological revolution to know all the consequences."

Money is still the key

Money is key to education.

Even though Leavitt is asking for a 7.3 percent increase in higher education funding next year, the annual battle for funds is just now beginning in the legislature. And, of course, it will be replayed each year - among an ever-increasing demand for state funds.

"It's a matter of needs," said Patricia Crane, spokeswoman for the Utah System of

Higher Education. "The Legislature will address our basic needs. They know they can't ignore us because we are experiencing growth. But it depends on all the other demands placed on them. They really are in a difficult position."

Public colleges and universities have other funding sources, but they tend to be somewhat fickle. Research universities such as the University of Utah and USU receive federal dollars and grants. Many institutions receive gifts from the community.

Beyond that, the only other real source of funding is the students themselves. And they've been hit with tuition increases 21 times in the past 22 years. While most recent increases hovered around 3 percent, some have been as high as 15.6 percent.

Higher education officials hope students won't get stuck holding the growth bill.

"We have difficult choices in higher education that we have to make, too," said Michael Petersen, associate commissioner for academic affairs for the Utah System of Higher Education. "We realize we're not going to have all of the resources we need to do everything."

No more career students

Quickly moving students through the system is one way to improve efficiency with limited resources.

While more students start college with credits earned in high school, students don't receive four-year degrees in four years. Rather, earning that degree takes students an average of 5.3 years at the U. and 6.5 years at Utah Valley State College, according to a Biennial Assessment and Accountability Report prepared for the State Board of Regents and Legislature.

Kinthead suggests better organizing academic counseling to help students choose a major and stick to it. Some could get fast-track graduation options.

But students also would have to stay in class. Currently, some not making the grade drop courses to save grade point averages, Kinthead said.

"There's a lot of pressure on them to maintain a high grade point average," Kinthead said. "So many have scholarships or are getting ready to go to graduate or professional school and need that GPA."

Meanwhile, several short-term overcrowding solutions exist. Schools now are hauling literature classes from crowded humanities buildings to engineering buildings to better use available space. Scheduling also may be affected, with more Saturday, afternoon and evening classes in the future.

But students at commuter schools generally prefer morning classes for convenience reasons, said John R. Burton, professor of family and consumer sciences at the University of Utah.

Enter technology

Courses are already offered online. EDNET satellite courses allow for virtual face-to-face interaction for students in outlying rural communities.

If such measures result in convenience and decongested campuses, imagine what an online university could do for overcrowding.

Leavitt is doing just that in pushing his idea for an online Western Governors University and, more recently, a Utah Electronic Community College.

They would offer diplomas to nontraditional and faraway students through distance learning, alleviate overcrowded campuses and deliver a cost-effective, convenient education while maintaining teacher-student relationships via e-mail, telephone talks and

community center ``labs."

``We're trying to encourage the market to have asynchronous learning, if you will, to have courses open any time people want to have them," said Jeff Edwards, WGU marketing director.

But some professors cringe at the thought of turning out graduates minus the good old-fashioned classroom discussion. Others wonder whether WGU students will be communicators effective enough for tomorrow's workplace. And computers cannot teach students to think.

``I use the Web, e-mail and technological resources," said Burton, who is chairman of his department's technology committee and posts online courses. Burton believes technology should supplement education, not be student's sole teacher. ``By using it, I can understand their limits."

``I think it is a logical extension of higher education," said Ted Wilson, director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics. ``If it really displaced human interaction and teaching, it would be disastrous. But I see the systems coming together. I just don't think the two systems are that independent of each other by nature."

Students' education online would lose out on the immediacy and ambience of classroom discussion and argumentation, complete with tone of voice and body language, many professors fear. They also may lose critical-thinking instruction.

Kinkead believes online lessons best serve education as a supplement.

``I see the function of the university is not so much to transfer knowledge, but to make sure that we're helping students grow intellectually and emotionally and culturally," she said. ``I'm not against WGU per se. I just want to make sure there are a variety of opportunities for our students."

Never fear, Edwards says. Community centers, perhaps at libraries, will offer online students opportunities for hands-on work and interaction.

Centers would provide computers, labs and perhaps satellite hookups for discussions. They also would be the site of all testing to ensure test-takers are who they say they are.

Students also can e-mail or phone professors as they wish. While the immediacy of in-person chats may be lost, Edwards says such communication may be better than that accomplished in the classroom.

``How personal of an experience is it with 500 students in a classroom, and you're with a pair of binoculars on the back row trying to read the blackboard?" Edwards asked.

``Distance education offers an improved interface with a faculty member."

WGU would not replace or compete with already established institutions, said Lou Workman, WGU representative and director of out-of-state programs for the continuing education department at USU. Rather, it will provide education for commuters and those living in rural areas.

``It will save them the time and money of having to quit their jobs and come to any campus," Workman said. ``I see it as one avenue (to address growth). Enrollment growth is cyclical. This could certainly help."