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Deal cut in Lansing, WMU to lower fee

By Jason Gillikin
Editor in Chief

University administrators may sleep a bit easier now that a compromise affecting Western Michigan University's budget has been negotiated between state lawmakers and the governor's office.

Under the deal, struck Wednesday afternoon and subject to ratification by a legislative conference committee, WMU will receive the 3 percent base funding rebate that was part of Gov. Jennifer Granholm's tuition restraint

pledge and an additional 3 percent to its base budget, said WMU President Judith Bailey.

WMU will lower its records initiation fee, assessed against incoming students, from \$500 to \$300. Students who have already paid the fee will receive a rebate; those who have not yet paid will see the assessment reduced to the new level, Bailey said.

"Because of the controversy over the legislature and the governor's interpretation of required fees, and the board's belief that we were behaving appropriately, we have agreed to a compromise

that we believe is fair for students," Bailey said.

The drama in Lansing over higher education appropriations revolved around the revenue enhancement practices of several universities. Michigan's public colleges and universities are required to submit proposed tuition-and-fee increases to the state for evaluation as part of the appropriations process. Although WMU's records initiation fee — which was the source of the disagreement with some lawmakers — was fully legal and compliant with then-existing norms, the proposals

offered by the colleges and universities prompted a more in-depth review by legislators.

The reduced records initiation fee will lower WMU's revenue estimates by \$1.6 million, Bailey said, but the 6 percent effective revenue increase will net \$6.6 million for the university. The additional funding, however, is already figured into the institutional budget.

Bailey will present a revised budget to the board of trustees at the board's meeting on Sept. 17. The administration is still evaluating ways to accommodate the reduction in revenue.