U plan may save $25 million

Ideas range from energy conservation to school closings

BY PAUL TOSTO
Pioneer Press

Overhauling the University of Minnesota's academic programs and operations may save as much as $25 million — money that would be redirected to helping students, President Robert Bruininks told the Senate Education Committee on Monday.

Much of the hoped-for savings would come from revamping university operations, such as consolidating or closing schools, colleges and curricula, $5 million to come as schools, colleges and curricula are consolidated or closed, though he didn't expect cuts as a result.

University regents on Friday will get their first formal look at Bruininks' plan to change the university's largest changes to the U in more than a decade. They are expected to vote on it June 10.

Many state, corporate and political leaders back Bruininks, though the battle continues over the General College, a gateway to the U for nearly 75 years for students with marginal high-school college entrance exam scores. General College would close in 2006 under Bruininks' plan and become a department in the college of education.

Bruininks reiterated the themes he's pressed for weeks: The U needs to change to be competitive, the university won't retreat on its commitment to racial and ethnic diversity, despite closing Gen the most racially and ethnically diverse college on the Twin Cities campus.

"We're not going to sacrifice our values in this process," he said.

Besides turning General College into a department, Bruininks' plan calls for closing the College Ecology and spreading remaining programs around the university and for merging the colleges and natural science.

That move drew questions Monday from Sen. Rod Skoe, DFL-Clearbrook. "I do have a concern college of agriculture and that it remain strong," said Skoe, a farmer. Bruininks sought to reassure wouldn't damage the work done in agriculture at the university.
U officials have said the package of changes will help make the university one of the top three institutions in the world. Other provisions include:

• A new College of Design that would include the current college of architecture. Bruininks said a particular interest in developing a product design program at the U.

• A campus honors program. Officials initially called this an Honors College, but the recommencement program form and description is up for discussion.

• A new emphasis on writing at the undergraduate level.

General College leaders continue to fight to keep their institution intact. The university has hit the relatively low numbers of students who stay and graduate in four to six years. General C say poor graduation rates are a university-wide problem. They also say the Twin Cities campus less diverse, despite the administration's vow.

Bruininks did say Monday that the savings from the changes to academics would be used to help including financial aid and increased academic support.

OVERHAULING THE U: WHAT'S NEXT?

• University of Minnesota regents on Friday get their first formal look at the recommendations. They are expected to vote June 10.

• To find university documents on the plan, go to www.umn.edu and type "strategic positioning" into the search engine.

? General College is fighting its closure as part of the plan. Read the responses of General College on www.gen.umn.edu.

We want to hear from you. What else would you like to know about this story?

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