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Three Florida universities won't get performance funds

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By Dave Breitenstein

Three Florida universities will be left without a slice of the state's performance funding pie under a plan approved Thursday.

The proposal doesn't just reward schools for achieving goals; it also docks institutions that fail to score a minimum number of points on the goal-oriented metric.

The State University System dabbled in performance funding last year with a \$20 million pot, but this year's \$50 million legislative request will be matched with \$50 million of system-wide funds to create a competition between universities and within each university.

"Some will not get money," advised Tom Kuntz, chairman of the Florida Board of Governors' budget and finance committee.

The board, which met Wednesday and Thursday on FGCU's campus, oversees Florida's 12 public universities.

Performance goals include graduation rate, employment data, financial stewardship, degree production and others. Each of the 10 categories is worth up to five points, which can be calculated either by the hard number or percent of improvement from last year's numbers. Universities must earn at least 26 points to be eligible, a figure that is especially concerning to New College of Florida President Donal O'Shea.

"We either have 25 or 26 points, depending on whether we can find one more Pell grant student," said O'Shea, whose Sarasota institution has the smallest enrollment in the state system.

Even presidents of Florida's largest schools have concerns. Florida State University President Eric Barron worries that the lowest-scoring institutions will stay near the bottom year after year, potentially losing money annually as a result of their shortcomings. That money then would be redistributed to other universities.

"I don't think that's a good press story," Barron said.

FGCU President Wilson Bradshaw has welcomed performance funding, saying he'll stand by any criteria the state implements ... as long as he knows the metric in advance. In last year's measurements, FGCU

captured five of six possible points based on three criteria: percentage of recent graduates who found jobs or continued their education, median wage of employed graduates and average institutional cost to educate each undergraduate. It earned a \$2.2 million bonus.

FGCU staff have plugged in rough numbers to the new formula, and based on trends, Bradshaw believes FGCU will be eligible for performance funding this year.

“I think we’ll comfortably be above the 25-threshold,” Bradshaw said. “Exactly where, I don’t know.”

Even if every university earns enough points to be bonus-eligible, three still won’t earn a portion of the \$50 million of new state funds. That’s why Bradshaw said staff are monitoring the numbers and will devote more resources if they spot any downward trends. There is one ultimate goal for performing funding.

“We all want to be better,” Bradshaw said.



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