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Sense of the Senate
May 12, 2011

Endorsed Pursuing a More Balanced Approach to Budget Reductions

In June 2008, the Faculty Senate adopted a “Sense of the Senate” concerning “Principles for Budget Discussions” in face of pending budget cuts. Two principles were articulated:

The first principle is to protect the teaching and research missions of the university to the fullest extent possible. This principle implies that elimination of programs that impact students and termination of faculty are measures of last resort. The success of students and the welfare of faculty and staff who are affected by class reductions or the elimination of programs in teaching, research, or service shall be protected to the fullest extent possible.

Should it be necessary to impact personnel or programs, the second principle is to preserve the overall functioning of those elements of the university that have achieved national prominence and provide the most value to university constituencies

These principles were made in good faith – as an attempt to work with the administration and in an honest belief that the cuts proposed were of such magnitude that some approach beyond so-called horizontal cuts had to be contemplated. The cuts for which the original document was crafted were pegged at between 10 and 14 percent, a level labeled as “inestimable.” Language concerning the preservation of the University’s Carnegie Research status and the attraction of top quality faculty were paramount in justifying adoption of the principles. The document also argued that “the proposed principles allow the broadest dialogue between our faculty leadership, the administration and the Board of Regents.”

It is hard to argue against the first principle and the second principle seemed to be motivated by a belief that any programmatic cuts would be minimal. But key elements of the document were not fully realized and the level of cuts now facing the University suggests *a more comprehensive strategy must be adopted*.

- The original document decried “unexamined, across the board cuts,” but the document has been interpreted to seemingly exclude any non-vertical cuts. *This has the effect of eliminating a larger number of academic and administrative faculty positions than might otherwise be necessary.*
- The cuts anticipated at between 10 and 14 percent have now grown to likely three times those levels. Where the initial document seemingly anticipated minor programmatic elimination or alteration, the cuts now facing the university cover whole programmatic areas in the Sciences, Arts and aspects of the Land Grant Mission of the University. *Such programmatic eliminations undercut the first principle of the June 2008 document as much as would any more balanced set of recommendations.*
- The rhetoric concerning Carnegie status is also hollow given the extent of reductions of programs – especially reductions of programs that were major contributors to the research which established the Carnegie ranking.

- Any programmatic cuts were also to be based on “reliable, relevant data on costs and value must be available.” This element of process is certainly questionable given practice under curricular review.
- The document has been used to support in addition to strategic cuts, strategic hires. Thus, while tenured faculty are being fired, core academic programs are being shuttered, and essential academic support services and their administrative faculty are being eliminated, new faculty are being hired. *Given the magnitude of the budget reductions, hiring except in the most extreme cases of need, undercuts the academic integrity of the university, is a direct assault on tenure, and is devastating for morale.*

Adoption of the June 2008 Sense of the Senate has been used to justify a rather rigid approach to handling the ever-spiraling downward budget of the University. The principles adopted in 2008 should not be viewed as being so limited. *We therefore vote to modify any such usage which implies Faculty Senate support for actions that eliminate ever-larger numbers of academic and administrative faculty. We are cognizant of the budgetary task before the institution, but encourage the administration and the Board of Regents to re-examine possible cross-the-board reductions which will save academic and administrative faculty positions. We encourage the Administration to greatly reduce so-called strategic hires while existing faculty positions are being eliminated. We encourage the administration and the Board of Regents to pursue the use of institutional resources to encourage voluntary retirements rather than forced terminations. We believe a more constructive dialog with faculty – through the Senate and through more comprehensive interaction with colleges, departments and administrative units – should be developed as administrative and academic faculty have direct knowledge of where potential savings might be pursued and which cuts are likely to cause the least damage. A combination of these approaches – and identification of strategies from a more robust interaction with faculty – is in order to truly meet the original intent of the Senate resolution adopted in 2008.*