CAMPUS

BSU expects $2 million loss

University could experience shortfall in technology budget

Leslie Benson
Special Projects Reporter

Ball State administrators estimate a $2 million budget shortage in technology funds next year.

Although Vice President for Information Technology O'Neal Smitherman foresees a shortage, he said the university will continue to enhance the quality of the technology on campus.

Smitherman said he hopes the student technology fee doesn't have to increase for the 2005-2006 academic year, but if it does have to change, he thinks students will feel it's worthwhile.

"When one considers the cost of the technology fee to each student and the benefits accrued, the value is clear," he said. "At the current rate of technology fees, the average four-year student will contribute about $1,100 over four years.

"If you were to just buy the retail version of Microsoft Office Professional [$499.99], it would cost almost half that whole amount. When one considers the digital, still and video cameras, 202 computer laboratories, 135 mbs Internet connection, wireless access, electronic classrooms, virus protection and software on campus that are all available, the value of the fee is very good."

The fee, however, does not pay for all technology used by students, such as services offered in the Center for Media Design. Dave Ferguson, director for the Center for Media Design, said the center receives its funding from outside sources including grants such as the Lilly Endowment and contracts with corporations. The Office of Information Technology does, on the other hand, supply the Center for Media Design with a tech-support person.

Fred Nay, director of University Computing Services, said UCS does not receive student technology fee funds for general expenses either, but numerous projects approved by the Office of Information Technology, based on the impact they will have on students, are funded with the fee. Such project initiatives include general use labs, graphic labs, Norton Anti Virus software, college storage servers, iWeb (personal storage for Web accounts), CleanAccess (virus and spyware management), Wifi, upgraded network switches, expanded campus e-mail servers, BlackBoard (the course-management system used by more than 80 percent of the student population) and campus Internet bandwidth, among others.

Last year, Ball State spent $800,000 to $900,000 on student laboratory technologies alone. One service benefiting from the funding, the VIA-II lab in the Ball Communication building, offers advanced video and audio editing equipment. It serves as a visual and animation lab for students. Such labs have improved students' access to superior technology campus-wide.

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CAMPUS

Technology: BSU survey says students want upgrades

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"Today's economy is driven more and more by the ability to understand and use technology," Smitherman said. "Based on the feedback we get from students who have graduated and entered the work force, exposure to the technology-rich environment at Ball State prepares them to be leaders immediately in their chosen professions. This seems to be true not just for technology-specific areas, but [also for] teachers, telecommunications professionals, architects and all content areas."

Smitherman said Ball State offers a variety of technology services for everyone across the campus as well. First, Ball State is a 100 percent wireless university, offering a fast network of computers with Internet access supported by a 10-gigabit core. The university also features 200 electronic classrooms with projectors or plasma televisions. Bracken Library offers online digital journals and reference material that can be accessed both on of off campus, and computers can also be checked out from the library. Smitherman said the library -- not including the computer lab located there -- spends approximately $700,000 on technology resources each year.

Nay said some of the increased demands he sees from students are for expanded storage capacity, increased focus on tools that enable communications and collaborative workspaces and enhanced services in technology support and computer labs.

According to Philip Repp, associate vice president of information technology. Ball State took a survey a year and a half ago of what technological changes students wanted to see on campus. Between 4,000 and 5,000 students responded.

The survey found that 90 percent of the respondents wanted lecture classrooms to receive technology upgrades. Repp said Ball State would try to compensate with the best technology available.

Smitherman said in response to the survey results, "Ball State is currently under an initiative to upgrade 16 larger lecture-sized classrooms with Elmo cameras, which allow you to see small things on screen, and multiple computer displays. The plan is to upgrade them this summer."

When asked how the university hopes to pay for the upgrade, Smitherman explained.

"The total for all systems was budgeted [last year] for $1.2 million," Smitherman said. "This will provide classrooms with integrated technologies — clearer, better projectors, access to more computer resources, access to media players and sophisticated trouble-shooting to solve any technical problems more quickly."

"I believe we have one of the best technological environments for students in the country," Ferguson said.

Smitherman, who works closely with such departments, as well as the deans and associate deans of Ball State's colleges, helps determine the best usage for the student technology fee every year with help from the Board of Trustees.
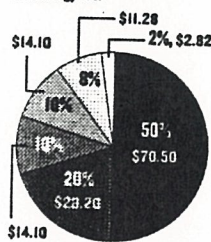
"Each spring, we work with the colleges to determine what the needs are for their students. We try to address their specific needs," he said. "The fee pays for activities driven solely by the needs of students. It's important to note that the money that pays for the faculty and administrators' technology is different from the student technology fee."

The Board of Trustees will decide next year's technology budget this May with input from the administration.

The changes

The Ball State Board of Trustees will decide whether or not to raise the student technology fee at its meeting in May. The board will discuss the matter with administrators.

Fees may not rise

Vice President for Information Technology O'Neal Smitherman said students' current technology fee of $141 will hopefully stay the same.

Breakdown of students' $141 technology fee:

- $70.50: New buildings and their infrastructure: MET, e-classrooms, new equipment, switches, wireless, storage and networks
- $28.20: College support for students: SIM lab, Intermedia lab in A.I. AJ390, ISOM Lab, Nanoscience, CAST student labs, MU 301, AJ307, 20 e-classrooms in Teachers College and iCare
- $14.10: General lab support, labs' student wages
- $14.10: E-classroom maintenance and upgrades
- $11.28: Microsoft support
- $2.82: BlackBoard

SOURCE: Staff Reports   RYAN SMITH /DN GRAPHIC

State funding cuts lead to creating fee

Leslie Benson
Special Projects Reporter

Prior to 2001, the state legislature had allocated $4.1 million a year for technology on campuses, the vice president of information technology said. When the legislature halved funds in 2001, Ball State had to implement the first student technology fee at $65 per student, and in 2002 — when state support was cut — Ball State increased the fee to $130 per student. Now it's up to $141.

While each full-time student currently pays $141 per semester, each part-time student taking fewer than seven credit hours only pays $44 per semester. Other universities charge higher amounts, like Indiana University at Bloomington (charging $200 per semester for a full-time student) and IUPUI (charging $186.90 per semester). On the other hand, Notre Dame only charges $125 per semester for a full-time student to enjoy campus Internet access, e-mail, student services and software-package deals.

Smitherman said Ball State received about $4.8 million last year from the total collected technology fee, with the seven colleges receiving nearly equal shares. With the millions of dollars collected over the years from the fee, Ball State has joined other universities in providing advanced technology for students to prepare them for the workplace.

"We're always looking for other ways to [financially] support technology," Smitherman said.

For instance, Ball State's technology as a whole receives funding from tuition, grants, contributions by technology businesses and private donors. Funds collected by the student technology fee, however, specifically benefit students.

"A representative amount of the total spent for all technology support, when you include all of the personnel and operating costs in computing services, the Teleplex and the library as well as the hardware, software and contract services is more than $20 million," Smitherman said. "Based on data collected through Educause, this is comparable to the average spent for universities of our size."

As for the budget shortage that is likely for next year, Smitherman outlined the university's plan to handle the issue.

"Our plan is to address these and any evolving needs on an incremental basis and upgrade those areas that have the greatest need for these facilities first," Smitherman said. "We will be seeking support from vendors and grants to address the most critical needs."