Amidst years of state funding cuts and financial strain in Louisiana, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette has managed to maintain relatively low tuition rates and has seen an increase in student enrollment at the university.

To put the budget cuts in perspective, eight years ago the university received 67 percent of its funding from the state; this year, state funding was less than 30 percent of total university funding.

"These cuts have been very challenging for the students and university community as a whole because whenever funding is reduced, we have to find ways to fill in the gaps," said DeWayne Bowie, Ph.D., vice president for enrollment management.

UL Lafayette has new and improved financial strategies designed to protect the academic core of the university and fill in the gaps of budget cuts. Reallocation of resources and consolidating academic programs has helped reduce overhead, while the university ensures it is still providing students with faculty and academic support they need to succeed in school.

Additionally, according to a statement University President Joseph Savoie, Ph.D., made in an article on louisiana.edu, there has been an almost 11 percent increase in donors and $15 million of private funds raised.

Another tactic being used is focusing on the auxiliary units that generate their own revenue. Those units are receiving more support now so they can perform their mission of raising funds for the university.

Increasing tuition rates and stable and increasing enrollment, however, is the biggest income contributor for UL Lafayette.

"A really great incoming freshman class has helped us significantly in softening the impact of funding cuts," Bowie said. "This is the university's biggest income source.

"Tuition increases have occurred over the past few years as well, so unfortunately, a lot of the financial burden the university has been experiencing is also passed on to students and their families."

Though tuition rates remained stable this semester, student fees were increased.

"The fee increase helped primarily to increase our auxiliary division," Bowie said when asked to differentiate between fee increases and tuition increases, "to help us support our auxiliary enterprises, and with the money that is generated from those enterprises, we will be able to support eligible students with financial needs who do not have enough money to cover their college expenses.

"On top of that, about 5 percent of the fee money received will go directly toward needs-based institutional grants."

In addition to budget cuts resulting in less money allocated to each state university, the TOPS scholarship program has also been affected by the economic state of Louisiana.

Last spring, the university was asked to fill in the gaps of the deficit in TOPS funding so students weren't affected. During this fall semester, however, students are experiencing a 7 percent decrease in their TOPS scholarships. In spring 2016, it is estimated that TOPS scholarships will be only 47 percent of what they were last year.

It would cost the university over $10 million to fill in the deficits of the TOPS program cuts, but lack of financial resources within state universities has resulted in an economic blow to TOPS recipients and their families.

"Right now, we are giving students the worst case scenario," Bowie said. "While we are hopeful that our state can generate increased revenue between now and the end of the year, which would perhaps minimize or eliminate proposed cuts to the TOPS program, we will begin sending students emails warning them to prepare for the worst outcome."

University officials hope the warning continued on page 4