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UF offers raises for faculty, staff, graduate assistants

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The University of Florida will provide raises for faculty, staff and graduate assistants in the coming fiscal year, UF President Bernie Machen announced Friday.

Faculty will be eligible for 4 percent merit raises, and staff will be eligible for 3 percent merit raises starting July 1, Machen told the UF Board of Trustees. Graduate assistants will be getting 3 percent across-the-board raises.

Machen said the raises will pump \$30 million to \$40 million into the local economy.

"It should have an economic impact on the whole community," he said.

In other business before the board, trustees unanimously approved increases to student fees and tuition. If the Florida Board of Governors approves the tuition increase next week, UF undergraduates in the next academic year will pay as much as 15 percent more for tuition and fees -- bringing them to a total of about \$5,000 for a 30-credit year.

In addition, the board unanimously passed a measure establishing a direct support organization to manage historic properties in St. Augustine. A state law passed in 2007 established UF's role in creating the organization and managing the buildings, but the St. Augustine City Commission unanimously passed a resolution in April asking the state to sunset the agreement.

Incoming St. Augustine City Manager John Regan spoke to the board after the measure passed, asking UF to support instead an agreement that keeps the city in charges of the properties. The city would manage the properties for six years, he said, reverting control to UF if it wasn't able to make them financially viable by that point.

While doing so would mean UF would have to forgo about \$650,000 it recently received from the state for building management, Regan said the city is "edgy" about ceding control to UF as it approaches its 450th anniversary in 2015.

"For the community this is about control of the properties, control of the community and the self-determination of the town," he said.

Ed Poppell, vice president for business affairs, said the university will continue to work with city officials but such a deal "wouldn't pass the smell test."

"We've been begging the Legislature for years to give us the money," he said.

As for raises, Machen said tuition increases would pay for them. He pointed out that the raise for graduate assistants comes on top of an increase in their minimum pay passed last year by trustees and a new arrangement that would mean they don't pay the increased fees.

"If we really are focusing on graduate education and research, we've got to make sure that we do all we can to help the graduate students," he said.

An agreement would have to be reached with the United Faculty of Florida to implement the raises for union-represented faculty. Chapter head John Biro said negotiations will begin next week. He said the union supported raises, but wanted to ensure that they were based on established criteria for merit and not at the discretion of the administration.

"The problem is that in the past there has not been agreement on what constitutes merit and how it is to be determined," he said.

Faculty have long argued that raises are needed to bring their pay in line with faculty at peer universities. Trustee Mary Ann Ferguson, the Faculty Senate president, said some faculty have different views on whether raises should be across the board or merit-based.

"We often don't agree as faculty on a lot of things, but I think we all agree that we're grateful to see raises," she said.

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