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Cuts Outweigh Gains in State Spending on Higher Education in 2003-4, Survey Shows

By [WILL POTTER](#)

A new nationwide survey of state spending on higher education confirms the fears of college officials: A worsening fiscal crisis has forced most states to make big cuts for the 2004 fiscal year, which began Tuesday in many states.

The survey was conducted by the State Higher Education Executive Officers, a nonprofit group based in Denver. The group has received 44 responses to an e-mail questionnaire asking its members the percentage change in each state's financing of higher education. Two states could not make a prediction. Among the findings:

- Twenty-four states expect decreases in state spending. The average drop is about 5 percent. Colorado felt the weightiest ax, with a fall of about 26 percent. Wisconsin, South Carolina, and Oklahoma all took cuts of about 10 percent.
- Eighteen states expect increases, but most of them will be measly. The average gain is about 3 percent, and for five states it is less than 1 percent. In a few states, the increases barely will replace budget cuts from the previous year. The largest proportional increases were 7 percent in New Mexico and about 5 percent in Louisiana and Arkansas.
- Of the 39 states that could provide a specific percentage change, the average decrease is about 3 percent. That is a drop of \$1.2-billion from last

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year's combined higher-education budgets in all states of \$42-billion.

"It has been a tough year for a lot of states," said David L. Wright, a senior research analyst for the executive-officers group. "In some states, this is piling on in terms of cuts from last year or cuts from the middle of the year."

He said the survey, which is not yet available online, is likely to underestimate the severity of the cuts to higher-education spending. It does not cover tax increases or cuts in financial-aid programs, he said. Moreover, California and New York, which are expected to have "terrible cuts," are not included in the results.

Background articles from *The Chronicle*:

- [Budget Ax Falls Hard on State Higher-Education Agencies](#) (9/13/2002)
- [State Spending on Colleges Increases at Lowest Rate in a Decade](#) (12/13/2002)
- [State Spending on Higher Education Grows by Smallest Rate in 5 Years](#) (1/18/2002)



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