

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE CHATTANOOGA

Provost's Page

December 12, 2008

Newspapers and nightly newscasts are now more than ever competing to see who can provide the most depressing economic news for our daily consumption. Tennessee, like all southern states and most of the nation, is reeling from possibly the worst economic downturn in decades. Clearly, public higher education is among the most vulnerable enterprises at such a time. As you have already heard, in addition to the 9% cut to our state appropriation in the current fiscal year, we are now preparing for a possible 15% cut to next year's state appropriation for a total cut of approximately \$10.5M in just two years. Although we have had and will likely continue to offset some of these losses through enrollment growth and tuition increases, it is impossible for revenue growth to prevent the necessity of some painful cuts.

I realize that this is an uncertain and anxious time for all of us. The current financial situation requires that everything, no matter how unlikely or outrageous it might appear, be discussed and considered. Although "everything is on the table," no decisions on any particular course of action have been made at this point. We are all still very much in the review and analysis stage of the process, and various options are being developed for further review. However, we continue to follow our blueprint for review of all academic operations and programs in a thoughtful, comprehensive, data-driven manner. Unfortunately, we do not have unlimited time to wrestle with this problem. The Governor may well require us to provide a basic outline of our tentative plans to cut expenses within a few weeks. Therefore, some decisions will have to be made sooner than we would like. I still expect these preliminary recommendations will be available for further review by the entire campus community before any final decisions are made.

As gloomy as the financial situation is, it's important to put it into some perspective. Despite this current set of circumstances, UTC will continue to be a dynamic university positively impacting the lives of its students. Our Education and General Budget will most likely still be well in excess of \$90M for fiscal year 2010. Even though some major factors, like the national and state economies, are out of our control, most of the institutional destiny of UTC is well within our control. We can collectively determine how to use the funds that we do have and decide how UTC needs to be positioned for the future. Yes, we may have temporarily lost access to \$10M, but we still have over \$90M to use as wisely as possible. So, the most important question for us is this: Are we up to the challenge and willing to make the effort necessary to move forward strategically in some tough times? I believe in UTC and our collective ability to work through these difficult decisions. There will likely be some of us, maybe many of us, unhappy with the immediate outcome. However, if we do this process well and make the difficult choices, UTC should emerge from this current economy quicker and stronger than otherwise would be the case.

This current financial situation is forcing us to expedite improved enrollment management. We are currently working on a plan to maintain a steady-state with our freshman class at its current level (~2,100) for the 2009 entering class. With some possible restructuring of recruiting efforts targeting more upper level transfers along with some natural growth in graduate programs, we hope to continue modest growth in enrollment in a more strategic and cost-effective manner. Current excess capacity in upper-level classes could thus be filled with tuition-paying students at little additional instructional costs. It would also help us provide better access to some of the advanced courses for all our students. This effort could prove very beneficial to us in the long-run and help considerably with our immediate financial crunch.

Below are brief annotations of other current initiatives that we are actively pursuing. As always, please feel free to contact me directly at phil-oldham@utc.edu with any suggestions, questions, and/or concerns you may have regarding any university-related issues. In any event, I wish all of you a safe and happy holiday season.

Current Initiatives

- SACS Process and the QEP- Our SACS Reaffirmation Steering Committee is now fully on-task under the leadership of Dr. Karen Adsit. The committee will be completing a readiness assessment for the compliance certification along with initiating the selection of our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) this spring. The QEP is a new component added to the reaffirmation process since our last self-study. Since many of you may be relatively unaware of that change to our accreditation requirement, we will plan for some introductory sessions to provide some insight. If you have time and interest, you can visit the SACS website at <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2008PrinciplesofAccreditation.pdf>.
- Brown Bag Lunch with the Provost- I'm feeling a bit claustrophobic these days and would enjoy some lunchtime discussion with any interested faculty members. If you would like to join me for lunch (Dutch-treat) to discuss anything on your mind, I plan to be in the UC at noon on the first Tuesday of each month. Please join me if you can. We'll let you know the room in advance of each lunch.
- Academic Operation and Program Review- I've already said plenty about this effort, but the process is actively proceeding as rapidly as feasible.
- Post-Retirement Contracts- I've heard there is some concern and possible confusion regarding our post-retirement employment opportunities. Post-retirement employment is not a guaranteed employee benefit and was never intended as such. However, we continue to offer the option with sufficient institutional justification on a case-by-case basis. If you are interested in exploring this option, contact your department head and dean to begin that conversation.
- Summer School- Summer school remains an important and fiscally viable operation. However, the budget allocation for last summer was significantly overspent. So, we are working with the deans and Richard Brown to develop a better financial model to adequately support the summer school program and incentivize future growth potential.
- FAST- Thanks to the support of the English Department, we will have data at the end of the semester to begin to assess the effectiveness of reporting freshmen absences. Under the leadership of Dr. Fran Bender, we are also initiating a new program to better support first-time freshman placed on probation for the spring semester. These students will be receiving a letter from the Provost with instructions on how to access the additional academic support.

- Articulation- We continue working with our local partners to provide any immediate improvements to student transferability; we're also conversing with other UT campuses for a more comprehensive approach to general articulation.
- International Programs- Under the leadership of Hugh Prevost and Bento Lobo, a significantly enlarged action committee has been charged with developing a comprehensive vision for international programming at UTC along with recommendations for necessary administrative support structures. This effort will continue to evolve over the next few months.
- Sabbatical Applications- Sabbatical applications have now been reviewed and the letters to the respective faculty members should be going out this coming week.