

BUDGET CRISIS HITS LCC

Instructional programs, faculty positions face cuts amid budget discrepancy conflict

Philosophy instructor Jeffrey Borrowdale has taught at Lane Community College for 17 years. In one month, though, his position as the school's only full-time philosophy instructor may be cut to save money.

LCC has a \$10.6 million budget deficit for the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

As the college president, board, faculty and union struggle to find a solution to the crisis, outgoing LCC President Mary Spilde has been holding private meetings with board members — bringing into question what is allowed under Oregon's public meetings law — to discuss the budget shortfall.

An overwhelming amount of public testimony has been heard during the budget meetings, calling for additional meeting times to accommodate the number of comments. Adrienne Mitchell, a member of the school's Budget and Finance Subcommittee, says 145 signed up to speak during the budget committee's April 19 meeting.

While cuts are being considered across the spectrum in LCC's 2017-2018 proposed budget — ranging from expense reductions in part-time classified staff to reducing non-mandatory items like travel — the biggest proposed layoffs will hit instructors the hardest.

The proposed reductions reduce philosophy course offerings and eliminate religion, respiratory therapy and the honors programs. The projected savings from those cuts total \$1.63 million, according to the 2018 Administrative Budget Balancing Options Summary.

Despite a decline in enrollment from 40,099 students in 2001 to 28,219 in 2016, management positions have steadily increased while the number of full-time instructors has decreased.

Although financial cuts are necessary to balance the budget, members of the LCC Education Association, the faculty union, have asked the budget office to calculate lost revenue from the proposed program cuts and include those figures in the proposed budget.

LCCEA members insist the proposed budget is misleading because it does not account for the tuition revenue that will be lost by cutting instructional programs. "In many cases, the proposed savings, the numbers that the administration has presented to the board and to the budget committee and the community, are simply false," says LCCEA President Jim Salt.

Before the Budget Committee's public meetings, Spilde held individual meetings with each member of the LCC Board of Education.

Board Chair Rosie Pryor says LCC's budget was discussed during her meeting with Spilde. "It's her job to work with each and every one of the board members individually so that she can provide full information in a public meeting session," Pryor says.

Oregon's public meetings law states that decisions of governing bodies "must be made in public" any time "a quorum is required to make or deliberate toward a decision on any matter, or to do information gathering." It does not specifically bar "serial meetings," in which board members discuss the same information in groups of less than a quorum.

A Portland lawyer specializing in public meetings law says the individual-meeting tactic can be employed to avoid transparency, but that the area of law on serial meetings has not been decided.

"There's no question that doing it one or a few at a time avoids the requirements of transparency in Oregon public meetings law. It's an end run around the statutory requirements," says Duane Bosworth, a First Amendment lawyer who frequently litigates public records and public meetings matters.

Spilde's plan would cut nine faculty, four staff and two managerial positions. Significant cuts will be made to early childhood education, and the geography information systems program will be put on hold for a year — although these programs were initially slated to be cut entirely.

Cutting religion, a core academic discipline, is a travesty, says religious studies instructor Jonathan Seidel.

An adjunct instructor with 35 years teaching of teaching experience, Seidel would lose his job completely.

The administration's proposed budget — slated for a vote by the LCC board on Wednesday, May 10, after *EW* goes to press — fails to account for the loss of tuition revenue, the union says.

The faculty union ran its own numbers, compared them to the administration's budget, and created a balanced bud-

get that retains all instructional programs. The union's data show that philosophy and religion bring in approximately \$337,000 each year, according to faculty member Adrienne Mitchell.

"So there's no accounting in the administrator's budget for the lost revenue," Mitchell says.

Both Spilde and Pryor say lost tuition revenue calculations are included in the budget. They couldn't, however, point to the figures in the budget and referred *Eugene Weekly* to Brian Kelly, LCC's vice president of student services.

Kelly did not provide specific lost-tuition revenue figures. He forwarded an unsigned email from the budget office that reads: "The college is projecting a net zero change to enrollment in 2017-2018. Any lost enrollment from program reductions will be offset by increased enrollment in career technical, transfer, and online courses through intentional program growth in these areas."

Board chair Pryor says she is not convinced by the faculty union's budget.

"I'm not persuaded. I'm simply not persuaded," she says.

Spilde says the faculty union's budget cut 40 percent of managers, and neither she nor the board sees that as a "reasonable approach" to balancing the budget.

Administrative bloat at Lane has increased over the last decade. Beginning with the recession in 2008, the college had 55 managers compared to 235 contracted faculty and 168 part-time faculty. In 2016, the number of managers increased to 63 managers compared to a decline of contracted faculty to 212. The number of part-time positions increased to 189 during that time period.

Borrowdale says the budget does not include any real cuts in management. "Managers went up during the boom times and have stayed steady despite a big drop in enrollment — so you've got few students, fewer full-time faculty, but for some reason you need more managers?"

LCC is facing scrutiny for its restructuring methods of contracted faculty — raising concerns regarding potential contract violations.

"In this case they are actually laying someone off so they can hire more part time faculty because of the cheaper rate," Borrowdale says. "And that to me is an incredibly immoral act, and I use that word because it's one of the subjects that philosophers teach of course is morality and ethics. I think the college needs to take a philosophy class in ethics." ■

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