

From the *Tallahassee Democrat*

FSU braces for layoffs amid budget crisis

University planning to cut budget by \$38 million

BY DOUG BLACKBURN • DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER • MARCH 5, 2009

Eric Walker has been a member of the English department at Florida State University for 25 years.

He admits he's never experienced anything remotely similar to the current climate at FSU, with a budget crisis threatening to force massive faculty layoffs.

"It's unsettling, to say the least," Walker said. "You look to your left and you look to your right and you realize that one of your fellow faculty members might not be here much longer."

FSU officials expect to learn during the current legislative session how much less in state aid the university will receive for the coming school year.

It's also unclear whether FSU and the other 10 colleges in the State University System will benefit from the federal stimulus package — which could delay pending layoffs.

Nevertheless, FSU has reduced its budget by \$21 million since June 2007, and university officials are making plans to cut the budget by as much as \$38 million more.

Last fall a hiring freeze was implemented and travel restrictions were enacted. A budget-crisis committee of faculty and administrators led by Provost Larry Abele was formed last October. It meets weekly.

The outlook for students at FSU is bleak, according to President T.K. Wetherell. He told students at a town hall meeting earlier this semester that they should be expect to pay more for tuition and housing — and at the same time expect to have larger classes.

"I know we're all blaming it on the economy, but it's really not just the economy," Wetherell said. "It's a system that's broken."

"We cannot continue to go down the path of passing a budget on May the 30th and then the day before the budget goes into effect, say you don't have even what we put in the budget. We need something that we can count on."

FSU decreased enrollment by almost 2,000 students for the current school year, from 41,000 to 39,136, knowing it would have fewer faculty members to teach classes.

But university officials acknowledge this is a double-edged sword, because fewer students translates into less tuition money coming in – and tuition dollars are a major source of revenue.

One option being considered is to increase enrollment of out-of-state students, who pay considerably higher tuition.

Harold Knowles, a Tallahassee attorney and vice-chairman of FSU's board of trustees, likens the series of reductions in state aid to torture.

"It seems like what we have here," Knowles said at last week's finance and business committee meeting, "is death by a thousand cuts."

A group of students calling itself Protect Our Professors is hoping to raise \$100,000 by mid-April to save faculty members in danger of being laid off, but the hard reality is that FSU may have to eliminate more than 200 positions. That's in addition to the 200 or so positions that haven't been filled.

Rather than make cuts across the board, university officials have decided that if deep cuts are required they will do away with certain departments – which have yet to be identified.

"We want to protect the programs where we've demonstrated a reputation nationally and internationally, but are those the most cost-efficient programs?" said John Carnaghi, FSU's vice president for finance.

"It's a dangerous game we're playing," Carnaghi added, "but it's real and we're doing it."