



OLYMPIA UPDATE

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The conference budget, Day 59:

“Stars” funding reborn, Fee freeze ends

Enhanced funding for the university “stars” research program and authorization for \$1.5 million or more in necessary WSU fee increases was announced by legislative leaders who completed a compromise supplemental operating budget today.

The compromise budgets contain no cuts but two major disappointments: No funding was included in the final operating budget for WSU’s \$1 million core computing study, which was passed by the Senate. The final capital budget contained no funding for design of the Veterinary Medical Research Building, which had been approved by the House. Those issues will likely lead WSU’s priority list for the 2009 legislative session.

Legislators are now driving toward adjournment tomorrow after making few substantial changes to the higher education budget from the biennial plan passed last year. Caseload increases and drops in the revenue forecast left them with \$500 million less to spend this session. They settled on an \$835 million reserve.

There are some changes ahead with an election pending and the retirement of significant legislators being announced. Today, it became known that House Appropriations Chair Helen Sommers, 75, perhaps the strongest advocate for research universities in the Legislature, is retiring after 36 years in the state House of Representatives. There are many legislators who will be vying to replace Sommers as chair. House Capital Chair Bill Fromhold, D-Vancouver, is among a growing list of others who are not running for re-election.

Despite Puget Sound radio station talk show hosts crusading for a \$75 million appropriation to keep the Seattle Sonics in town, there is no funding in the budget to accomplish that. Proposals to renovate Husky Stadium and build a new \$800 million UW branch campus in Everett have been reduced to budget studies rather than budget appropriations.

The total enhancements (minus technical changes) in the compromise budget to WSU is \$3.1 million, less than the \$4.5 million provided by the Senate but more than the \$2.1 million provided by the House and the governor. Below are the highlights of the WSU operating budget contained in Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2687. The bill is now poised to be approved by the Legislature and sent to the governor.

\$1.5 million for “Stars.” The final conference budget restored and added to the more than \$1.5 million sliced by the House from a program designed to recruit key “star researchers” for UW

and WSU. Like the Senate budget, the final legislative budget leaves the funding intact and then adds \$265,000 to the appropriation.

WSU will use the “Stars” funding toward a new position for Birgitte Kiar Ahring, a world class Danish microbiologist, who has been hired to lead WSU efforts in bioproducts research. She will lead a research center with WSU scientists across the state. She will be based at a Bioproducts Science & Engineering Laboratory building at WSU Tri-Cities, a facility built in partnership with Pacific Northwest National Laboratories. Among her areas of expertise is converting wheat straw into ethanol and motor vehicle fuel.

\$1.5 million Fee Authorization. About \$1.5 million in fee increases that were presumed in last year’s biennial budget for WSU were put in doubt by the passage of Initiative 960. It required special authorization for the increases, most notably \$640,000 in student “services and activities” fees increases for organizations like the Associated Students of Washington State University. The final compromise budget provides that authorization to ease issues like mandatory state employee pay raises, rising gasoline costs, and rising food costs. Examples of groups funded by S&A fees also include the Cougar Marching Band, the WSU Graduate and Professional Students Association, Student Publications including the Daily Evergreen, Health Advocates, Cable 8, and ASWSU Programming, which provides concerts and other programs for students.

\$1.6 million to correct salary error. Funding was provided to WSU to correct errors in the calculations of salary increases for the current budget.

Child care funding. ASWSU, represented this session by student lobbyist Chris Reigelsperger, and the Washington Student Lobby were successful in securing \$1 million for higher education institutions for a new child care grant program. About \$500,000 is earmarked for the four-year higher education institutions and \$500,000 for the community colleges. The student lobbyists have also successfully pushed through House Bill 2582, now headed for the governor’s desk. The bill establishes new guidelines for the current state child care grant program. WSU received about \$33,000 under the old competitive grant program. The new program takes into consideration matching funds provided by student governments. Since ASWSU contributes about \$280,000 per year for child care, it would now be eligible for about \$125,000 in grants, according to Reigelsperger. “We’re thrilled with the outcome,” he said.

\$500,000 for Community Technology. The Senate had provided \$1 million funding for WSU to administer “community technology” grants. The House had provided no funding. The funding is now implemented through Second Substitute Senate Bill 6438, which underwent substantial change before it passed the Legislature. The program had previously been guided by Senate Bill 6775, which died in the House Rules Committee. Senate bill 6438, however, now contains the WSU program that was in SB 6775. It sets up a grant program through WSU, building on a program initiated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The grants “provide training and skill-building opportunities for community technology programs; access to hardware and software; internet connectivity; assistance in the adoption of information and communication technologies in low-income and underserved areas of the state; and development of locally relevant content and delivery of vital services through technology.”

\$77,000 for Campus Mental Health. Surprisingly, legislators did not make significant investments in campus safety this session despite incidents at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University. The only direct appropriation to WSU was \$77,000 for a new campus safety

mental health counselor. WSU had requested about \$3 million in funding (about \$1.8 million in one-time funding was supported by the governor but not the Legislature.)

\$225,000 for the William Ruckelshaus Center. Funding was provided directly to WSU to support the joint UW-WSU policy consensus center. The WSU funding was provided to explore practical and effective ways to resolve or reduce conflict associated with land use requirements and property rights. There is also funding to implement Engrossed Substitute House Bill 3123, which has passed both houses and is on the governor's desk. It directs the center to assist labor, hospital and nurses organizations in reviewing and establishing nurse staffing plans.

\$160,000 for Student Employee Bargaining. Funding is provided for the necessary administrative resources and personnel at WSU now that the Legislature has passed enabling legislation that allows graduate student teaching and research assistants to collectively bargain. The legislation, House Bill 2963, has passed both houses and been delivered to the governor.

\$145,000 for Integrated Pest Management in Schools. The budget provided additional funding to WSU to assist school districts and the Washington State School Director's Association in implementing integrated pest management programs. The program reduces the uses of chemicals for weed and pest control. Legislation on the subject has not yet passed the Legislature.

\$200,000 for the Deaf Education Program at WSU Vancouver. The funding implements a program that will allow licensed teachers to more effectively educate deaf or hearing-impaired students.

\$75,000 for Green Collar Jobs. Funding is provided to WSU extension to provide consultation on Employment Security "green economy" labor market research as provided in Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2815. The bill has passed both houses and been sent to the governor.

\$50,000 Renton Small Business Development Center. Funding is provided to expand counseling and technical assistance centers through Renton Technical College, part of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) operated by WSU.

Food Animal Veterinarian Scholarship Created, but not funded. The budget allows the provisions of Senate Bill 6187, food animal veterinarians to be implemented. The bill, which has passed the Legislature, creates a new scholarship programs for students who want to specialize in large animals. However, the budget created no funding for those scholarships. Unless private or other funds are secured, it seems unlikely the scholarship program will be implemented.

Olympia Update is produced for persons interested in state government developments affecting Washington State University. For more information, go to www.olympia.wsu.edu. Contact: Larry Ganders, Assistant to the President, 360-956-2165. From WSU campuses, dial 8-2165. If you wish to subscribe to Olympia Update directly by email go to www.olympia.wsu.edu/Update.aspx