President Engstrom,

The following statement summarizes the community feedback you requested during your Nov. 17 forum about the campus budget and the need to reduce campus positions.

By the deadline we received 149 email comments that were compiled into a 211-page PDF. The great majority of the comments were from UM alumni, with a lesser volume of letters from concerned community members and people closely associated with programs that may experience reductions. A small number of submissions came from current students and one prospective student.

Most letters expressed concern and dismay and emphasized the need to protect an esteemed college, school or department. Many writers included vivid examples of how a faculty member, department or unit had benefitted them or others in an effort to argue against cutbacks in that area.

It’s evident that the School of Journalism and College of Visual and Performing Arts made efforts to mobilize alumni, friends and affiliated stakeholders to provide feedback. This should not detract from value of the resulting communication, but it should be noted. Some writers expressed several points, so there is some crossover in the themes expressed.

Some notes about the correspondence:

- 62 emails supported the School of Journalism and argued against cuts.
- 55 emails supported the College of Visual and Performing Arts and argued against cuts.
- 17 emails argued against cutting the liberal arts or humanities at UM.
- 17 emails argued against cutting graduate teaching assistant positions.
- 5 emails argued against cutting employees at the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library.
- 4 emails argued against cuts to Careers Services, Testing Services and/or the Office of Civic Engagement.
- 4 emails supported your overall announcement.
- 3 emails argued against cutting the College of Forestry & Conservation.
- 1 email argued against cutting Missoula College industrial technology programs.
- 1 email was against cutting anthropology.

Suggestions about how to improve the budget situation were limited. The main ideas can be summarized as “find better solutions,” “preserve this area because it has incredible value,” “cut administrative salaries” or “cut athletics and not academics.” Several writers contended cutting humanities will worsen the enrollment situation.
The need to protect art and culture on campus and in Missoula was a reoccurring theme. The names of journalism faculty members Jule Banville, Jason Begay and Joe Eaton were singled out repeatedly as worthy of protection. Employees wrote of already being spread too thin. One letter protested Career Services being moved to Academic Affairs. The lengths of emails ranged from one line (NO BUDGET CUTS!) to a multipage in-depth piece that provided five real-life examples of dissatisfaction with UM. One potential journalism student said she might reconsider attending UM if the J-school experiences cutbacks.

The following selected excerpts give a feel for the emails received:

“You and the administration are faced with an incredibly difficult balancing task – protecting the core mission and academic excellence of the University we all love, and ensuring from an economic and business standpoint that it maintains the ability to do so.”

“The liberal arts program is a very important part of what makes UM great. We are losing the very soul of the university, which is the soul of this town.”

“Part of what makes this community cultured is the dedication and involvement of the art faculty.”

“The three journalism professors who would lose their jobs because of the budget cuts are some of the best professors I’ve had. They were not only diligent and thorough, but they cared.”

“Jim Messina and J.K. Simmons, two of UM’s celebrity alumni, have accomplished much more than we tend to give humanities students credit for. Clearly, we still have a role in today’s world, if only we look past the smokescreen of financial success as life’s sole purpose. It is in neither UM’s nor its student’s best interests to eliminate programs and faculty positions unless all other options have been exercised.”

“Reducing library staff numbers will contribute to the following:
- It will hurt the existing student population by depriving them of knowledgeable, helpful people whose focus is to assist students and help them do research. It will also deprive students of convenient study hours, which will also decrease their access to print and electronic materials, computers, and printing services.
- It will hurt enrollment numbers when visiting students and their parents realize that there is less academic support at UM.
- It will negatively impact student retention. Most universities, including the University of Montana, struggle to retain students, particularly freshmen. Students are most successful when they can find assistance from supportive staff members. Cutting library staff positions will leave our students with fewer resources making it more difficult for them to complete assignments and research projects.”

“I’m deeply saddened to learn of the proposed cuts to the [journalism] school. To me, it seems like a reactionary move that doesn’t have the school, or the university’s best interest in mind. And to cut the most recently hired professors, the ones with the freshest experience in this rapidly changing media landscape, would be incredibly shortsighted.”
“I wholeheartedly agree that there is a need to adjust budgets to reflect enrollment and staffing realities; no institution can bleed money until it runs dry. I disagree, however, with the budget creators’ desire to realign UM’s finances in accordance with the national job market.”

“A major reason for UM’s huge national reputation is the success of the best little journalism school in the country. To quote Fred Ryan, publisher of the Jeff Bezos-owned Washington Post, which employs two UM j-school grads (and this former professor): ‘You can’t shrink your way to success.’”

“I would not be who I am today – a flourishing professor, scholar and activist for higher education – without my J-school experience.”

“An alumna of the University of Montana’s School of Journalism… [I am writing] to express my concerns about the University’s recent announcement regarding budget cuts that would essentially debilitate the school that made me who I am today.”

“Career Services at the University of Montana provides an invaluable service that is key to student success and essential for the fulfillment of the University’s Mission. Consolidation and reduction of Career Services jeopardizes students’ access to a resource that will adequately prepare them for life after the University of Montana.”

“I understand that cuts must be made, but I also learned at the University of Montana that there’s always more than one solution to a problem. Maybe there’s another way to solve this problem?”

“Why not cut some of the bloated salaries of senior UM administrators? It makes no sense that administrators should have salaries in the hundreds of thousands of dollars – much higher that faculty salaries. The university also needs to eliminate more administrative positions, perhaps through buyouts or other means of encouraging ineffective or redundant people to leave their posts.”

“But you say these cuts are primarily a result of enrollment issues. Well guess what: these teachers are the reason why I continued to enroll at UM. Teachers are why students stick around and finish their degrees, not administration.”

“Truly the job of president or vice president is actually superfluous here. If you must fire someone, fire yourself. In fact, that would save quite a few of the faculty positions you are threatening, and it will likely also save the university from entire ruin. In the name of all of the students, in the name of all of the faculty, in the name of alumni, and in the name of the community, I call on you to either immediately rescind your proposed budget cuts or immediately step down from a role for which you are ill fitted. And please, really do look up the word ‘university’ in a dictionary, as a president of one, you should take the time to know what a university is and what it is not.”

“Moving forward our marketing dollars should go to advertise the academics of UM, not the UM lifestyle. This is what parents want to see, and this is also what students will ultimately desire. There is an old adage in my career field, “what you win them with is what you keep them with.” We are not winning people with our academics or faculty and therefore we are not keeping them. This needs to be addressed immediately.”
“Please consider furloughs for administration before laying off staff, especially at the Mansfield Library. A well-funded, fully staffed library attracts the right kind of student to UM. Eliminating staff will lead to gradual decay of the building and the collection, limited hours of access, and inadequate resources. Please protect this valuable asset.”

“We write to you as members of the Women’s Leadership Initiative and as allies committed to positive transformation at the University. In this spirit, we bring to you two concerns regarding the processes through which FTE reductions and office consolidations will take place. Left unchecked, these concerns could adversely impact the University. First, regarding FTE reductions, we believe it is in our best interest to have Jessica Weltman in EEO review the names of employees who will be negatively impacted. This will help to ensure that women and members of minority groups are not disproportionately impacted. This list could be provided to Ms. Weltman by Human Resources. At this time, we have no reason to think these groups will be disproportionately impacted. However, we believe taking measures to avoid such an outcome is warranted, especially given that it will be relatively easy to compile this list.”

“… At the end of this difficult road, I firmly believe you will find great support from the vast majority of stakeholders, as you are clearly approaching this challenge from a platform of transparency and leadership in difficult times. That will continue to become more and more apparent, as you have the best interests of UM in your heart, soul and mind every bit as much as the rest of us.”

“As a parent of a college-age daughter, I would not be at ease with the prospect of her attending UM because of the ongoing problem of sexual assaults in Missoula and on campus. No doubt there is a direct correlation between declining enrollment and increased coverage of assaults. Until that problem is addressed, enrollment will continue to dwindle. Consequently, we must ask why UM athletes continue to be implicated in these assaults and other illegal activities. And we must also question whether the proposed cuts to Athletics is commensurate with the reduction in faculty and other programs.”

“The best education we can provide young people is by example. Too often in this country, we are resistant to change; in this matter, cutbacks in employment and spending. Just look at government … cutbacks almost never happen, and market forces do happen, leaving the unaltered institution weaker and bloated. My point is that by instituting intelligent and strategic cutbacks to react to inevitable market changes, you are teaching your students a valuable skill and teaching them to think strategically and react to market forces. I’m all in favor of it and congratulate you in leading the way. That is indeed acting as an institution of higher learning.”

Compiled by,

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