

## Miami's regional campuses respond to 6 percent tuition cap

*Editor's Note: The following is a guest column that was submitted to the JournalNews and the Middletown Journal. It appears here in this special edition of Headlines.*

By Daniel Hall and Kelly Cowan

On June 23, 2005 the Hamilton Journal-News and the Middletown Journal printed stories about Miami University Hamilton and Miami University Middletown each facing a \$300,000 budget reduction due to a decision of the Ohio General Assembly to limit tuition and fee increases at Ohio's public colleges and universities to 6%. The Miami University Board of Trustees had previously approved a 9.8% increase for both campuses.

The articles have given rise to questions about why a tuition increase that exceeds the rate of inflation would require a reduction in budget. In short, why is more, less? The answer to this can be broken into two parts. The first concerns our expenses and the second, our revenues. In regards to expenses, Miami, as any other business, experiences continually increasing salary and benefits expenses, utility costs, new and changing technology expenses, and other increased costs of operation.

The other part of the answer centers on revenues that support campus operations. Nearly all of Miami's regional campuses' revenues come from two sources: state support and student tuition and fees. We do not have the additional source of revenue available to community colleges, namely a local tax levy.

While statewide enrollment has increased in recent years, the amount of state funds available to support higher education has not. The result is that a relatively flat amount of state support is being divided into increasingly smaller portions to support an increasing number of students enrolled across Ohio.

Between 1993 and 1999, before state limits on tuition and fee increases, Miami regional campuses' fees only increased \$210 or 7% over a six-year period. There was no increase between 1993 and 1994, and the campuses reduced their tuition and fees 1.8% between 1996 and 1997.

As a result, Miami's regional campuses have had the lowest annual tuition rate for entering students among all of Ohio's 23 regional campuses for the past two years. The campuses have been below the statewide average for regional campuses since 1996, and in 2004 they were \$1,000 below the statewide average.

### Community wants more programs

The communities we serve in Butler, Preble, and Warren counties are telling us that more is desired of us – more academic programs; a greater diversity of classes, schedules, and locations; and more cultural programming. The students we serve, who range in age from 16 to 60, expect – and deserve – a richer array of services than offered in the past. Even more, they want these services to be convenient, accessible, and efficient.

While we are committed to providing these things, it is a challenge to expand programming and services during a period when state support is dwindling and we are not permitted to set tuition at a level that will provide the revenues needed to satisfy the needs of our communities. Where possible we are actively engaged in "belt tightening." But our Campuses are relatively lean operations and little tightening can occur without a reduction in services or programming. Of course, we will not act in any way to jeopardize the high quality education that is characteristic of Miami University.

Local support for campus initiatives has played a key role for almost 40 years. The generosity of two generations of

local citizens has made possible locally supported and endowed scholarships that have benefited students at both campuses. The recent gift of the Richard J. Fitton family for the construction of The Conservatory at Miami Hamilton and the support of the citizens of the Middletown community in its goal to construct a Campus and Community Center are other examples.

Both campuses also actively seek, and are successful in obtaining, external support of teaching, research, and community service. As examples, last year the Middletown Campus received over \$1.6 million in grant and contract funding, much of it designated for working with teachers to improve instruction in the classroom. Together with the Hamilton School District, the Hamilton Campus received a \$750,000 award from the U.S. Department of Education to improve the teaching of history in Hamilton schools and the Hamilton Community Foundation renewed its support of the Colligan History Project.

### Commitment to quality high

Miami's regional campuses – your regional campuses – remain committed to providing high quality, affordable education to the communities we serve. As state support declines, we will continue to seek alternative revenue sources and new ways to economize. But, in the end, Miami Hamilton and Miami Middletown need state and community support to provide the quality liberal arts, technical, and workforce education, as well as the cultural and social programming, that has characterized the regional campuses for almost four decades.

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