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State budget brings good news for SIU

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The new state budget passed by legislators and signed by the governor contains a lot of good news for Illinois colleges and universities in general and for SIU specifically.

The budget for the 2020 fiscal year includes a 5 percent increase in general operating funding for each institution plus increases in funding for MAP grants, the Illinois AIM High program and more. When added together, the increases total 8.2 percent, reflecting the largest percentage increase for higher education since 1990. The budget also includes increases for capital projects.

What does this mean for SIU Carbondale? Here's a breakdown.

Capital Projects

Communications Building: The budget includes \$83 million for renovations and an addition to the communications building, a long-time priority. The building, constructed in 1964, currently houses the College of Mass Communications and Media Arts as well as our theater and speech communications, WSIU and the Daily Egyptian student newspaper. The project will include new classroom and auditorium space as well as laboratories and production suites that will support interdisciplinary learning.

Greenhouses: The budget includes \$2.54 million for the renovation of greenhouses for our agriculture and science programs. These funds had been appropriated in 2014 but were never provided due to the state's budget challenges.

Deferred maintenance: The budget includes \$56 million for the Carbondale campus and \$11.9 million for the School of Medicine. They will be used for roofs, sewer and water line replacement, electrical upgrades, improvements to classrooms and laboratories, and more.

All of the funding for capital projects is very welcome, but it may be 12 months or more before we see cranes on campus and other signs of change. In fact, the funding is part of a six-year plan, and priorities will be determined by the state's Capital Development Board. The first step on the communications building is to update our plans.

Operating Budgets

Overall operations: The budget includes \$191.5 million to the SIU System for operations, reflecting a 5 percent increase. These funds will be divided between the system's campuses by the system office. We will share more about how these funds will be used once we know the allocation for the Carbondale campus. It's important to note that they will most likely be used to close the gap on existing funding challenges.

Earmarks: The Simmons Cancer Institute at the School of Medicine will receive \$1 million, and the Daily Egyptian will receive \$62,800. This funding is unchanged from fiscal year 2019 levels.

Other investments: The new budget also includes other investments in all institutions that will benefit SIU students, including a \$50 million increase in MAP grants and \$35 million for the [AIM High Scholarship](#). The Monetary Assistance Program, or MAP, provides need-based grants to Illinois undergraduate students. The AIM High program awards grants to freshman and transfer students based on criteria such as test scores and grade point average. The portion of these funds that will specifically benefit SIU students will vary based on multiple factors. Both of these important programs help keep Illinois students in the state.

Thank you to our legislators

We are grateful to the governor, our state legislators, the Illinois Board of Higher Education and all who advocated for funding to help SIU support its students. The exodus of students from Illinois due to concern about higher education funding challenges is well known. It is critically important to the future of the state that we turn the trend around. The 2020 higher education budget is a good start to what we hope will be several years of needed investment in higher education, specifically in SIU.

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