

## THE PLAIN DEALER

### State Senate ups higher ed ante

Posted by [Janet Okoben](#) and [Aaron Marshall](#) June 04, 2007 18:35PM

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Two years worth of tuition freezes, scholarships for community college students and major money to attract scientists are all part of a bonanza for higher education unveiled by the Ohio Senate on Monday.

The Senate has outdone the already generous budget plans for higher education laid out by Gov. Ted Strickland and the Ohio House in the past few months.

Amid all the hoopla about the gains for colleges and universities on Monday was the trickier question of how to pay for these extras, which total \$180 million more than the higher-education portion of the House's version of the budget approved on May 1.

No one in the Senate leadership was able to give a definitive answer about paying for the plan, but deep cuts to other programs is the expected answer. A substitute bill with a full budget proposal will be unveiled today.

Monday was all about higher education, though, as senators labeled their proposal a historic investment in Ohio's colleges and universities.

Students at the state's public colleges and universities would go two years without a hike in tuition under the plan, which would have to be approved by the Senate and then a conference committee of House and Senate members. To offset the tuition freeze, state aid to public schools would go up 5.6 percent the first year and 9.8 percent the next.

The state subsidy covers about 45 percent of the costs for state colleges and universities, according to the latest figures from the Board of Regents.

Cleveland State University President Michael Schwartz, who said he was "absolutely fascinated" by the continued good news from the Statehouse, said he's not sure yet if CSU would do well under the tuition-freeze proposal.

"If it's 105 percent of what you got last year, then yes," he said. But if the extra money is applied to a formula and distributed to schools based on enrollment averages, CSU wouldn't fare well because its enrollment hasn't been as strong as other schools in recent years.

On top of the tuition freeze, students at community and technical colleges would get additional scholarship opportunities under the Senate proposal. The James A. Rhodes Scholarship program would initially get \$10 million from the state. The hope is that private donations would swell that to a \$65 million scholarship pot.

The Senate agreed with the House to give four-year institutions an additional \$100 million in grants to be used as scholarships for students studying science, technology engineering, math and medicine.

Those who say Ohio needs to boost its science savvy to jumpstart the economy also will like another part of the plan: \$50 million over two years to draw 40 top scientists and their research teams to the state.

Eric Fingerhut, the chancellor for higher education, would get to choose among proposals submitted by state universities. The money would essentially create endowed professorships at those schools, but Fingerhut said the idea is to spur collaborations with public and private universities, hospitals and others.

University of Akron President Luis Proenza seized on the idea immediately, saying he's been advocating for such an investment for years. Akron has a particular interest in polymer science, since it already has a top-ranked program, but Proenza said metalworking, computer science and instrument controls are other fields with a need for researchers.

"It takes money," he said.

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