State aid cuts put area college quality at risk

See Opinion page By RALPH R. ECHTINAW STAFF WRITER

Local college and university of-ficials are worried that shrinking state subsidies are adversely af-fecting the quality of education. Oakland University, Oakland Community College and School-craft College have been forced to hike tuition, consider miliage lev-ies, cut staff and curtail expan-sion. At Oakland University the state provides 54 percent of the total budget, down from 60.5 per-

cent in 1988. Over the same period, OU has bumped tuition upfrom 36 percent of the budget to 35 percent.

"When we lose state aid, the only choice we have is to raise tuition or decrease the budget." British Nicosia, the university's budget director. "We've been doing both."

With a hiring freeze in effect, OU has eliminated some staff positions as people retire or resign and left other positions unfilled pending more rosy economic times.

The downside is that OU has

no money left to expand the university and, increase enrollment. Even though OU has raised tuition several times in the last few years, competition for admission has remained high. Since the mid 1980s OU has had more than 1990s OU has had more than 1990s OU has had more than 1900 students and could easily have more, but the university has maintained a de facte enrollment freeze by railsing the academic requirements for admission.

"There is a need for expansion and demand for expansion that can't be met," Nicosia said, because state aid has declined.

Schoolcraft College

Schoolcraft College
At Schoolcraft Community College in Livonia, officials have a luxury not available to the state's four-year universities. Like most Michigan community colleges, Schoolcraft levies a property-tax millage in its district. In 1985 the millage levy was raised by '4 mill (to 2.27), allowing the college to

just I percent as a portion of the budget.
"Our board has always had a very strong commitment to keeping tuition low," said Steve Ragan, a Schoolcraft trustee.
The state subaidies for colleges and universities, however, are expected to be reduced again in the next budget. "It's going to continuous to decline at least for the next year or two," Nicosia said.

Consequently, the Schoolcraft trustees, while interviewing appli-cants for two vacant board seats last week put a lot of emphasis on questions of finance. "We're in

very good shape financially for the short term," Ragan said, (but) at some point if we can't find a way (to increase revenue or cut costs more) we're going to have to (raise tuition)."

Declining state subsidies, however, are not all bad, Ragan said, because they force colleges and universities to be more responsive to the educational demands of students and industr, "It's never a good thing to have fewer resources, but it does have some positive side effects," he said. "It's forced us to be more resourceful, You have to be able to do more with less."

Oakland Community College

Oakland Community College Oakland Community College faces the same problem as Schoolcraft, but has balanced its budget through tuition increases as opposed to millage increases. In 1970 the state paid 39.5 per-cent of OCC's budget. In 1991

that figure had shrunk to 24 per-cent. On the other hand, tuition was 23 percent of OCC's 1970 budget, but 36 percent in 1991.

Over the same period, the por-tion of OCC's budget supplied by property taxes increased only 1 percent.

Since the college was founded in the 1960s it has levied a steady 1 mill, fueled by a tax base that has grown at a phenomenal rate: But now, since tuition has already been increased a bunch, the OCC board of trustees is thinking about asking voters to approve a millage increase.

"We talk about it every time the state cuts our allotment," said. David Hackett, chairman of the boatd. "It's a possibility (that we'll ask for it this year), but I don't think it's likely. If we go for allows we want to make sure a millage we want to make sure it's going to go through."

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