Panel calls for approval of LSU’s drug abuse studies center

By JOHN LaPLANTE
Capitol news bureau

Despite a critical staff report, a state panel recommended approval of LSU’s proposed drug abuse studies center Wednesday after LSU’s top research officer warned that a delay would cost the university $5 million a year in federal funds.

But LSU Chancellor William “Bud” Davis said later that he doubts the state Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Training and Research could attract that magnitude of federal money.

“I would consider that a remote possibility” Davis said in an interview.

Academic affairs committee

Blondin suggested delaying approval until the board can get more information.

However, a Board of Regents evaluation of the proposal called it “extravagant,” its functions unclear and its advisory board too political.

The evaluation said the center might duplicate drug abuse studies already underway, and included no plans to use expertise from other campuses.

“We’re being asked to approve this sort of blindly, on trust,” said Joan Blondin, a member of the regents’ academic affairs committee.

McGlynn declined to identify the federal program, but said it involves locating a federal agency in Baton Rouge “that wants to be associated with universities” and would provide “a $5 million budget next year.”

Social Work Dean James Middelg and Social Work professor Peter McManus, heads of the center, also discussed the source of the federal money.

“Social workers don’t have to tip our hand to the others” who also are seeking it, Roundtree said.

Davis did not attend the committee meeting, but, as the issue was discussed, was asked later in an interview to identify the program McGlynn was talking about.

Davis said McGlynn apparently was referring to a federal regional drug abuse research agency in Oklahoma.

There is some talk that at some point it might be moved,” Davis said. However, “That’s a very peripheral thing.”

Roundtree said the center is being set up in part, “So we could qualify for federal grants that are already available, but not of that magnitude.”

Before being told about the support, Blondin and other campuses could be consulted—about joining in the drug studies.

“Substance abuse is one of the biggest problems facing our society today,” Blondin said.

Roundtree said the Roemer administration has proposed a $100,000 base budget for the center, and has already signed a contract with the center for an additional $77,000 to train state drug counselors.

LSU is putting up $40,000 from its own coffers to get the agency started.