Board delays vote on new budget

Although the new fiscal year starts Wednesday, Auburn University will restrain spending to current levels for at least another month.

The Board of Trustees agreed Friday to carry over AU's 2002-03 budget until the university has a clear commitment of funding from the state for the new fiscal year. The Legislature passed the education budget with minor amendments from Gov. Bob Riley on Friday, as the AU Board met.

AU Executive Vice President Don Large said the university's budget planners need time to evaluate the state appropriation and make adjustments to the administration's recommendations before submitting those recommendations to the board. Trustees agreed to postpone consideration of the new budget at the board's next session, which is scheduled for Nov. 7.

Budget guidelines the board established in June include salary increases for faculty and staff in an effort to keep Auburn competitive with peer institutions across the South. Except for promotions that go into effect earlier, salary increases will be delayed until the new budget is implemented. The board also agreed to exemptions for staffing of AU's new museum and for state-mandated adjustments that go into effect Oct. 1.

Large said the university will fare about as expected in the new state budget. AU had planned last spring for a 6.3 percent cut of about $8.5 million in the state appropriation. The new appropriation will be about the same as in 2002-03, but the state is shifting additional costs totaling $7.5 million to $8 million to the university.

The largest additional cost will be $5 million for health insurance premiums of AU retirees in the state's retiree insurance plan known as PEEHIP.

The university could delay new spending plans beyond the board's November meeting. For that session, board members said they want more information about what to expect next fall, when state government hits the second stage of a massive decline in revenue. Trustees said they want to be sure the university can weather a sharp drop in state appropriations next year and beyond.
Auburn Creed brings different approach to network TV spots

On fall football Saturdays, nearly every college game on television features halftime commercials for the universities of the opposing teams. With most of the television spots looking the same, the universities depict nearly always seem interchangeable — until now.

Last spring, a planning committee in AU’s Office of Communications and Marketing decided to break out of the mold for football halftime television commercials. In that mold, every campus is beautiful, every student enthusiastic, every professor dedicated, and every president extols his institution as “world class.”

Breaking that mold is the “I believe…” series of institutional commercials airing this fall on televised games of the Auburn Tigers. Taking a different approach for Auburn’s network spots, students and faculty members in a variety of settings recite lines from the Auburn Creed.

“We got tired of saying the same thing everyone else is saying and showing the same things every other college is showing,” said Jim Jackson, one of several band members in the spots, added, “I felt as if this line was written for me.”

Auburn University’s Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art will officially open to the public Friday at 11 a.m.

The museum is named for Auburn alumna Jule Collins Smith of Houston, whose husband, Al, a 1947 engineering graduate, donated $3 million toward construction of the museum as a 50th anniversary wedding present to his wife in 1998.

“Without the work of Auburn people and the generosity of many of our friends, the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Art would never have become reality,” said AU President William Walker.

He added, “We are extremely proud to bring to Alabama a museum of this quality — one that will give Auburn a strong cultural presence in the state and the Southeast and we are equally thankful to all who have given of their time and money to make this project possible.”

On a knob overlooking a three-acre lake at South College Street and Woodfield Drive, the $13.2 million museum is one mile southeast of campus. Gresham, Smith and Partners of Birmingham designed the white, modernistic building. The nearly 40,000-square-foot museum has eight galleries, a restaurant, a museum shop and a 125-seat auditorium. The 15-acre site includes walking trails, a lake and a formal garden area.

The museum’s public entrance is on the east side of the building off Woodfield Drive. Greeting visitors at the entrance is an 11-foot-high brass sculpture by Auburn graduate Jean Woodham, one of the most extensive collections of prints by 19th-century naturalist John James Audubon.

The museum’s exterior and interior surfaces include expanses of Italian travertine marble, which are among the building’s most distinctive characteristics. A vaulted rotunda houses a three-tier glass chandelier, commissioned from the internationally known glass artist Dale Chihuly of Seattle.

The museum’s holdings also include one of the world’s largest collections of Victorian Belleek porcelain, a gift from Helen and Dwight Carlisle. And, the Joan Coates Hartman Collection contains outstanding Tibetan Buddhist bronzes.

The museum is part of the academic buildings and the surrounding community. The Advisory Board has always envisioned a museum that maintains the highest possible standards,” said Dwight Carlisle, president of the museum advisory board. “I believe our building, collection, curatorial standards and programming are comparable to major museums across the country.”

“The museum is genuinely a dream come true,” said Jule Collins Smith, namesake of the museum.

“And, what a beautiful reality it is. The support of this project from all facets of the Auburn community and indeed, statewide, has been overwhelmingly gratifying.”
Insurance premiums go up in January

Employee health insurance premiums will go up 10 percent under increases approved Friday by the AU Board of Trustees.

Participants in Auburn's employee health insurance program will also pay more for each prescription under new co-pay provisions of the Blue Cross/Blue Shield-administered plan.

Executive Vice President Don Large said the increased premiums and co-pay provisions are needed to offset health care costs that rose 10 percent last year and will continue to rise in 2004. The university and its employees maintain a self-insurance plan that pays all costs for claims approved by Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Alabama.

Effective Jan. 1, the family rate for participants will increase from $133 per month to $124 for employees earning less than $21,000 per year, from $168 to $185 for those earning $21,000-$31,499 and from $225 to $246 for those earning $31,500 or more.

For employees with individual coverage, the rate will increase from $55 to $61 in the lowest pay bracket, from $80 to $88 in the middle bracket and from $107 to $116 for the top bracket.

For all participants, co-payments for prescription drugs will rise from $5 to $10 for generic drugs, from $20 to $25 for name-brand drugs on the Blue Cross/Blue Shield list of preferred brands and from $35 to $40 for name brands not on that list.

Large said increases in expenses for prescription drugs are the biggest factor driving increases in the cost of health insurance. He provided a chart showing that prescriptions have risen from 14.4 percent of the total health plan expenditures at AU in 1994 to 25 percent in 2003. In the 12-month period ending May 31, payments for prescriptions increased 19.7 percent, compared to 10.6 percent for hospital costs and 4 percent for payments to physicians.

With the increase, the plan will maintain a $3.8 million reserve to cover outstanding claims at the end of the year. Large said the reserve will meet routine accounting standards that are in place to insure the solvency of insurance plans.

On a related topic, President William Walker said the university faces long-term risks from the Alabama Legislature’s transfer to Auburn of responsibility for health insurance costs for AU retirees. That change will cost Auburn $5 million in the budget year starting Oct. 1.

Walker said his main concern is that the expense of the state’s FEHEIP insurance program for retirees will grow rapidly, yet the university has no control over that insurance plan.

Program to explore dependents’ college aid options

The Office of Human Resources will sponsor the program “Money for Your Children’s Education,” from 9 a.m.-11 a.m., Oct. 8, at Dixon Conference Center.

Charles Markle of the Office of Student Financial Aid will discuss state and federal financial assistance for dependents of faculty and staff.

To register, complete an HRD registration form or register online. The online registration system is at www.auburn.edu/administration/human_resourc es/hrd/index.html.

Contact Heather Crozier at 844-1445 or vannah@auburn.edu for more information.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, September 30

• Littleton-Fontklin Lecture: David Billington, authority on aesthetics in engineering, 4 p.m., Dixon Conference Center.

Wednesday, October 1

• AU Theatre: “The Member of the Wedding,” 7:30 p.m., through Friday, Oct. 3; Sunday, Oct. 5. All performances at Jan Dempsey Arts Center, behind Frank Brown Recreation Center on Opelika Road. Box Office, 844-4154.

Friday, October 3

• Grand Opening: Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, 10 a.m., South College Street and Woodfield Drive.

Monday, October 6

• Next AU Report.
• UPC Speaker: Former Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev, 7 p.m., Coliseum. Admission: students, $8; faculty and staff, $12; others, $15. Tickets on sale at Foy Union Sept. 23.

Friday, October 10

• Mid-semester.

Monday, October 13

• AU Report.

Tuesday, October 14

• Meeting: University Senate, 3 p.m., Brown Hall auditorium.

Thursday, October 16

• AU Theatre: “The Member of the Wedding,” 7:30 p.m., through Friday, Oct. 3; Sunday, Oct. 5. All performances at Jan Dempsey Arts Center, behind Frank Brown Recreation Center on Opelika Road. Box Office, 844-4154.

Former refugee returns to Cuba as part of Alabama trade delegation

Forty-two years ago, Diego Gimenez, a young Cuban farm worker, was convicted of a drug smuggling charge in 1960. He was sentenced to 30 years of hard labor after his capture.

Gimenez was eventually ransomed out of Cuba along with other members of the failed invasion and warned never to set foot on Cuban soil again.

Recently though, with the permission of the Cuban government, Gimenez, now an AU faculty member and Extension specialist, accompanied Alabama Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparkman and other Alabama agricultural leaders to Cuba to explore ways the state and Auburn University can improve trade and information exchanges with this beleaguered island nation.

The state of Alabama and Auburn University, Gimenez says, are well-positioned to develop a working partnership with the Cuban people when relations between the Cuban and U.S. governments normalize.

“If you look at Cuba, it is still predominantly an agricultural country with a very strong need for many of the products commonly grown in Alabama — cotton, cotton seed, grain, poultry and eggs and, to a somewhat lesser extent, pork, which is already being imported from Canada,” said Gimenez, an associate professor of animal science and Alabama Cooperative Extension System animal scientist who also serves as Extension’s Hispanic/Latino coordinator.

For the foreseeable future, Gimenez said, trade and information exchanges with Cuba essentially will be a one-way street. Once a major agricultural exporter, Cuba is now a net importer of many agricultural staples and will likely remain so for a very long time, he said.

“This is often what happens to countries such as Cuba recovering from major economic difficulties,” Gimenez said. “They have to sell their very best commodities to generate hard currency and, thus, are unable to progress at the rate they would like.”

With Cuba’s farming sector undertaking a slow, painful transition to a free-market economy, Gimenez says he believes land-grant universities can also serve an especially valuable role by working with Cuban counterparts to develop Extension programs.

Despite his differences with the Castro regime, Gimenez said he believes it is time for the U.S. government to lift the long-standing Cuban trade embargo.

Lifting the embargo, he said, not only will help ordinary Cubans, but also will provide a strong incentive for normalization between the United States and Cuba to occur “that we have to lose,” he said.

Gimenez, who, along with other members of the Alabama delegation, met with Cuban President Fidel Castro for more than three hours during the visit, will share his experiences and views on fostering better relations with Cuba as part of the E.T. York International Scholar Lecture Series on Oct. 31 in 109 Comer Hall.

Going vertical

Concrete piers mark progress in the construc-

tion of the College of Sciences and Mathemat-
ics’ Science Laboratory Center south of Roos-
velt Drive. When completed in 2004, the com-
plex will include a four-

storey building for teach-

ing labs, a two-story classroom building and a 300-seat multimedia auditorium.

AU Report Editor: Roy Summerford. Contributing Writers: Martha Barker, Sciences and Mathematics; Jim Langcuster, ACES; Nicole Loscalzo, Student Affairs; Haden Brown, Museum; and AU Athletics. Photography by Jeff Etheridge and Trice Megginson, Nicole Loscalzo, Student Affairs; Haden Brown, Museum; and AU Athletics. Photography by Jeff Etheridge and Trice Megginson, Nicole Loscalzo, Student Affairs; Haden Brown, Museum; and AU Athletics. Photography by Jeff Etheridge and Trice Megginson, Nicole Loscalzo, Student Affairs; Haden Brown, Museum; and AU Athletics.

AU Report is published by the Office of Communications and Marketing at Auburn University. Issues appear each Monday during academic terms, except for weeks on which major holidays fall. Issues are every two weeks during summer term. Copies are distributed free by campus mail to fulltime faculty and staff at campus offices. Deadline for delivery of items for publication is 4 p.m. on Wednesday before publication date.

Direct inquiries, subscription and news items to AU Report, 25 Samford Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849. Telephone 334/844-9999. E-mail: summero@auburn.edu.

Rainy days

Umbrellas were up all over campus early last week. The Auburn area has seen an unusual amount of rain this year, but behind the most recent front were clear skies and cooler temperatures — right on time for the start of autumn.
The National Institutes of Health has awarded a $5.6 million grant to Stewart Schneller of the College of Sciences and Mathematics’ Science Laboratory Center flies the U.S. flag. This crane was one of two flying Old Glory at the site last week.

The National Institutes of Health has awarded a $5.6 million grant to Stewart Schneller of the College of Sciences and Mathematics’ Science Laboratory Center flies the U.S. flag. This crane was one of two flying Old Glory at the site last week.

The National Institutes of Health has awarded a $5.6 million grant to Stewart Schneller of the College of Sciences and Mathematics’ Science Laboratory Center flies the U.S. flag. This crane was one of two flying Old Glory at the site last week.

The National Institutes of Health has awarded a $5.6 million grant to Stewart Schneller of the College of Sciences and Mathematics’ Science Laboratory Center flies the U.S. flag. This crane was one of two flying Old Glory at the site last week.

The National Institutes of Health has awarded a $5.6 million grant to Stewart Schneller of the College of Sciences and Mathematics’ Science Laboratory Center flies the U.S. flag. This crane was one of two flying Old Glory at the site last week.
AU Theatre starts new season with ‘Wedding’

AU Theatre starts its 2003-04 season this week with Carson McCullers’ “The Member of the Wedding.”

While Telfair Poet Theatre is undergoing renovations this fall, the university theatre troupe will present the season’s first two plays at the city’s Jan Dempsey Art Center at 222 Drake Ave., behind the Frank Brown Recreation Center on Opelika Road. Performances of “The Member of the Wedding” will be Wednesday-Friday and Oct. 8-11 at 7:30 p.m., with a matinee at 2 p.m., Sunday.

For tickets, contact the Box Office at 844-4154. Other information is on the Web at www.auburn.edu/academic/liberal_arts/theatre/

In the photo at left, cast members shown during rehearsal are, from left, Matthew Weathers from Cary Woods Elementary School in Auburn, Cynthia Beavers Wilson of Tuskegee University and Katie Villane, a theatre major at AU.

Program on Discovery Channel features AU English professor

Paula Backscheider of AU’s Department of English is a featured academic authority in a new Discovery Channel program about 18th century author Daniel Defoe and the writing of “Robinson Crusoe.”

The documentary, one in a series on authors of literary classics, is scheduled to air at 9 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5, and will repeat periodically as part of the Discovery Channel’s broadcasting package.

At strategic points in the documentary, Backscheider, the Philpott-Stevens Eminent Scholar in the College of Liberal Arts, discusses the British author’s life and craft. Of key importance to the documentary, she discusses factors that influenced Defoe as he developed his classic novel about a man alone against the wilderness.

Backscheider is an internationally recognized authority on Defoe. Her biography of the English writer was published by Johns Hopkins University Press and won the prestigious British Council Prize for biography in 1990. The book also won the Outstanding Academic Book Award that year by Choice magazine.

The 1719 novel remains one of the most universally popular adventure novels. In part due to the novel’s vivid imagery, many adventurers of the period claimed to be the real “Robinson Crusoe.”

Backscheider notes that, although Defoe may have gotten ideas from many published accounts of rescued shipwreck survivors, the story is entirely fictional.

“Robinson Crusoe” is more than an adventure novel, Backscheider said. The book also presents insights into customs and attitudes of the period, she said. Of greater importance, she added, the author used the story of a man’s triumphant struggle for survival to develop a complex psychological study that is as relevant today as it was in the 18th century.

Backscheider initially became involved in the project as a consultant to the Discovery Channel production crew. In that role, she helped the crew authenticate details about Defoe, his literary practices and early 18th century England.

Later, during filming last spring, she traveled to Toronto to visit sets and record her discussion of Defoe and his work.

A prominent authority on other aspects of 18th century British literature and culture, Backscheider also served as a consultant for the play and film “The Madness of King George III.”

Backscheider, whose Ph.D. is from Purdue University, is also author of Reflections on Biography, a study of the craft of writing biography. That work was published by Oxford University Press.

In her recent work, Backscheider has expanded her research into literary cultural studies, including a study of the influence of women poets on their times, which she examines in an upcoming book.

AU financial records to go offline for day

With the new fiscal year starting Wednesday, the AU Business Office will begin year-end processing of financial records for the 2002-03 fiscal year Thursday night.

The university’s financial records system will be unavailable to users on Friday. For information, contact Felicia Roberson of Information Systems Support at 844-5661.

Basketball season tickets go on sale

AU faculty and staff may purchase men’s and women’s basketball season tickets for half price.

The Athletic Ticket Office mailed basketball ticket order forms last week to faculty and staff. The discount tickets are on sale until Oct. 15. Prices are: Men’s, $95; Women’s, $20; both, $105.

For information, contact the ticket office at 844-4040.