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OSU expects OK for energy, environment focus

3 other schools want funding in field

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BY DAVE HENDRICKS

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Ohio State and at least three other public universities want to focus on energy or the environment under a state plan designed to reduce competition, but officials think the proposals are different enough to avoid a showdown over state support.

"This was a concern of ours because we figured that energy and the environment would be a theme at different institutions," said Caroline Whitacre, OSU's vice president for research.

But Chancellor Eric D. Fingerhut reassured Ohio State officials that the environment and energy proposals showed each school's unique focus, Whitacre said. The Board of Regents doesn't anticipate much, if any, overlap because each center should focus on a specific area, Fingerhut told *The Dispatch*.

Fingerhut asked each university to identify its strengths and create "centers of excellence" to hone them. Each approved center could bring additional state money. The state hopes universities eventually will eliminate costly duplicate programs that aren't considered "excellent."

Universities must suggest centers by the end of the month.

Ohio State proposed five centers of study: health, behavior and bioinformatics; state, regional and urban development; food production, supply and safety; materials, manufacturing and nanotechnology; and climate change, energy and the environment. For the last one, Ohio State will draw heavily on its climate-change expertise.

Three other universities with energy and environmental proposals were Bowling Green, Ohio University and Toledo.

"Among all of these institutions, we'll come up with a very strong energy and the environment profile for the entire state," said Ann Fidler, interim associate provost for strategic initiatives at Ohio University. Its center would study fuel and environmental mitigation.

Toledo's energy center would focus on solar power and could involve solar-panel companies with close ties to the university, said William McMillen, chief of staff to the university's president.

Similar overlap appears to exist in health-care-related proposals. Universities have announced 28 proposed centers in areas from food production to international business.

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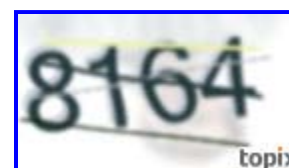
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