

Principles for Budget Discussions
Endorsed¹ by the Faculty Senate of the
University of Nevada, Reno
June 5, 2008

Earlier this year Governor Gibbons required a 4.5% budget reduction for UNR. Following consultation with the Faculty Senate leadership, President Glick introduced strategic cuts that were governed by a set of principles that were largely in agreement with the following paragraph distributed to the senate in a memo from Steve Rock, then Chair of the Faculty Senate:

The Executive Board agrees with the principle that the teaching and research enterprise are the core missions of the university and must be protected. We further agree with the principle endorsed by past faculty senates affected by budget crises, that faculty should take steps to preserve jobs where possible. In fact, the Senate has supported delaying merit raises under similar circumstances in the past. The Executive Board sees the delay of merit as a rational way for the faculty to participate in solving UNR's short-term budget contraction while minimizing damage to both our core mission and the long-term interests of the faculty.

Using the delay in merit, some strategic administrative restructuring, a giveback by the Board of Regents involving Project Integrate (the NSHE attempt to implement a new computer system), and an increase in tuition, the administration was largely able to achieve the goals of cutting the budget while maintaining the university's ability to sustain its teaching and research goals. Now it appears that Governor Gibbons intends to implement an additional budget cut amounting to an additional 10-14% reduction for UNR. While the earlier reduction was significant, the impact of this additional reduction is inestimable if it were to go forward as proposed. If this level of reduction is implemented, the core missions of the university are destined to be profoundly affected. Teaching and research will suffer, adversely impacting faculty, students, and the citizens of Nevada.

During earlier budget discussions Steve Rock and I were comfortable with asserting a position we thought would be consistent with faculty values. During those discussions it was possible to foresee a set of principles that could guide us through the budget travails. **However, the principles that guided earlier budget planning cannot address the level of budget cuts now being contemplated.** Thus, it is important that we engage in a discussion about triaging additional cuts if we actually must endure the reductions currently under discussion.

One of the most promising features of the way budget cuts were handled earlier in the year was that the Board of Regents adopted the plans put forth by individual campuses in the NSHE system. UNR's proposal entailed strategic cuts that minimized impact on students and faculty. If we are to receive a similar response from the Board of Regents, any proposal put forth by the university must be thoughtful, and an approach that has the support of the faculty would likely be better received than one without our support. Here are the broad principles that should guide our input into the budget discussion that affect our campus.

¹ The senate supported the general language and principles herein and permitted the leadership to craft modifications based on senate suggestions. Any misstatement of the senate's position rests with the senate chair.

Budget adjustments should be made with two strategic principles in mind:

- **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.**

The first principle continues to emphasize that the primary missions of the university be preserved as fully as possible. It also recognizes that people will be impacted by the governor's choice of how to deal with the budget shortfall. Jobs and learning opportunities may well be lost and lives disrupted. This reality requires us to be creative in finding methods of helping people permanently or temporarily alter their role at the university. There are many ways to address this possibility should it come to that. Some options may involve proposals for revisions to the NSHE Code. The point is not to list all possibilities here but to state the importance of protecting the well-being of students, staff, and colleagues through whatever creative means are possible. The teaching and research missions of the university cannot be sacrificed. Given the importance of preserving enrollment to the greatest extent possible, the faculty senate will strongly advocate that the Chancellor and the Regents fully consider the elimination or delay of system level initiatives that have minimal, immediate direct impact on the teaching mission of the system.

The second principle explicitly states that some cuts would not be evenly distributed but strategically implemented. This means that rather than damaging all programs to the point they cannot function effectively, some would be considered for reduction or elimination so that others can maintain high levels of quality or even enhance their functioning. UNR will suffer irreparable harm if, at the end of this process, the only result is that all programs are diminished. This alternative strategy is to maintain or cultivate success in selected programs. Unexamined, across the board cuts are not the means by which our campus should address a financial crisis. The ability to attract and retain excellent faculty and students is crucial. This depends on critical elements of the university maintaining high, positive visibility. This is certainly applicable to activities that enhance our national and international reputation through scholarly publication or other creative activity. The university has only recently achieved Carnegie Research Extensive status and is the only institution in the state with that designation. This status cannot be jeopardized.

It should be stated that before any thoughtful evaluation of programs can occur, reliable, relevant data on costs and value must be available. The costs are relatively easy to identify. The value may not be as clear. Certainly FTEs, extramural funding, publications, creative activities, donations and patronage can be identified. There may be other less tangible values of programs that should be highlighted. Part of any discussion about change requires that those involved agree upon the data to be used in the evaluation process.

We can get much more detailed and specific once we agree on the larger principles and more fully understand the magnitude of actual cuts. The proposed principles allow the broadest dialogue between our faculty leadership, the administration and the Board of Regents.

Note that outlining these principles does not in any way suggest that we believe cuts of this magnitude are wise or defensible. The senate opposes such budget reductions. There is no set of principles that can successfully protect the teaching and research missions of the university if cuts even remotely near those being discussed are imposed. However, if discussions of budget cuts go forward, these principles will help shape our position.