

SCSU wants ideas on how to spend \$5.6 million surplus

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St. Cloud State University has a \$5.6 million budget surplus, and it is looking for suggestions on how to spend it.

The university sent e-mails to students and staff asking them to help come up with ways to spend the money. Ideas can be submitted until Dec. 15. Then administrators will narrow the choices and give people a chance to comment.

The surplus amounts to about 5 percent of the university's \$114 million budget. It's not unusual for budgets, especially large ones, to end up with a surplus or deficit. St. Cloud State last had a surplus in fiscal year 2000, when it underspent its budget by \$3.1 million, said Lisa Helmin Foss, a university spokeswoman. The university keeps reserves to cover deficits.

Several universities in the Minnesota College and University System, including

Bemidji State University and Minnesota State University-Mankato, also have surpluses in fiscal year 2004, said Linda Kohl, a MnSCU spokeswoman.

"It's not unusual," she said. "It happens every year."

St. Cloud State is the largest school in the system and has the largest surplus, Kohl said.

St. Cloud State found savings in a number of areas, Foss said. The university did not spend \$750,000 budgeted for fuel oil because winter was not as severe as expected, Foss said.

The faculty contract was settled for less than budgeted. The university also increased revenue by collecting an unbudgeted \$1 million in unpaid debt.

The money is only available once, so it probably will not be used for recurring expenses such as employee salaries.

Foss said some things that might be considered are new equipment, repairs or improvements.