

UTK Faculty,

This is an update on the current budget situation and on recent Faculty Senate activities.

News on the budget continues to worsen. This week the governor announced that the state shortfall has reached a billion dollars. This will probably translate into a 20% cut in state appropriations for higher education. (As I understand it, this 20% includes the 3% impoundment that we have already suffered this fall, so for us it is an additional 17%.) At the same time we are facing increased costs for coal, electricity and natural gas. The term “crisis” is not an overdescription of the situation.

Exactly how this will impact us remains to be seen. Several factors might mitigate our losses, including: tuition and fee increases; release of money held at the system level (such as the unspent pool money for the Governor’s Chairs); administrative cuts, consolidations and efficiencies at all levels; energy conservation; and use of the state’s rainy day fund. Certainly some, but probably not all, of these mitigating factors will be brought into play. Thus the budgets for our units will not be cut by the full 17%. But they will be cut substantially.

We face increasing pressure for layoffs of faculty and staff. In the campus budget hearings this week the Provost’s office proposed to meet a hypothetical 5% reduction in its budget by cutting \$4.4 million from faculty salaries. This would be achieved by not filling open lines and by layoffs of non-tenure-track faculty—about 65 people. The impact on course offerings would be substantial; many thousands of student seats would be lost next year. This, however, is merely a proposal. The actual figures, which could be better or much worse, are unknowable at this point.

My position as President of the Senate is that the most important mission of this university is teaching; thus the last thing to cut is teachers. I am making this case as vigorously as I know how, both to the administration and in the media.

The danger in times like this is disunity—each of us, in fear of our own losses, trying to deflect the blow so that it falls on someone else. We will be more effective if we work in solidarity. There are four things each of us can do:

1. Stay informed
2. Strategize; anticipate what is coming and prepare for it and join in strategizing with others
3. Work to reduce unnecessary costs
4. Work for revenue enhancement

The Senate is staying informed by tracking budgets and budget proposals at all levels. This work is being done mainly by the Budget and Planning Committee, ably chaired by Don Bruce of the Center for Business and Economic Research. We’ll communicate important developments to you; but anyone can ask questions, and the more questions the faculty ask, the better.

Budgetary strategizing is widely distributed in the Senate, but perhaps the most talked-about committee at work now is the Program Review, Reduction and Reallocation Task Force (PRRR for those who like a more soothing sound), a cooperative effort of the Senate and Interim Provost Susan Martin. The goal of this committee is to provide an avenue for faculty recommendations on criteria and procedures in case we must cut programs. We thus hope to avoid a repetition of the hurried and *ad hoc* proceedings that led to the elimination of programs last year. There is a widespread misimpression that this committee will decide which programs will be cut if cuts are needed. That is not true. The task force will recommend criteria and procedures to the Senate, which will vote on (and may modify) these criteria and procedures. It will not recommend specific program rankings or cuts.

The chief role in faculty oversight of specific program closures falls to the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils, which present their recommendations to the full Senate. If program cuts are proposed, these Councils must do the detailed work of examining them. PRRR is working with the Council Chairs, Vince Anfara and John Romeiser, to make sure we have a fair and effective process in place if it is needed.

In the end, however, everything the Faculty Senate does with respect to budgets and program closures is merely advisory to the administration, which makes the ultimate decisions. Still, we aim to make our voice strong and clear.

The third thing we can all do is to reduce unnecessary costs. We need to conserve energy—and every other resource that the university uses. The Senate has been active in these efforts. For more information, see <http://www.utk.edu/features/switch/>. Any university employee, moreover, can suggest cost-saving measures directly to the Board of Trustees at: <http://bot.tennessee.edu/committees/eef/index.html> or to the Chancellor's office at: <http://chancellor.utk.edu/>.

Finally, all of us need to get involved in educating the trustees, legislators and the public on how the budget cuts are affecting and will affect our work. Senate leadership has been talking with the Board and with some legislators. We will step up this activity after the first of the year. Anthony Haynes, UT's Director of State Relations, will attend the first Senate meeting of the new year (January 26, 3:30-5 in the Shiloh Room of the UC) to educate us on interacting with the legislature and state officials. (Senate meetings are open to the public.)

Please call or write your legislators, send letters to the editor, talk with prominent members of the community and use any other channels available to you on behalf of our students and our university.

Best wishes,
John