New budget year starts with fresh cut in state funds

Auburn entered a new fiscal year on Thursday with an immediate cut of 7.5 percent in its appropriation from the State of Alabama due to the impact of the nation’s economic recession.

All public education in the state is affected by the proration, which Gov. Bob Riley announced Tuesday, citing recent economic projections that state sales taxes will not be adequate to fully fund the education budget passed by the Alabama Legislature last spring.

State appropriations account for approximately 30 percent of the university’s total revenues. The proration will reduce state funding to the Auburn University System by nearly $20 million over the next 12 months from the budget passed by the Board of Trustees on Sept. 25.

Providing some relief to the continued reductions in state appropriations carried over from the fiscal 2008-09 budget, officials say the university system is hopeful of receiving approximately $26 million in federal stimulus funding. However, most of those funds were budgeted to help make up for losses from cuts that began in past fiscal years in response to the recession.

The federal funds are one-time funds that carry significant restrictions and tight reporting requirements. Of the $16.9 million in stimulus funds expected for the main campus, $11.4 million is allocated for academic programs, primarily funding graduate, part-time and temporary faculty positions.

At the Sept. 25 meeting, trustees said they regretted that for the second consecutive year there is no funding for employee pay increases, other than individuals receiving promotions. With institutions in other states being forced to lay off or furlough employees, Executive Vice President Don Large said Auburn’s faculty and staff, in general, understand and accept that funds are simply not available for pay raises.

President Jay Gogue said no layoffs or furloughs of employees are being planned as part of Auburn’s response to state funding cuts. The university must find less harmful ways to cut costs, he said.

Gogue said the university is weathering bad economic times in relatively better shape than many of its peers because it budgeted conservatively in better fiscal times. But, he cautioned, the university faces still more cuts in an already lean budget.

Before the governor’s announcement of the 7.5 percent cut, Auburn was preparing for proration in the state education budget. Vice presidents, deans and department heads throughout the university had already been advised to cut back on their spending.

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Budget cuts
continued from page 1

plans for the next 12 months. “We are trying to cut our operating budget in a rational way that will give us time to do some things gradually with minimal hardship,” Large told the Auburn Board.

Although employees will not receive merit or cost-of-living salary increases, the university faces continued increases in costs for retirement accounts and health insurance. Large noted that the university also faces continued increases in operating costs for new and existing buildings and for debt service.

The administration will continue to monitor economic conditions, and the Board of Trustees, at its Nov. 6 meeting, will review the university’s long-term capital commitments.

Despite the financial constraints, Gogue said he expects Auburn to emerge from the recession faster than many of its peers. “We are trying to move forward in a very tough time,” he said. “In spite of everything, I am very excited about where Auburn is in relation to others. That’s the only solace in this discussion.”

Panel nominates Mobile businessman for seat on Auburn Board of Trustees

The Auburn University Trustee Selection Committee has selected Mobile business leader Ben Tom “B.T.” Roberts as the nominee for the second of two open positions on the Board of Trustees.

If confirmed by the Alabama Senate, Roberts will serve out the term of the late John C.H. “Jack” Miller on the board. Miller, who died in July, represented District 1 comprising seven counties in Southwest Alabama. The term runs through May 10, 2012.

Roberts is president of Roberts Brothers Commercial and Property Management Inc. in Mobile. He graduated from Auburn in 1972 with a degree in industrial management and has long been active in Auburn alumni and development activities. He was selected for the position in a unanimous vote by the selection committee, which includes Gov. Bob Riley, two members of the Auburn Alumni Association Board of Directors and two Auburn trustees.

Randy Campbell of suburban Birmingham was recently nominated to represent District 6, which covers eight Alabama counties south and west of Birmingham. The position is currently filled by Paul Spina, whose term expired in September. Board members may serve for up to one year after the end of their terms during the search and nomination process for their replacements.

The next legislative session is scheduled to begin in January 2010.

Exhibit of young-Elvis photos opens on Oct. 10


Assigned by Elvis’s record label, RCA Victor, for a one-day photo shoot in 1956, Wertheimer was so struck by the rising young star’s charisma and photogenic persona, that he felt compelled to continue documenting the everyday moments in Elvis’s life during that transformative year. This exhibition of more than 40 gelatin-silver prints at the Auburn art museum precedes a planned national tour of Wertheimer’s images reproduced as pigment prints.

Organized by the Smithsonian Institution, the exhibition offers audiences an opportunity to view the works in their original format. Art experts say the images portray a seemingly innocent period in Presley’s life that was soon to vanish in the wake of his superstardom, and they constitute a visual document of post-World War II America.

Largest tailgate party set for homecoming weekend

The College of Agriculture’s Fall Roundup and Taste of Alabama Agriculture will be at Ag Heritage Park on Nov. 7, prior to the Tigers’ homecoming football game against Furman.

This is the 30th anniversary of the annual event, which has been described as Auburn’s largest tailgate party. Ag Roundup began as a reunion for alumni and friends of the College of Agriculture, as an opportunity to spotlight the bounty of highly coveted foods Alabama farmers produce and a chance to increase awareness of agriculture’s significant impact on the state’s economy.

For $5, fans can sample foods ranging from grilled burgers, fried catfish and roast leg of lamb to turnip greens, sweet potato fries and fresh satsumas.

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Clearer views, sound
Hotel unveils new systems, support services in conference center

In an initiative aimed at audiences and conferees for campus events, The Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center has launched an upgrade of its audio-visual services capabilities.

The upgrade includes full-time, in-house audio-visual support through a partnership between the hotel and the Office of Communications and Marketing.

The first stage involves new projecting equipment, screen and sound and lighting systems recently added to the conference center’s auditorium. Similar improvements, financed through operating revenues, are scheduled for the ballrooms and meeting rooms, starting in 2010.

Although not on a scale with the facility’s near-total renovation since the West Paces Group began managing the university-owned hotel and conference center six years ago, audio-visual services are among the details that help cement a hotel’s reputation for quality, said Hans van der Reijden, the hotel’s managing director. And, since many prospective faculty members, families of prospective students, donors and others stay at the hotel and use its services, a favorable impression of the hotel can lead to or reinforce a favorable image of the university, he added.

“At a time when creative solutions to budget issues are needed, this partnership is a revenue generating and cost cutting solution all in one,” said Deedie Dowdle, executive director of OCM. “The hotel provides us the commission percentage of revenue that used to go outside the university to an Atlanta agency, and we in turn invest those monies in a full-time staff person and in marketing, promotion and meeting planning at the hotel to increase event revenues. Resulting commissions are returned to us to reinvest in upgraded equipment to improve the quality of campus-wide events.” That way, she added, the money stays inside Auburn rather than going to an external source.

Visual displays in the auditorium have been enhanced with a projector rated at 720 lines per inch, versus 420 on the one it replaced, and a resized screen specially coated to reduce glare and produce sharper images. New lighting fixtures, meanwhile, produce a softer light with less glare and heat.

While those changes produce better visual effects, the room’s sound has been enhanced through four new theatrical-quality speakers with subwoofers, enabling visiting speakers to communicate more effectively with their audiences.

Those auditorium features have been used at several recent events and by visiting speakers this semester, including presentations by visiting Under Armour executive Kevin Plank and oceanography filmmaker Fabien Cousteau.

Even more important from a customer-service perspective, Van der Reijden said, is a change in the way the hotel provides audio-visual services for its patrons.

“Reliability and quality are very important when you are planning for a conference or a visiting speaker,” he said. “These are not things you leave to chance, and we will not do so.”

Adding that more than event planners and audiences benefit from the improvements, Van der Reijden, an adjunct faculty member in the College of Human Sciences, said the audio-visual upgrade will enable the hotel to instruct students in the college’s hotel and restaurant management program about the role that modern, high-quality audio-visual operations play in the overall operation of a high-quality hotel.

“It is important to provide cutting-edge technology and support for our guests and for organizations that use our services,” said Van der Reijden. “It is equally important that we use modern technology in teaching our students about the hospitality industry, because they need to know what to look for on behalf of their guests when they manage their own properties.”

Sight and sound
In the above photo at right, Audio-Visual Supervisor Keith Brewer works the controls of new audio-visual equipment in the auditorium of the Dixon Conference Center. The new equipment and on-site support are part of recent steps by The Hotel at Auburn University to upgrade systems to a higher level for conferences and special lectures such as the presentation, above left, by Kevin Plank, CEO of Under Armour Inc.
Final performances
In this scene from Auburn University Theatre’s production of “Intimate Apparel,” actors Susan Gabrielle Ware as Mayme and Zeke Weldon as George discuss his gift of a silk jacket. The play is in its final two nights at Telfair Peet Theatre. Tickets for the 7:30 p.m. performances are available at the theatre box office. Call 844-4154.

Engineering professor receives grants from two agencies for research to assist space missions

Sushil Bhavnani of the Department of Mechanical Engineering in Auburn’s Samuel Ginn College of Engineering recently received major grants from two federal government agencies. These include grants from the National Science Foundation Chemical, Biological, Environmental and Thermal Systems Directorate, as well as the NASA Headquarters Exploration Systems Mission Directorate. Both grants will support Bhavnani’s research efforts in electronics packaging.

The projects will focus on boiling mechanisms during thermally-actuated pumping using asymmetric microscopic surface structures. These studies represent a $370,000 collaborative effort between Bhavnani’s group at Auburn and colleagues at Oregon State University.

Auburn launches its own social networking site on the Web

Auburn became one of the first universities to have its own social networking Web site in September with the launch of “Auburn Family,” a site designed to inform and connect current and prospective students, alumni, faculty, staff, parents and fans.

The site, which can be accessed at http://family.auburn.edu/, allows users to manage their personal profiles, upload Auburn-related photos, blogs and videos, set status updates and communicate with other members via their “comments wall” or direct messaging. The network also features current news stories about Auburn University from students’ perspectives.

Robert French of the Department of Communication and Journalism in the College of Liberal Arts worked with Auburn’s Office of Communications and Marketing to develop the network. Each week, students in French’s “Style and Design in Public Relations Messages” course write, blog and produce videos about news and events happening in Auburn’s 13 schools and colleges.

“For the students, it’s a valuable learning experience,” French said. “For the university, it’s valuable to show ‘this is a class, telling the Auburn story and we want you to participate.’”

In addition to the students’ featured stories, the site has a calendar of Auburn events and feeds of official Wire Eagle and This Week at Auburn headlines.

“I think it’s particularly good for alumni and fans,” said John Roberson, a senior in public relations who is taking French’s class. “It gives them an opportunity to feel more connected to the university.”

— Natalie Nettles
Pedestrian concourses, streets get new names

The Board of Trustees on Sept. 25 named several new streets and pedestrian concourses, recognizing the concluding stage of efforts to make Auburn a pedestrian-friendly campus.

The program is a major part of the university’s Comprehensive Campus Master Plan.

The namings include:
- The pedestrian concourse on the former section of West Thach Avenue from Ross Square to Wire Road was renamed Thach Concourse.
- The pedestrian concourse on the former section of Roosevelt Drive from Mell Street to the Campus Green east of the stadium was renamed Roosevelt Concourse.
- Roosevelt Drive from Wire Road to and around Jordan-Hare Stadium to Donahue Drive was renamed Heisman Drive in honor of the early Auburn football coach for whom the Heisman Trophy is named.
- Connector Drive from Donahue Drive westward past Wallace Center and the new basketball arena to Heisman Drive was renamed Beard-Eaves Court.
- Dormitory Drive was renamed War Eagle Way and will extend westward to Wire Road. Magnolia Dormitory once stood along the street on the site now occupied by parking for the College of Business.
- The previously unnamed street west of the Public Safety and Security Building and extending from Magnolia Avenue south to The Village residence center was named Village View Lane.

Away from class
Davis Arboretum offers a quiet respite from the crowds on a busy class day. While thousands of students rush to class within a few hundred feet, a great blue heron shares a restful, between-meals perch with several of the pond’s turtles.

NASA grant

Auburn faculty developing educational materials about climate change

Auburn’s College of Sciences and Mathematics and the Alabama Department of Education have been awarded $600,000 from NASA to produce high school educational materials about global climate change.

Faculty in the Auburn-based program, “Bringing Global Climate Change Education to Alabama Classrooms,” will work with the Alabama Science in Motion, or ASIM, program to train teachers and educate students in grades 9-12 about the changing planet.

“Teachers and students will gain unique insight into the science behind one of the most prevalent scientific issues of our time – the environment and its effect on our lives,” he said.

“Different aspects of global climate change and its impact on Earth can be debated,” Ricks added. “But regardless of where you stand on the issues, learning how science is applied to study the planet and its climate will help our students acquire the skills needed to compete in a global economy.”

Lesson plans can range from students playing the role of a carbon atom as it cycles between Earth and the atmosphere to students using computer models to analyze saltwater intrusion in coastal regions. Students will also utilize tools such as NASA data and satellite imagery and Google Earth to analyze the effects of climate change on global carbon storage and release. Several learning modules will allow students to collect real data from local water sources to evaluate the effects of climate change on water quality and availability.

Also awarded was an additional $100,000 from NASA. The additional funds will be used in part to host a climate change symposium at Auburn University.

An interdisciplinary group of Auburn University faculty members will serve as coprincipal investigators to develop interactive education modules designed to engage high school students on the changes in the Earth’s climate and its effect on weather, carbon cycle and ecosystems, climate variability change, and atmospheric composition using NASA resources. They include Kevin Fielman, biological sciences; Ming-Kuo Lee, geology and geography; Yu Lin, physics; Luke Marzen, geology and geography; and Marllin Simon, physics.

Lead teachers from Alabama schools associated with the project are Emily Wheelees of Benjamin Russell High School, Jennifer Cox of Stanhope Elmore High School and Laura Steltenpohl of Auburn High School.

“Our ability to partner with ASIM is unique. Within three years, our hands-on, inquiry-based experiments will be incorporated into the high school curriculum across the state of Alabama with the goal of creating a climate-literate society,” said Marie Wooten, associate dean for research in Auburn’s College of Sciences and Mathematics, the project’s principal investigator.
Researchers: Fish wastewater is ideal for growing plants

Teach a man to raise fish – and grow plants – and you’ll help feed his family and fellow citizens for a lifetime. That’s a new twist being applied to the age-old proverb at Auburn University, where researchers are combining fish farming and horticulture to help Alabama farmers find new income streams.

Jesse Chappell, who is an associate professor in the Department of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures and specialist with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, is working with professor Jeff Sibley of the Department of Horticulture on the use of fish greenhouse wastewater to fertilize plants in an adjacent greenhouse.

“We want to provide an opportunity for farmers to have more on-farm income,” Chappell says. “We are seeking ways to produce plants more economically through new opportunities.”

The researchers, using an experimental setup with two greenhouses at the university’s E.W. Shell Fisheries Center just north of Auburn, are studying the nutrient amount and quality in fish wastewater that is piped from the fish greenhouse to the plant greenhouse. Chappell says fish retain 40 percent to 50 percent of nutrients but the rest are excreted, making the wastewater-production byproduct an excellent resource for plant nourishment.

Many factors, though, affect the nutrients coming from the fish greenhouse. These variables include the number and kind of fish in a tank, the size of fish, the volume of the tank and the amount of water. “We are quantifying the water and nutrient output in relation to stocking density and fish waste byproducts that can be used as biomass,” Chappell said.

“This will help us determine baseline numbers so we can inform farmers of the right ratios regarding fish biomass and feed inputs applied as related to the amount and nutrient strength of wastewater,” he explained.

Horticulturist Sibley, who also serves Auburn as acting associate dean of the Graduate School, is growing several types of plants with the fish production water, such as herbs, bedding plants, ornamental shrubs, flowers and foliage, with the most potential residing in leatherleaf ferns, snapdragons and calla lilies. He is also studying edible plants, including tomatoes, sweet corn, peppers and strawberries. The study thus far indicates only one limitation in that fish water contains insufficient calcium, so it must be added when watering the plants.

“This project is very environmentally friendly as we use the unused fish production nutrients from aquaculture and reduce the amount of synthetic fertilizers used in horticulture crop production,” Sibley said.

The Auburn researchers are working with farmer Butch Wilson of Marion Junction, who is installing a full-scale operation that will have a 70-foot by 170-foot building with 10 intensive fish production systems. Wilson also will use fish wastewater to grow several plants including bamboo on outdoor plots that, in turn, will be used as fuel biomass to produce heat for the fish tanks.

Chappell says they also can produce methane from fish wastewater to heat, cool and power the building. This type of indoor fish production approach uses 40 percent to 50 percent less energy than traditional production systems in ponds to produce similar amounts of fish.

“There is much potential beyond normal farm setups as well,” Sibley added. “Empty warehouses and stores across the state could be converted into fish and plant production systems.”

— Charles Martin
It is one thing to listen to a lecture about ancient Roman civilization, read about Vatican City in a textbook or see photographs of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It’s an entirely different occurrence to experience the Italian culture firsthand.

Each year, more than 700 Auburn students embark on life-changing journeys when they make the decision to study abroad through one of the university’s Auburn Abroad programs.

One of these programs, the “Human Odyssey in Italy” summer study abroad program, allows students to spend three weeks in Rome, two in Florence and one on the Mediterranean coast while exploring Italian history, science, art, architecture, literature, philosophy and religion.

“The university has a strategic plan to promote international skills and global programs,” said Paul Harris, associate director of the University Honors College and director of the Human Odyssey program. “The Human Odyssey is a wonderful, interdisciplinary program.”

The Human Odyssey program is a component of the university’s Honors College, although students do not have to be members of the Honors College to participate.

Auburn University instructors Clark Lundell, professor and head of the Department of Industrial Design; Lewis Barker, professor of psychology; and Jim Bradley, professor of biological sciences, serve as program coordinators and teach the available course offerings.

The program satisfies students’ required six hours of world history requirements with its Human Odyssey I and II courses. Students also have the option of taking the core fine arts course, “The Art of Architecture, Place and Culture,” and the core social sciences courses, “Introduction to Psychology” and “Concepts of Science.”

Hanna Gordon, a sophomore in French and English, took four courses when she embarked on the Human Odyssey and said studying abroad was very rewarding. “I actually got to see the places we were learning about, rather than just reading about them and seeing pictures in a textbook,” Gordon said. “It was as if history came to life.”

Aside from the classroom learning and field trips, students are allowed to take separate excursions in their free time to see additional sights.

“Florence was my favorite city we visited,” said Natalie Foster, a junior in nursing. “We also got to take a lot of trips into the Tuscan countryside. A group of us independently went to Pisa for the day for the sole purpose of taking pictures looking like we were holding up the Leaning Tower of Pisa.”

Lundell said one of the hypotheses he presents to the students prior to traveling to Italy is that the American culture they live in is inherently Roman. The semester before the students embark on the trip, he schedules a time to take them on a campus tour and show them how Auburn is laid out like a Roman city.

“I try to make a connection between what they will see in Rome and what they see in their everyday life. That way it doesn’t seem so foreign to them when they get there.”

Clark Lundell
Professor

“‘I actually got to see the places we were learning about, rather than just reading about them and seeing pictures in a textbook, It was as if history came to life.”

Hanna Gordon
Student

It is the most amazing experience of her life. “We did everything I could imagine,” she said. “It was such a fulfilling, enriching experience that allowed me to make life-long memories. I want to go back.”
Campus News Briefs

University offering on-campus exercise program for persons with disabilities

A free, accessible fitness program for faculty, students and staff with disabilities is offered Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 5-6 p.m. in room 1129 of Beard-Eaves-Memorial Coliseum.

The fitness program offers accessible weight training, accessible cardiovascular training and assisted exercise in a friendly atmosphere. It is not a class, but a program that can accommodate participants’ needs so they are able to exercise. For more information, contact Nancy Gell at gellnan@auburn.edu or call 844-4483.

Emeritus professor from Auburn named interim president of Florida Atlantic

John Pritchett, emeritus professor of biological sciences and former interim provost at Auburn, has been confirmed by the Florida Board of Governors as interim president of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. He replaces Frank T. Brogan, who left that institution’s presidency in September to become chancellor of Florida’s state university system.

Pritchett has served as Florida Atlantic’s provost and chief academic officer since retiring from Auburn in 2004. The university has 10 colleges and 27,000 students at seven campuses along the east coast of Florida. At Auburn, Pritchett served on the zoology and biological sciences faculties for more than 30 years, and served as a department head in the College of Agriculture and later the College of Sciences and Mathematics. He also served as dean of the Graduate School and associate provost, as well as interim provost.

Women’s Studies Program to present public lecture by noted filmmaker

Filmmaker Elvira Dones will discuss her documentary film “Sworn Virgins” in a public presentation on Tuesday, Oct. 6, in the University Student Center, room 225. The presentation is sponsored by the Women’s Studies Program and the University Lectures Committee.

Dones is an Albanian-born novelist and journalist as well as a screenwriter. In 1988, she traveled to Switzerland for Albanian State Television and there she defected. She moved to Washington, D.C., in 2004. “Sworn Virgins” won the Best Documentary Award at the Baltimore Women’s Film Festival in fall 2007. The documentary explores the lives of women in northern Albania who take an oath of virginity in order to enjoy the rights of men.

George Crandell appointed associate dean of Graduate School at Auburn

Following an external search, Graduate School Dean George Flowers has announced the appointment of George Crandell as associate dean. Crandell served as acting associate dean for the past year.

An Auburn faculty member since 1988, Crandell holds the rank of full professor in the Department of English, where he served as department head for seven years. He earned Ph.D. and master’s degrees in English at the University of Texas at Austin and a bachelor’s degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Crandell has published widely on topics in modern American drama and humor. He is the author of four books or edited collections, including “Arthur Miller: A Descriptive Bibliography,” forthcoming from Oak Knoll Press.

Audiences get first experience with new visual, sound systems in conference center. See page 3.

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