

Great Basin College
Senate Chair Update
January 22, 2010

I have several items to update everyone on today. Let's take the item first that you probably consider the most important one.

I saw quite a few of you at the Welcome Back presentation the other day. During that meeting, our president updated us on the economy of the state of Nevada, of NSHE, and of Great Basin College. I won't repeat everything he said, but since you'll need to understand the college's standing over the next year and a half, I will recap what he told us about that.

First, here's a bit of history: As I reported to this body in my last report, the Governor had directed state entities to make budgets for the current and coming year showing additional savings of 6%, 8%, and 10%. Our system Chancellor had expressed that it would not be possible for the institutions to make these projections in the time frame that was given to him.

Since my last report, the Chancellor observed that his statement about the difficulty of pulling together that information was being interpreted by some people in the public as a statement of defiance or refusal to cooperate. Naturally, the system does not want to be misperceived in that manner. This is why the Chancellor issued the instructions that I provided for you in your packet – instructions to the institutions to find realistic ways to save 8% for the last three months of this fiscal year and for FY11 as well. As our president told us on Wednesday, given the budgetary shortfall statewide, these may actually be conservative numbers.

I want to stress at this point that no action is being taken at the moment. The regents will meet on February 2nd to discuss the strategies recommended by the presidents and by the Chancellor. Right now, we are only trying to be proactive – to make sure that we come up with reasonable plans that can minimize the negative impact of upcoming cuts on the institution.

The president's budget committee convened during the break and discussed possible measures for the remainder of this year. As the Chancellor's letter indicates, and as the President announced, GBC was directed to find savings of approximately \$390,000 for the current year. The committee was able to do this by keeping several positions open, by cutting operating budgets, by allocating money that had been set aside to rent the Basin Center in Pahrump. Also, one position, a CDL position, is now entirely self-supporting. There will be no additional furloughs for the year, and no one will lose their job this year.

For FY11, the amount to be shaved systemwide is a full year's money instead of one quarter. Therefore, this amounts to an additional \$1.2Million. At least some of the \$390,000 will carry forward into the next year, but not necessarily all of it. Likewise, some of the positions that were set aside during the current series of cuts may remain open. By cutting operating budgets further, we estimate an additional savings of close to \$200,000. However, all of those together cannot make up the full amount of \$1.2Million.

Therefore, the president has made available this year the offer of early retirement or “buyouts” to people who will save the college money by doing so. The president wanted me to stress that there must be salary savings. The college cannot offer early retirement to someone if we have to re-hire the position right away.

We’re also not sure how many temporary positions will be available next year.

If we are able to save enough through early retirement and the things I mentioned earlier, we will make it through this biennium relatively unscathed. It is possible, though, that we will need to make a curricular review for financial purposes. We shouldn’t be scared about this, but we do need to prepare for the possibility because we haven’t had to do it before. The VP for Academic Affairs has numbers, and he will work with the department chairs on this if it’s something that we need to do. The chairs will hold department meetings and will report back to the Senate, so everyone will be included in the process.

Again, though, I need to point out that right now we’re just staying ahead of something that we believe is going to happen. The president hopes that no one will have to lose their jobs, and he told me personally that he’s committed to keeping us all together.

Let’s talk about this for a moment before I continue.

Q&A

Another item that has come up in the chairs' meetings with the Chancellor is the issue of enrollment caps and workload. These two are tied together because so many of us are working extra hard on account of the increase in enrollment. The VP for Academic Affairs is rightly concerned that we need to be careful about the quality of our courses, about ourselves "burning out," and about how people perceive the faculty's working harder for less pay.

You'll recall that I sent out a question in December to all of you, asking how the cuts have affected you so far. I received a lot of responses to that question. I took out any "identifiers" that I noticed – things that might make people realize who was writing. Then I put all of it together and sent it to the other chairs and to the Chancellor. One reason for doing this was to get ahead of that question of "doing more for less." As the Chancellor told us, people need to see that we're bearing a burden here. They need to know how we're handling things, and the system has been fairly silent.

I did get a letter back from the Chair of Chairs. He read the stories that you all sent, and he was moved by what was said. Some of you wrote that you weren't affected much this year, but many of you told of extra hours, stress, trouble paying higher health care premiums, and so on. The Chair of Chairs said that he found the comments to be both "depressing and inspiring." He wrote, in part, that he was "inspired by how many of the responders seem to be expressing confidence that they can get through this." He wants you to know that this is the case at UNLV (at his institution), too. He told me that they will be sending out a similar survey to their faculty, and I think some of the others will be doing this, too.

In line with the increased workload that you've all been taking on, the Chancellor said that the regents are looking seriously at capping enrollments. At CSN, many faculty are complaining that they're in super-overload. The chair at UNR reports that his faculty are "easily ticked off" this year because of the stress caused by overload. The institutions may need to cap enrollments in order to deal with these workload issues and stress, and we will all need to consider carefully how much work we can handle. Some of you have lives at home that are on the back burner because you're working so hard. You might need to cut back.

Enrollment caps, if they come, will help with that. Our administration hopes that we can do as much of this "naturally" as possible. By that, they mean without setting FTE caps on the college as a whole, but instead looking at course caps and program caps – the kinds of things that we already have in place.

Q&A

Other random items that have been floating about are just ideas. Some of these may not come to fruition; others may.

1. Consolidating Institutions
2. Restructure within NSHE (combine system offices, HR)
3. Consolidate some programs, particularly between universities
4. Code changes – The Chancellor has said that we should expect possible code changes for the March meeting, and he wants our input as soon as possible. Right now he does not have a list of proposed changes.
5. The idea to switch to a merit system is still on the table, but right now it's not on the front burner.

Folks, we've survived a lot in the past, and whatever comes at us in the next few years, we'll survive that through. Our objective, working together, will be to minimize the negative impact and look at what we'll need most in the future. Don't let any of this scare you, but be aware of what is happening. The president said he'd be happy to fill in details for you, and I will as they're told to me. The Chancellor said that none of the proposed changes will be done in secret – and all of them will have faculty input.

This concludes my report.