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SUNY campuses may have to absorb 70% of state cuts

BY CARA MATTHEWS • ALBANY BUREAU • SEPTEMBER 30, 2008

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ALBANY — State University of New York campuses may have to absorb up to \$70 million of the \$96.3 million in cuts made by the governor and Legislature last month, school officials said Monday.

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Campus presidents and [financial](#) officers said actions at their campuses include reducing admissions for the spring, leaving faculty positions open, offering fewer and larger classes, and cutting library acquisitions.

SUNY leaders at first estimated \$60 million of the reductions would be made across the system, and campuses would split the rest. However, that was a best-case scenario, said Trustee H. Carl McCall, head of SUNY's [Finance](#) and Administration Committee. Now it looks like campuses could be saddled with between \$40 million and \$70 million of the total, likely closer to \$70 million, he said.

McCall said the purpose of Monday's meeting was to hear about the impact of reductions. The

committee will meet again in November — the same month SUNY trustees vote on a budget proposal for the following year — and make recommendations to trustees on the \$96.3 million.

Campus presidents and business officers sounded off Monday on how campuses have adapted to two rounds of state funding reductions already made this fiscal year, and how difficult it will be to pare spending further.

Cornelius Murphy, president of the College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse said campus presidents recommend that a number of actions be considered, such as raising tuition gradually each year, capping enrollment to match available resources, and developing a communication plan to help negotiate back as much of the \$96.3 million as possible. Murphy said about 96 percent of his annual budget is set by the time freshmen arrive on campus.

Murphy said some of the actions taken at his campus are limiting admissions for the spring, and potentially not accepting any new students; reducing faculty through attrition; cutting need- and merit-based financial support by 10 percent; and cutting campus expenses by 15 percent. Up to 5 percent of students may not graduate on schedule in the spring because there may not be a faculty member to teach a course they need, he said.

The SUNY cuts disproportionately affect upstate New York, Murphy said, adding that the economy upstate "has been literally battered for the last 20 years."

The state budget, enacted in April, reduced SUNY's funding by \$38.8 million. Following that, the school had

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to subtract another \$11.2 million in state funds and cap the [money](#) it raises on its own, including from residence halls and hospital fees. Gov. David Paterson approved the \$96.3 million cut last month. All told, the net impact over last year's funding is \$210 million, according to SUNY.

Many campuses have admitted more students in recent years and are struggling because there is about \$30 million in unfunded enrollment increases in the system, said Steven Brady, vice president for administration and finance at SUNY Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse.

Brady said that SUNY business officers favor gradual increases in tuition, the ability to develop more public/private partnerships and less state regulation on the ability of SUNY to purchase goods and services.

SUNY College of Technology at Cobleskill President Donald Zingale said the cuts may limit the school's ability to maintain current enrollment. The reductions could continue to affect the school's programs long after this year, he said.

The school has taken actions like limiting library funds for new acquisitions and non-essential travel, but there are other areas where it cannot skimp, Zingale said.

"Feed and fuel. Cows and horses don't stop eating," he said.

Community college presidents are concerned about how any limit on enrollment could affect students transferring from two-year to four-year SUNY schools, said Dennis Golladay, vice chancellor for community colleges.

"That will reduce the number of transfer slots available to our community college graduates," he said.

Phillip Smith, president of United University Professions, said in a statement that the 35,000-member union is urging "concerned parents and students to join us in asking the governor to rethink his reductions to SUNY."

The cuts are putting the quality of a SUNY education at risk, according to the New York Public Interest Research Group.

"At a time when the economy is doing so poorly and students really need a college degree, the last thing they should do is freeze enrollment," Binghamton University student Obazine Wheeler said in a statement from NYPIRG.

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