

From the *Tallahassee Democrat*

Testimony concludes in FSU hearing

BY DOUG BLACKBURN • DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER • PUBLISHED: AUGUST 12, 2010 2:00AM

Joseph Travis, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Florida State, testified that he agonized over deciding which positions he would have to eliminate in spring 2009 after being told to trim \$8.2 million from his budget.

"This was a seriously emotionally draining exercise for me," Travis said. "Issuing a notice to anyone is a painful pill. None of it is not difficult."

Travis, FSU's final witness in a grievance case brought forth last year by FSU's chapter of United Faculty of Florida, answered questions for almost three hours Wednesday.

FSU's Board of Trustees, forced to cope with \$82 million in reduced state support, approved a three-year budget in June 2009 that included laying off 21 faculty members with tenure, a status that is generally regarded as permanent job security.

The union, in a single grievance involving multiple faculty members, claims the university violated the collective bargaining agreement when it decided to terminate tenured faculty. Testimony in the grievance hearing began in May, resumed in July and concluded Wednesday.

Arbitrator Stanley Sergent indicated he doesn't expect to have a ruling before October. Carolyn Egan, an attorney with FSU, and UFF-FSU attorney Thomas Brooks will submit summary arguments by Sept. 17.

Travis was asked to explain how he decided to merge three departments — geological sciences, oceanography and meteorology — into the department of earth, ocean and atmospheric science, a process that resulted in the elimination of 12 positions.

The merger had been considered off and on since before he was promoted to dean five years ago, he said. It was a way to preserve the missions of three departments, Travis added.

He also said he had planned to completely eliminate the anthropology department, which no longer offers a major and no longer accepts graduate students. But the Budget Crisis Committee, which was involved in reductions taking place in all of FSU's colleges, demanded that anthropology remain active.

"I had to go back to the drawing board," Travis testified. "It was very frustrating. I had to go back and select some people from other units."

Brooks, representing FSU faculty, does not dispute that FSU faced difficult decisions when the Legislature slashed its support of the State University System.

"We're not saying there wasn't a crisis. The question is how you deal with it," Brooks said. "They had quite a few alternatives. They chose to use layoffs instead of other options."