Leaders say proposed budget cuts would cause major harm to AU, UA

Trustees and top administrators from Auburn University and the University of Alabama joined forces last week in Montgomery in a plea for fair treatment as the Alabama Legislature ponders sharply reduced projections for education revenue for the next budget year.

Facing projections of a decline in education revenues for 2008-09, the Education Appropriations Committee of the Alabama House is considering a bill that would cut funding to AU for operations and maintenance almost 14 percent from the current level for that fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1.

With the University of Alabama facing a similar cut, the trustee executive committees and chief executives of AU and UA said the spending proposals in the governor’s proposed education budget for 2008-09 would hurt the state’s two largest university systems far more than other parts of public education in Alabama. According to news reports, two-year colleges would take a 9 percent cut, and K-12’s cut would be only 2.5 percent.

Meeting in a rare joint session on Wednesday in the RSA Tower, across the street from the Alabama State House, AU and UA trustees and administrators warned that the state’s economy would be set back for years and thousands of students could find themselves unable to afford college if AU and UA are forced to bear the brunt of the funding cuts.

Jimmy Rane of the AU Board of Trustees said the proposed disproportionate cuts would be “unfair and unconscionable.”

Joe Espy, president pro tem of the UA Board of Trustees, and Sarah Newton, chair of the AU Board’s Executive Committee, said the funding cuts would wipe out gains made in the budget for the current year and would harm the state, as well as the institutions. Other AU and UA officials pointed out that their institutions had made continuing commitments, such as scholarships and faculty salaries, that could not be undone.

The Auburn main campus would have to find a way to offset nearly $30 million in lost funding for operations and maintenance. Cuts to Auburn Montgomery, the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System would add another $16 million in lost O&M funds to the total.

The actual shortfalls would be much higher, totaling $40.3 million for the AU main campus and $60.7 million overall because of rising costs for the state’s teacher and employee retirement systems and health insurance.
University Faculty and Senate
Chair-elect candidate statement

Ron Clark in his own words

O ur course I remember vividly from my days as a student was the faculty’s role in the university’s overall structure. In that course, a university was described as a “professional bureaucracy.”

While the term “bureaucracy” is perhaps intimidating to some, it is important to remember that our university is in fact a bureaucracy. From the people who develop our curriculum, to the people who work in the administrative offices, there is a hierarchy that enables our university to function. When we think about the university as a bureaucracy, it is easy to see that our faculty, staff, and administrators work together to create a comfortable environment for our students.

The faculty is the most visible part of the university. They are the ones who teach our students and guide them through their academic careers. Our faculty members are also involved in the university’s decision-making processes. They participate in the university’s governance through the University Senate, which is the highest level of faculty representation.

The Senate is the most visible part of the university’s governance. It is where the faculty can express their opinions and have a say in the university’s decision-making processes. The Senate is also where the faculty can make recommendations to the university administration, which is responsible for implementing these recommendations.

The faculty members are the university’s most important asset. They are the ones who provide the intellectual leadership that makes the university successful. They are the ones who work with the students and help them achieve their goals.

It is important to remember that the university is a bureaucracy. It is a complex system that requires the cooperation of many different people. The faculty, staff, and administrators all play important roles in making the university successful. They work together to create a comfortable environment for our students and to ensure that they receive the best possible education.
Auburn faculty are preparing for a transition of leadership, starting with an election in which faculty vote electronically from March 3-10 for chair-elect and secretary-elect of the University Faculty and its representative body, the University Senate.

The candidates for chair-elect are Ron Clark of Accountancy and Kathryn Flynn of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. Nominees for secretary-elect are Dennis DeVries of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures and Lawrence Molt of Communication Disorders.

The winners will be announced at the March 11 meeting of the University Faculty and will take office in March 2009. During the coming year, the chair-elect and secretary-elect will assist 2008-09 Chair Bob Locy and Secretary Sue Barry, who will take office at the 3 p.m. meeting.

Locy, a professor in Biological Sciences, will succeed David Cicci of Aerospace Engineering as chair, and Barry, a professor in Curriculum and Teaching, will succeed Ann Beth Presley of Consumer Affairs as secretary. As immediate past chair, Cicci will serve for a year as faculty adviser to the AU Board of Trustees, succeeding Richard Penaskovic of Philosophy in that position.

Candidate statements by Clark and Flynn are on pages 2 and 3 of this AU Report. Candidate statements for the secretary-elect nominees will appear in the March 3 edition.

Chair-elect candidate Clark, a professor in the College of Business, has been an Auburn faculty member since 1995 and served five years as director of the School of Accountancy. He previously was in private practice in accounting and taught at the University of Georgia. Clark holds a bachelor’s degree from Western Kentucky University, an M.B.A. from the University of Tennessee and a Ph.D. from the University of Alabama.

Representing the School of Accountancy in the University Senate since 2005, Clark has served on senate or university committees on faculty salaries, academic computing, academic standards, assessment and university program review.

Chair-elect candidate Flynn is Mosley Environmental Associate Professor in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, where she has been a faculty member since 1992. She is also Extension forester and coordinator with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Auburn and a master’s and doctoral degrees from LSU.

Flynn represented her school in the senate in 2003 and 2004, served as secretary-elect of the senate in 2004-05 and secretary of the senate in 2005-06. She has served on the senate executive, steering and rules committees, as chair of the faculty handbook committee and a member of the university’s insurance and benefits committee.

Secretary-elect candidate DeVries, a professor in Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures, has been a faculty member at AU since 1990, and he holds a Ph.D. from Ohio State University. He has served two terms in the University Senate.

Secretary-elect candidate Molt is chair of the Department of Communications Disorders and an associate professor in that department. A former member of the University Senate, he holds a Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee and has been a member of the AU faculty since 1995.

Impact of budget cuts

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for employees, as well as binding commitments for scholarships and contractual obligations, according to AU Executive Vice President Don Large.

Noting that AU has an annual impact of more than $4 billion on the state’s economy, AU President Jay Gogue said many people across Alabama, not just students, base their hopes and dreams on the work of Auburn, AUM, the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension System. If the proposed budget cuts go through, he said, “a lot of hopes and dreams probably won’t be met.”

Malcolm Portera, chancellor of the UA System, said the proposed cuts would wipe out gains the university had achieved during a period of unprecedented growth. He noted that the pending education budget legislation, House Bill 319, contains the largest proposed budget cut for UA — and AU — in Alabama history.

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Proponents of the legislative proposal have cited university endowments as justifying larger cuts on four-year colleges than on two-year institutions or K-12. However, trustees and administrators from AU and UA noted that most donors stipulate how and over what period of time their gifts are to be used. The universities cannot by law divert donors’ gifts to offset state funding cuts, they said.

The only remaining significant source of additional revenue, university officials said, would be tuition increases. However, Large said Auburn and AUM would have to raise tuition 24 percent this fall to offset the cut. AUM would have raise tuition 26.7 percent. UA officials said tuition increases at their three campuses would range from 26.5 percent to 28.5 percent.

Leaders of both university systems said they have no plans to impose a large burden on their students, but they said the cuts, if allowed to stand, would have wide impact and would not be confined to the campuses or students. AAES and ACES, for instance, receive no tuition for their statewide operations.

Lunar eclipse

Alert skywatchers in Auburn viewed a rare lunar eclipse Wednesday night, as captured in this series of photos by Jeff Etheridge of Photographic Services.

Hankes to aid planning for Olympics

Student Counseling Services Director Doug Hankes has been invited to participate in planning for the on-site provision of sport psychology services at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Hankes, who is also a sport psychology consultant for the AU Athletic Department, will journey to the United States Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs on March 24-25 for Olympic planning activities.