

Our View

UI enrollment won't increase without proper funding

Elizabeth Rudd/Moscow-Pullman Daily News Editorial Board

The lack of concern for education and its proper funding from the Idaho Legislature is amazing.

In recent years, the state has hacked away at the public education budget forcing school districts to run levy and bond elections, or make substantial cuts.

For higher education, that same financial black hole is increasingly subsidized with tuition paid by students.

Or at least that's what the schools hope will happen.

But the Idaho State Board of Education - for two years in a row now - has stopped this from occurring.

The University of Idaho asked for approval of a 5.9 percent increase for in-state tuition at an SBOE meeting last week and was denied it. The board, instead, voted for a 5 percent increase - a loss of \$500,000 from UI's anticipated \$3.3 million in additional revenue for 2013-14.

Board member Bill Goesling said he was concerned UI's projected enrollment growth for this year fell short and will remain flat next year.

He might be on to something. UI's enrollment projections were off, and have been for several years now. They're not getting any better, especially when compared to the unrealistic goal of 16,000 by 2020 set by outgoing President Duane Nellis.

But Goesling was wrong to use this as an excuse for why UI should not receive the increase requested.

Students who attend universities and colleges do so with the intention to obtain a quality education and are typically willing to pay for it. Even at the requested 5.9 percent increase, annual in-state tuition would have only been \$6,580. That is still far less than several out-of-state options for Idaho students, especially for a land-grant university - a strong selling point for students who do attend UI, despite what Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna may believe.

If UI is forced to continue to whittle away at its programs, the school will only become even less desirable, further hurting enrollment numbers. It's difficult to entice future students when what the school has to offer is slowly withering away.

Then again, maybe that's what the SBOE wants - one less reason for education to be important in Idaho.