

The following message is from UNLV President Neal J. Smatresk.

Dear Colleagues,

We are now at the end of a painful process in which we have exhaustively reviewed our options to meet the most recent round of state imposed budget cuts. As you all know, our state base budget has been reduced by \$44 million, since FY08. In the recent Special Session we were given additional cuts of \$3.7 million to absorb for the balance of FY10, and are required to achieve an additional 6.9% (\$10.7 million) base budget reduction by July. This creates a staggering 30% reduction in our state funding in three years.

To date we have taken cuts by reducing operating costs and personnel and have tried our best to minimize the impact on academic programs and class availability for students. I credit our hard working faculty and staff with achieving this goal as enrollment increased steadily over the past three years. Nevertheless, these cuts have systemically weakened our university, reduced services to students, and created large workload increases for faculty and staff. In short, we are in an unsustainable situation.

The current cuts were assigned to all budgeting units as detailed in the FY11 Budget Reduction Summary <http://www.unlv.edu/budget/docs/FY2011-Budget-Reduction-Summary.pdf>. On the main campus we determined that we could cut academic support areas by \$5.7 million, thus limiting cuts to our academic programs to \$4 million. We recognized that we could no longer take “horizontal” cuts without seriously compromising our core academic strengths and student enrollment. It should be noted that enrollment loss results in tuition revenue loss, hence further cuts. We determined that we could no longer support the diversity of offerings and programs that we worked so hard to create over the past 52 years, and have been forced to consider which academic programs we would eliminate or reorganize to preserve core strengths.

The process for program evaluation and elimination was developed last year in extensive consultation with administrative leadership and the Faculty Senate. This process followed all applicable Board of Regents and UNLV by-laws, was open to comment, and met the highest expectations of the principles and practices of shared governance. We also agreed to maintain our commitment to retain tenured faculty in eliminated programs.

The process began last fall with a set of recommendations made by the Joint Evaluation Team (JET). This spring, after the special session, the Executive Vice President and Provost (EVP&P) and the Vice President for Research/Graduate Dean (VPR) made additional recommendations for program modification and elimination. These recommendations were given to a Presidential Review Committee (PRC) composed of five administrative appointments, five elected Faculty Senate members, and a Chair elected by the Faculty Senate. The PRC was given the latitude to add to or delete programs from the list, and to suggest any reasonable alternatives that could achieve the target savings. After reviewing available program metrics, and consulting with deans, external stakeholders and faculty they recommended elimination of seven BoR approved programs including: Education Leadership; Sports Education Leadership; Recreation and Sports Management; Informatics; Marriage and Family Therapy; Urban Horticulture; and the Teaching and Learning Center. They also recommended holding three Vice Provost positions vacant for three years to help provide partial “bridge” funding to meet our budget reduction needs as programs are phased out, as well as making recommendations for differential tuition and program reorganization. These recommendations were submitted to the Faculty Senate Priority and New Program Committee (PNPC), and to the Academic Council and Cabinet.

The PRC recommendations and the response of the PNPC were brought to a full Faculty Senate meeting May 4, 2010. There was discussion concerning the subjective factors and quality metrics involved in the review, but no new alternatives to meet the cuts were brought to the fore. It was recognized by all present that the programs recommended for elimination were substantively sound and contributed to our educational mission, scholarly pursuits and regional needs in significant ways. After discussion, the PNPC recommended that the Faculty Senate accept the PRC report, which was accepted by the Chair of the Faculty Senate.

The Academic Council and Cabinet were also given the opportunity to evaluate and comment on the PRC proposal. After these discussions, the President added Clinical Laboratory Sciences to the list. This program had been recommended for elimination by the Joint Evaluation Team and by the EVP&P and VPR. Each dean of an impacted unit expressed their grave concerns about the loss of their programs and several offered recommendations that differential tuition could be used in lieu of elimination. There was discussion of the need for significant reorganization after elimination of units, and on developing plans to serve students currently accepted into the impacted programs. We agreed that we would try to preserve functionality through reorganization where possible, after achieving the target savings required. When reorganization of a unit leaves faculty without a critical role, we plan to reassign them to meet other strategic priorities of the university.

Finally, our undergraduate and graduate student leadership was consulted on the PRC proposal. They too expressed concerns about programs being eliminated, but suggested no alternative solutions to achieving the target reductions. They expressed serious concerns for students accepted or enrolled in the programs, emphasizing the need to discuss graduation plans, and urged us to preserve functions where possible through reorganization. They urged us to communicate the eliminations broadly with students in the impacted programs.

Following this last round of consultation, I have endorsed the recommendations for elimination by the PRC, with the addition of Clinical Laboratory Sciences, to the list to be submitted to the Board of Regents. These recommendations along with our recommendations for cuts to other VP areas will be considered by the Board of Regents at the June 3 and 4, 2010 meeting. We plan on holding reorganization discussions with impacted units beginning this summer.

I thank the groups and individuals involved for their thoughtful comments and consultation. While difficult, this process has been a tribute to our strong sense of community even under duress. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities noted this in their recent decennial accreditation visit to UNLV, commending our commitment to shared governance as follows:

“The Committee commends the University for its exceptional sense of community and solidarity in the face of literally unprecedented fiscal challenges. The administration’s and Senate’s commitment to transparency and inclusiveness in critical planning, while unlikely to mitigate the impact of eventual program and service adjustments, is essential to an ongoing process of broad-based, continuous planning and evaluation.”

The faculty, staff and students of UNLV have shown that we can face the worst of times. I know we will all continue to work together as we reorganize our institution and implement these cuts so that we will be able to best support faculty, staff and students. Despite these challenges we remain committed to our mission to educate and serve Nevada and to create a prosperous and sustainable future.

Sincerely,

Neal Smatresk, Ph.D.

President, University of Nevada Las Vegas

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