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State Budget Woes Hit UD

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Cuts in the state budget are costing University of Dayton students at least $2.6 million in annual financial aid from the Ohio Student Choice Grant program; forcing the Dayton Early College Academy to find operating funds from outside sources; curtailing research funding for new faculty; and threatening the very existence of an innovative consortium of area graduate engineering programs.

Ted Bucaro, director of government and regional relations, said that while it was not a surprise to see the elimination of the Ohio Student Choice Grant, awarded to all Ohio students who choose to study at an in-state private institution, it's a painful one. In-state students represent more than half of UD's undergraduate enrollment, and for many, the grant was a contributing factor in the choice to attend UD. But even they were not surprised by the decision, Bucaro said; the grant was cut by a third in 2008 and by smaller amounts several times during the past academic year.

The Dayton Area Graduate Studies Institute, a consortium of graduate engineering programs at UD, Wright State University and the Air Force Institute of Technology, is losing $2.63 million in state aid. Without it, DAGSI will have trouble staying afloat beyond the 2009-10 academic year, said its director, Liz Downie.

At its peak in 2001, DAGSI provided scholarships, research fellowships and special programs to more than 180 master's- and doctoral-level engineering students at its three partner institutions, Downie said. By 2008-09, budget cuts and tuition increases already had forced DAGSI to reduce the number of students supported to 100 and trim the award term for doctoral students from three years to two. New scholarship awards made in April were for only one year.

Aside from several challenge grants with local companies, the state funding is DAGSI's only revenue, Downie said.

"We can fund our commitments for this coming academic year, but beyond that, we're not sure how we'll continue," she said. "We're exploring other sources, including federal agencies, some of which might have stimulus funds available. We're hoping that the economy improves enough that we can get back into the state budget for fiscal year 2012-13."

It looks as though some funding, probably about $1 million, will continue for the research program DAGSI sponsors between Ohio universities and the Air Force Research Laboratory, she said.

DECA, the first early-college high school in Ohio and the only one in the United States operated by a Catholic university, will remain open for the 2009-10 school year. The University is committed to working with the DECA school leadership in finding other sources of funding to make up for the $750,000 it will no longer receive from the state, said Thomas J. Lasley, dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions. The school has an operating budget of about $3.5 million; for the coming school year, it's enrolled about 400 students in seventh through 12th grade.

The state budget cuts will also mean a reduction of more than $150,000 per year for the University of Dayton Research Council, which provides seed grants to new faculty in the form of summer fellowships, grants-in-aid and equipment funding. Mickey McCabe, UD's vice president for research, said the University is searching for ways to make up this shortfall, as research and scholarship are critically important for faculty - particularly those working toward tenure.

One positive note: The Ohio College Opportunity Grant program was spared. It provides $41 million in need-based scholarships to Ohio students who choose to attend independent, not-for-profit institutions in the state; UD students received about $1.1 million from this program in 2008-09, Bucaro said.

"In this budget, there's a good deal of pain spread across all the sectors," he said, "and the next budget cycle probably won't be easier because several hundred million dollars in the Regents' budget is one-time money from federal stimulus funding. It won't be there after next year."

Despite the shortfalls, UD is weathering the economic conditions relatively well, Bucaro said: "We've made a lot of good
decisions along the way so that we're able to cope and manage in tough times."