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## Academics, A newsletter for the Faculty of the University of Florida

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### Chair's Report: Budget Cuts and the Role of Shared Governance

*By: Rick Yost, Faculty Senate Chair*

As all of us are aware, UF faces significant budget cuts for the next fiscal year. Regular updates on the situation appear in the FAQs at [www.president.ufl.edu/budget-reduction](http://www.president.ufl.edu/budget-reduction).

I feel strongly that it's important in such challenging times to maintain our commitment to shared governance at UF. Last April, the Faculty Senate endorsed a resolution supporting faculty participation in setting budget priorities at all levels of the university. The Senate's Budget Council has monitored this process during the year, and Deans and Chairs in many colleges and departments have actively involved the faculty in the ongoing discussions of proposed budget reductions. As I often remind my colleagues, we make the best decisions, even these most difficult ones, when administrators and faculty members work together.

President Machen has called on all Deans and Vice Presidents to propose 6% cuts to their budgets, including possible programmatic cuts. These proposals are currently being considered by the President and Senior Vice Presidents. Initially, President Machen planned to announce the cuts in mid-April. In continuing discussions, however, it has become clear that these plans cannot be finalized until a final state budget is passed, and that will not occur until the end of the legislative session (scheduled for May 2). Thus, it is now proposed to announce the proposed cuts early the following week, and then to have the Faculty Senate Steering Committee discuss them at its meeting on May 8. The Steering Committee will review these proposals and may offer recommendations on how to meet these budget cuts while minimizing the impact on academics, scholarship, and teaching at UF. The President has indicated that the Libraries and campus security will be spared these cuts, and the members of the Board of Trustees have requested that students currently in degree programs be allowed to complete their degrees.

One move that may help us better manage our budgets at UF is the appointment of a Chief Financial Officer (CFO), a new position at UF. Although this is a common model in the corporate world, and increasingly at private universities, UF is one of the first public universities to explore this model. President Machen addressed this issue at the March 20 Senate meeting, clarifying that "the academic leaders of the institution have and will continue to make academic

decisions, including where the resources are deployed," with the CFO "providing the data to inform those decisions." *Rick Yost is Professor and Head of Analytical Chemistry and Chair of the Faculty Senate. You may contact him at [facultySenatechair@ufl.edu](mailto:facultySenatechair@ufl.edu).*

## Legislative Update

*By: Jane Adams, Vice President for University Relations*

All eyes are on Tallahassee this spring as the Florida Legislature carves another \$3 billion out of the budget for the state's new fiscal year beginning on July 1. Most years we promote an agenda of bold new university initiatives. This year we find ourselves trying to hold on to as much as we can in the face of declining revenues and economic uncertainties.

While the mood in the capitol is grim, there are some bright spots for the University of Florida. As presently written, the appropriations bill provides UF the necessary funding to continue with the biomedical sciences and veterinary medicine buildings, as well as to begin planning a new chemistry building. In addition, there are funds in the Senate version to plan a facility for UF – Burnham research and to match the contributions our donors have made to support buildings. Finally, the legislature is proposing an energy research consortium headed up by UF and including FSU, UCF, USF and FAU.

These appropriations reflect the legislature's desire to stimulate the economy through construction and economic development. We believe UF is well positioned to do that, and we are hopeful these projects will be included in the final budget that the legislature will pass in early May.

Unfortunately, budget reductions far outweigh the funding available for economic stimulus. In addition to the large education budget reductions we expected, a number of UF programs that are funded from different sources are also experiencing cuts. Examples include Children's Medical Services, the Archer Clinic, marine mammal research and many more. The UF government relations team in Tallahassee will continue to promote our university during this difficult year and look forward to better times.

## Undergraduate Education at UF: On the Road to Excellence

*By: Daniel A. Wubah, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs*

At a welcome reception during my first month at UF, one of my colleagues commented that "this is the worst time for anyone to come to UF because of the budget situation." I politely disagreed and retorted "Au contraire, I think this is the best time to be here because we have an opportunity to align our 'meager' resources with institutional priorities." I truly believe in this statement.

Among the factors that contribute towards a great university are an outstanding faculty and an assemblage of very bright and intelligent students. Since admission standards to UF are so high and our faculty members are among the best in their fields of expertise, how do we make UF great? With astute leadership and a strong support staff, I believe UF is positioned to be a great university that provides superlative experiences for students, especially undergraduates who constitute about two-thirds of the students' population.

Now, what will be the distinguishing attributes of a UF undergraduate from any other institution? This is one of the key questions that my office is trying to address. The transition from high school to college is critical for establishing a solid foundation for academic success as an undergraduate student. On most campuses, a first year seminar series is used to assist students to make this transition. At some AAU institutions, these seminars, which include no more than twenty students per class, are taught by the most distinguished faculty researchers and skillful teachers. The seminars allow students to work with an established professor and classmates on a shared intellectual problem. Such courses emphasize class discussion which helps students learn in creative ways. Does our first year common class achieve these goals? What are some of the barriers toward having such a program for our first year students?

Lower-division advising is a crucial component of superlative undergraduate education. At smaller campuses, faculty advisors help students understand the structure of the curriculum and encourage students to explore their choice of courses while also thinking about future areas of focus. Due to our size and resource limitations, majority of our undecided students and those who do not meet the entry requirements for certain majors often face difficulties in meeting advisors. Some of our colleges have professional advisors and have developed strategies to advise lower division students using a cohort approach. But what happens to the student who is exploring options? How do we use our current resources to enhance advising for such students?

The bedrock of undergraduate education is the curriculum. Due to the rapid pace of information and knowledge development, the best curriculum in the future will be dynamic and reviewed on a regular basis to meet the changing needs of employers, industry and society at large. How well does our General Education curriculum, including introductory courses, meet these standards or prepare our students for the upper level courses? How well do we facilitate integration, synthesis and application of knowledge that students have acquired? Do our majors have senior capstone courses? How interdisciplinary are our programs?

To create a truly integrated learning experience, students need to participate in research, discovery and creative activities as part of their undergraduate education. Whenever possible, the projects may include a strong public service and outreach component while effectively integrating research, civic engagement, and the curriculum in ways that students will not only understand, but directly experience in their educational growth. Do we have a coordinated approach for providing students this kind of creative experiences? How do we involve our undergraduates in mentored research experiences?

Ultimately, the process of transforming the undergraduate program at UF will be anchored by a Strategic Plan that will identify our strengths and weaknesses, point out our critical needs, and help determine how best to meet those needs using innovative and collaborative approaches. Answers to the questions and the next steps will be addressed in a future issue of this newsletter. Please stay tuned.