

Local News / Broward News

FAU's \$25 million windfall to pay for raises, research, safety



By **Scott Travis** · Contact Reporter
Sun Sentinel

JULY 1, 2016, 12:05 PM

Florida Atlantic University's continuing improvement has led to a \$25 million windfall from the state that could be used for cutting edge research and attracting top-notch faculty and students.

Officials say the money could help FAU strengthen its honors college, recruit top scientific researchers and improve campus safety.

"I think it can make a big difference in terms of our reputation and the quality of the students and faculty," said Dorothy Russell, vice president for finance. "Obviously, we're very excited about this. It just shows the incredible amount of work we did, and we're pleased the results."

The university hasn't drafted a specific budget for the money, although \$8 million has been committed for faculty raises, Russell said. That includes a retroactive 3 percent raise for the 2015-16 school year, a 3 percent increase for the new school year and 2 percent raise the next year. That's helping FAU reverse a trend it saw several years ago, when a large number of faculty left to take jobs in other states.

FAU's effort now is to attract high-caliber faculty from other universities. Some of the performance money will be used for start-up packages for researchers to set up laboratories and buy equipment, Russell said.

Other money will be used to increase the number of faculty on the Jupiter campus. FAU received \$3 million from the Legislature earlier this year to start planning a new science building on the campus. FAU has been trying to better leverage its partnerships with Scripps Florida and Max Planck, two biotech researchers housed on the campus.

The money could help boost FAU's out-of-state enrollment, which is now below 5 percent. It has been considering merit-based scholarships, similar to Bright Futures, for students outside of Florida, Russell said.

The university also hopes to devote money to safety issues, such as replacing failing roofs and air conditioners, repairing sidewalks and upgrading security cameras and alert systems, Russell said.

It's a major turnaround for FAU, which just two years ago was considered one of the lowest performing in the state.

As part of its improvement effort, FAU bought a new software program that enables advisers and faculty to identify students at risk of dropping out. The university also raised its admissions criteria, to ensure that students entering were ready for college. It created an intensive summer program for students who were borderline for being accepted, with only those who succeed being allowed to enroll in the fall.

The university has added about 26 student advisers in the past two years and will likely add more, with a focus on juniors and seniors, Russell said.

"I think we've done a fine job with freshmen and sophomores but as students continue on their path toward a degree, we want make sure they don't stop," she said.

The money comes from a state fund that rewards universities that show excellence or improvement.

FAU scored high on a 100-point measure that looked at factors such as students graduating and getting good jobs. It scored high on the first year salary of its graduates (\$36,500), and the graduation rate has improved from 40 percent to 48 percent in two years.

President John Kelly said that while 48 percent is still far below acceptable, he expects the extra dollars will help boost that rate even more.

"Our goal is to become the fastest improving university in the country," he said.

FAU tied with the University of Central Florida as the state's top ranked public university for improvement and success. Its \$25 million allocation is more than double its \$11 million from last year. UCF's performance money increased from \$23 million to \$39 million.

Florida International University in Miami, which scored in the middle of the pack, will also receive \$25 million in performance funding. The funding is based partly on the size of a university's budget.

FIU is using its money to help improve its graduation rates from 58 percent now to 70 percent by 2020. Officials say they are investing in more advisers and adding resources to help students find jobs and internships.

Tom Kuntz, chairman of the State University System's Board of Governors, said he's pleased with the progress at all state universities. Universities can lose some of their regular allocation of funds if they score low on the performance plan, but this year, none did.

"Each year, our universities are demonstrating remarkable improvements, raising the bar on their commitments to student success and the success of our graduates," Kuntz said.

stravis@sunsentinel.com or 561-243-6637

This article is related to: [Colleges and Universities](#), [Education](#), [Scientific Research](#), [Florida Atlantic University](#)