

Senate Report, May 2013

My name's Eric Reed, I'm one of the faculty representatives on the university's Budget Council. The Budget Council met twice in the spring. I'm here to give you an update.

To this point, the Budget Council has not been involved in decision-making. It had no role in deciding recently-announced budget cuts. The Budget Council has not seen a draft of the budget plan that Dr. Ransdell will present in June. It is generally unclear what role the Budget Council is going to play.

That being said, I can offer you some insights.

Above all, I think we need to put things in a clear perspective. The budget cuts that Dr. Ransdell revealed last week are not the end of a short-term crisis caused by the CPE's refusal to allow us to raise tuition by 5 percent. Instead, the cuts are the latest manifestation of long-term funding deficiencies that are in part our own fault. They are partly our own fault because WKU makes spending choices that make it impossible to fund academics adequately.

The best example of this trend is one from this coming year's spending plans, assuming the Board approves them. We'll be cutting academic programs, closing classroom space, defunding teaching and research activities, and letting some of our part time colleagues go. Yet at the same time, we'll also be taking nearly a million and a half dollars of tuition money out of circulation to pay for the construction of a new building.

I repeat that these long-term funding deficiencies are in part our own fault. The effects of budget cutting are already accumulating to the point that they are undermining everyday academic operations.

What exactly do I mean by that?

Over the past couple weeks, I've been in touch with dozens of tenured faculty and department heads across campus. I asked them to tell me about the effects of recent belt-tightening, even before next year's budget cuts. Faculty in every college report that their departments and colleges have already experienced some or all of the following:

- Reductions in upper and lower division course offerings;
- Cuts to the number of sections offered in multi-section courses;
- Reductions in teaching staff;
- Cuts to department budgets;
- Reductions in services offered by faculty and departments to the university, students, and the public;
- Reductions in faculty research and professional development funds and release time;
- Declines in research productivity as faculty take on larger teaching loads, more students in their classes, or other duties they didn't previously do;
- Difficulty in recruiting for study abroad due to cost-shifting to students, in the form of assessing new fees and requiring students to pay for things normally paid for by the university.

Why are these trends important?

The possible medium to long-term implications of these trends on student recruitment, retention, and graduation rates are pretty obvious. The ongoing effects of these trends on faculty morale, productivity, effectiveness, and esprit de corps are also pretty obvious.

What is to be done?

The Senate needs to take strong, repeated, and public stands about spending priorities at WKU. The Senate must repeat the message that the ongoing process of cannibalizing academic budgets must cease. The Senate must insist that the backfilling the “everyday” academic budget begin immediately. The Senate must insist that spending on basic essentials like teaching, offering courses, and supporting faculty research be ramped up, not ramped down.

Thanks for listening, and please feel free to get in touch with me any time.