



Millions at stake as Saudi funding dwindles at Morehead State



April 13, 2017 | Lexington Herald-Leader: Web Edition Articles (KY)

Author: Linda Blackford, Lexington Herald-Leader | Section: education

424 Words

Morehead State University could lose millions in tuition dollars over the next few years if the Saudi government sticks to its decision to stop paying for its students to attend the Eastern Kentucky school.

The issue, first reported by the Morehead Trail Blazer student newspaper Thursday, came up last week when the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S. declared that Morehead State was now “unavailable” to Saudi students seeking degrees from U.S. universities.

Currently, Morehead State has more than 150 Saudi students, and receives about \$3.3 million a year from the Saudi government for their tuition and other costs. International students pay out-of-state tuition, about \$20,000 a year, as opposed to about \$8,500 for in-state students.

Jason Bentley, Morehead State’s vice president for student success, said Morehead State has not received any official notification, although a SACM representative told them the change could be due to “saturation issues,” that is to say, too many Saudi students at one school.

However, current Saudi students have been told that they will be able to finish their degrees at Morehead with the government’s help.

“It’s definitely millions of dollars, but the impact of this would be over time,” Bentley said. “We’re concerned because we want all students to have support and the best experience in school. This decision has created a lot of questions, and we’re trying to help students find out what this means.”

Bentley said he’s hopeful they will get more answers from the cultural mission.

“We’re exploring every possible avenue, whether this is a short-term or long-term decision,” he said.

The news could further add to Morehead’s financial worries, started by state budget cuts and declining enrollment from Eastern Kentucky, where the coal industry’s decline has affected numerous families. Since 2012, student enrollment has dropped more than 400 students, according to Morehead’s calculations.

Last year, Morehead faced a budget deficit of \$9.7 million, exacerbated by a 4.5 percent state funding cut. Officials implemented a one-week, unpaid furlough for all faculty and staff, and eliminated 64 positions. Most schools are now planning their 2017-2018 fiscal year budgets.

But President Wayne Andrews has also sounded warnings about the new state funding formula, based on outcomes such as graduation rates, which he believes could disproportionately hurt Morehead and other smaller schools. Andrews is retiring and will be replaced on July 1 by Joseph “Jay” Morgan.

UK had a similar situation last year, when the College of Arts and Sciences faced a \$4 million deficit when foreign government contracts from Saudi Arabia, Oman, Brazil and Ecuador for tuition dried up unexpectedly.

Linda Blackford: 859-231-1359, @lbblackford

© Copyright (c) 2017 Lexington Herald-Leader