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Date: October 24, 2007

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Regents Approve 2007-08 Operating Budget Review

The Board of Regents Finance Committee today recommended approval of the Regents' 2007-08 Operating Budget Review submission. The committee action is the culmination of a series of meetings over several weeks with representatives of Louisiana's four public postsecondary education systems and their campuses to review plans for investing this year's historic budget appropriation for Louisiana's colleges and universities. On October 11, 12, 18, 19, and 22, campuses presented to the Board their detailed plans for spending their portions of the \$2.9 billion FY 2007-08 higher education budget, especially the more than \$230 million in new recurring revenue appropriated by the legislature this year. Louisiana's colleges and universities are now funded at the average of their regional peers for the first time in more than 25 years.

Because of the significant new state funding, the Board of Regents directed the Finance Committee and staff to engage in a particularly detailed operating budget review to ensure investment in areas that support the goals and objectives of the state's Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education and which are consistent with mission of each institution.

"This year's historic appropriation for higher education provides Louisiana's colleges and universities an unprecedented opportunity to gain ground on their regional counterparts," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "This exhaustive review has demonstrated that our systems and individual institutions are proceeding prudently and responsibly in their plans for investing these public dollars."

The \$230 million in new funding is being invested in several key areas, including faculty and staff pay increases to raise salaries to the southern regional average; hiring new faculty in priority disciplines; library improvements and acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment; long-overdue building maintenance; student support facilities; and mandated costs (uncontrollable expenses, such as health insurance premium increases and pay increases for classified staff, that campuses must absorb each year).

In other action today, the Board of Regents' Technology Committee voted to recommend approval of Regents' grants awarded through the SELECT (Supporting Electronic Learning and Essential Campus Transitions) Program. Campuses receiving grants include UL-Monroe (3 grants, \$103,187 total), Southeastern Louisiana University (\$36,008), LSU-Eunice (2 grants, \$89,938 total), Nicholls State University (\$46,099), UNO (\$50,000), Southern University – BR (\$29,739), Louisiana Technical College – Region 6 (\$75,000), River Parishes Community

College (\$49,450), and UNO/LSU-Eunice (shared grant, \$20,000 total). Details on the SELECT projects funded by the Board will be posted on the Board of Regents website after full board approval of the grant, expected at tomorrow's meeting.

Since its inception in 1997, the SELECT grants program has fostered the development of electronically-delivered degree programs and supported the Board of Regents' Electronic Campus (BOREC). The SELECT initiative continues to expand such programs. Structural support is in place: technicians have created a high-quality compressed video and Internet network; partnerships between institutions at a variety of levels have been forged; faculty members around the state have been trained to use these resources effectively; and the Community and Technical College System and K-12 school systems are coming online, increasing the numbers of potential users and programs.