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Regents OK efficiency measures, appropriations

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The Iowa Board of Regents on Wednesday approved three more efficiency measures from an ongoing review by a consulting firm hired to find savings in the state's three public universities.

The new measures include setting specific policies and size guidelines for professional and scientific staff search committees, creating a common application portal for prospective students applying to Iowa State University, the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Iowa and finding a consistent method for the universities to compute the Regents Admissions Index, which measures applicants' high school grade point average, class rank, ACT scores and high school course credits.

The RAI has come into question as more and more high schools have decided to no longer give their students class ranks.

David Noone, of Deloitte Consulting, the firm conducting the efficiency study, told the board that creating the common application portal may actually cost the universities some money to develop, but would simplify the application process and have the real advantage of "improving the experience for prospective students."

Similarly, revising the RAI would not save the universities money, but would create "improved transparency in the admission process," Noone said.

During its meeting in ISU's Memorial Union, the board also approved a \$661.9 million state appropriations request to the Iowa Legislature for the 2016 fiscal year.

ISU will become the highest funded of the three universities, receiving \$206.9 million, or 41 percent, of the requested funds.

The University of Iowa in Iowa City would receive \$188.5 million, or 37 percent of the total funding, and the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls would receive \$114.4 million, or 22 percent.

The Regents are also requesting an additional \$12.9 million that would be divided between ISU and UNI that will start the transition to a new performance based funding model of dividing state appropriations among the universities.

The new model, which the Regents approved in June, determines 60 percent of each university's funding based on the number of in-state students they enroll, and distributes the other 40 percent based on a series of metrics such as progress and attainment, access, graduate and professional student enrollment and sponsored research.

In his update to the board, ISU President Steven Leath said the university is having a "very successful" fundraising year, detailing that they have raised \$95 million toward a five-year goal of \$150 million as part of a "Moving Students Forward" initiative.

"We're very pleased and grateful for what our alums and friends are doing for the university," he said. "It's that type of generosity that's allowed us to make some very substantial improvements and additions to campus."

Leath also commented on ISU's recent ranking as No. 50 in the U.S. News & World Report list of public colleges and universities.

"While that's good, I don't think it's great, and we've got an aggressive way to look at improving upon this ranking, so hopefully you'll see that in the next two to three years," Leath said.

Leath also updated the board on a pledge he made to hire more than 200 new faculty in his first three years at ISU. The university has hired 245 new faculty since he announced that goal, he said, including 105 new tenured or tenure-track faculty this fall.

"Faculty are really the ones who raise the level of the university and really contribute to the student experience, so we need to continue that trend and keep our ratios in line as our enrollment grows," Leath said.

When asked by one of the Regents what it would take to bring back ISU's annual Veishea celebration, Leath referred to Veishea as a "complex issue," and indicated he is not likely to change his mind on the decision announced last month to end the 92-year tradition after a civil disturbance in Campustown in April.

"We will try to incorporate the best parts of Veishea in university showcases as we go forward," Leath said. "It would take a lot for me to put all that stuff in one week in the spring again. I don't see that happening in the short term. But we will try and bring back the best things in a fashion that the students and faculty support."