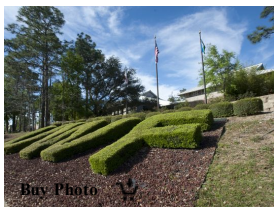


# UWF investing in its own success

Will Isern, wisern@pnj.com 3:28 p.m. CDT March 18, 2015



Over the past year, the University of West Florida has made dramatic improvements in several areas under the state's performance based funding model and is now poised to see millions of dollars in new funding added to its budget.

(Photo: Tony Giberson/tgiberson@pnj.com)



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Performance-based funding was implemented by the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida last year. Under the board's model, universities must score a minimum of 26 points on a 50-point scale to preserve their full amount of base funding.

Last year, UWF ranked last out of all public universities in the state with a score of 21 and subsequently saw \$3.8 million withheld from its budget. The university was required to implement an improvement plan to get that money back.

The first public signs that that plan was working came in December, when the board approved restoration of half of UWF's withheld funds based on a status report.



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Now, based on further improvements reviewed at the board's annual meeting currently underway, UWF is on track to see not only the restoration of the remainder of its withheld funds, but also the addition of new state funding that averaged \$2 million last year.

From the bottom of the pack, UWF improved its overall score to 37, placing it among the highest scoring institutions. Final approval of the university's numbers will have to be granted by the board Thursday.

"Our entire campus has come together to focus on supporting our students, improving our scores and positioning the University toward achieving better outcomes on these metrics," said UWF President Judy Bense. "This is a work in progress and we will continue to place an emphasis on improving these metrics moving forward."



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Specific areas of improvement included six-year graduation rates up nine percent, student retention up four percent, students graduating from STEM programs up five percent, and the average wage of recent graduates up six percent from \$31,000 to \$32,900, among others.

"Performance funding signifies a new era for our State University System, one that places a renewed emphasis on university accountability," said Mori Hosseini, chairman for the Board of Governors. "UWF has made strategic investments in its students, and that focus is paying off."

Key components of UWF's success in the last year, as laid out in the university's December status report to the board, have been the creation of a college dedicated to student success known as University College, the hiring of three new academic advisers, and the implementation of several student success programs.

"The headline writes itself: Performance funding works," said Tom Kuntz, Board of Governors' vice chairman. "Whether through increased communication with students or new faculty in high-demand workforce areas, UWF found smart ways to invest in its own success."

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