Local Colleges dig deeper to meet Budget Cut Demands

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The newest round of budget cuts for state agencies is leaving Whatcom County’s higher education institutions looking for ways to cut about $4.3 million.

Gov. Chris Gregoire announced just before Thanksgiving that state agencies, including state colleges and universities, need to cut an additional $260 million from their current operating budgets.

For Western Washington University, this means cutting about $1.3 million, which is on top of the $2 million reduction the university was asked to make earlier this fall. Those cuts come from WWU’s $75 million state apportionment, or about 2.6 percent of its current operating state apportionments for the 2009-11 biennium budget.

Those cuts aren’t definite, and exact numbers won’t be available for months, but university and college officials are looking at what cuts like that would mean, while lobbying that reducing education options when people are losing their jobs is a bad idea.

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 Ling BUDGET CUTS

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But college presidents argue that colleges have a significant positive impact on the economy because people can get a degree or get trained quickly, making them more likely to find a job and therefore spend money.

“Community colleges are the answer to a lot of the problems in the recession and the critical player in the economic recovery as well,” said Linda Maier, dean of workforce education at WCC. “We pride ourselves on being very responsive to community and industry needs.”

College presidents are lobbying legislators who will work on the 2009-11 biennium state budget to reduce the cuts their institutions may have to take. Many are worried that tuition will increase beyond affordability and programs will be eliminated.

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