

And the Board said, 'Let there be fright'

By MIKE PETRYNI
Of the Emerald

In the beginning there was the State Board of Higher Education, and their word was economic hard times.

Hard times begat a \$6 million cut in state system operations and a \$1.5 million cut at the University.

Thus, University President Robert Clark begat a "state of financial exigency" and that begat the Hearing Panel on University Priorities (HPUP), charged with "reviewing the University's priorities" to cut the budget.

HPUP begat a "collective nervous breakdown" for the University.

So it was with the University's budget last year.

Because of financial exigency, the only commandment was: Thou shalt not hold anything sacred—graduate assistantships, secretaries, whole departments, and, finally, tenure. No more tenure during the financial crisis? The initial cuts projected a loss of 62 full-time faculty members and 8 classified personnel from the University for the 1972-73 fiscal year.

Panic struck. "What is this knocking at my door?" the faculty asked. "It is only I," the cold-wind-of-looking-for-another-job replied.

Students nodded, blinked, cast demeanors of sympathy across their faces, and felt relieved. A chance to trim the jowliness from the University's jaws. For once, the University, of its own accord, could get rid of an ineffective, entrenched faculty, hiding from the world behind their tenured walls.

But the gloom, in the end, descended on the students too. They finally realized that the best would be the first to go. Sixty-two full-time faculty could possibly slice off all the knockers and shakers this school had.

Then to top it all off, HPUP, ballooned to fifteen members, including administration members, faculty members, student

members, and decided to review priorities behind closed doors.

Their argument was that the panel was going to examine all priorities of the University to first decide what were the most important, what money would be available for new programs and finally those areas where the \$1.5 million could come from. Because much of the discussion would be tentative and concerning personnel, and possibly later reversed in subsequent discussions, the panel did not feel it would be beneficial for the press to be reporting what may be premature deliberations. The press, the panel contended, would only be causing unneeded alarm throughout the departments and personnel.

But wait a minute. Just what was the task HPUP was to perform?

They were simply going to advise President Clark on where the cuts could be undertaken. The procedure was based on a University of Minnesota plan of priority review rather than just performing an across-the-board, University-wide slash. Priority review, it was believed, could best eliminate undue harm to the most important programs.

Essentially, the procedure was to have each department file plans to cut more than the necessary University-wide percentage cut. The University's cut was to be 7 per cent for 1972-73 so each department was asked to cut 12 per cent. Departments were to tank their programs in order of priority.

Then HPUP would review each departmental plan, with a little give and take around the 7 and 12 per cent locus points, which would both come through with the appropriate cut and at the same time evaluate the priorities of programs on a broader University-wide basis.

Now, back to the closed doors. The Emerald and more than 15 other newspapers in the state cried foul.

President Clark had said, in reply to how

much he thought the cut back would hurt the quality of the University: "It is inevitable that it hurts the University when there is that much reduction in staff—it cannot but affect us adversely in quality."

"But it helps the University in this one sense: we've been growing so rapidly for so long that we haven't really taken the time out to appraise what we were doing. For that, I think, it (the budget review) can produce a very beneficial by-product."

The newspapers said, basically: "If so, then we should examine what we have been doing at a public institution, in public."

The Salem Capital Journal contended flatly that the setting of University priorities was too important for secrecy. And when HPUP persisted in maintaining secrecy, even to the closing down of deliberations if the press continued to insist on attending the meetings, the Emerald lamented: "It is sad to see this sort of situation arise at an institution of higher education; a place where free inquiry and the search for truth are supposed to be the ultimate goal."

But, when HPUP got going, truth was not the ultimate goal; they just wanted to cut \$1.5 million from the University's budget.

And that they did—in a roundabout way. After months of deliberations, HPUP made its recommendations. The recommended cut was nearly \$2 million instead of \$1.5 million. The projected 62 full-time faculty cut somewhere in the smoke-filled room had turned into 42.4 full-time faculty positions and the projected cut of eight classified personnel had gone up to 17.6 full-time positions in the recommendations. Classified personnel were not represented on HPUP. In addition, 72 full-time positions out of the total 800 graduate teaching fellows were cut.

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