

Arts on the Chopping Block

THE UO WANTS TO CUT MONEY TO ARTS, CULTURE AND LABOR PROGRAMS

By Bob Keefer

The University of Oregon plans to solve its budget crisis by cutting money for the arts and culture.

That's the message conveyed by a series of major budget cuts quietly proposed for the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, the Oregon Bach Festival and the Museum of Natural and Cultural History.

Meanwhile, a non-arts institution — the Labor Education and Research Center, or LERC — faces the loss of two-thirds of its UO funding, a professor there says. Founded in 1977, LERC does research and offers classes in support of the labor movement.

The university needs to cut its overall budget by \$11.6 because of falling enrollment and other revenue losses, UO President Michael Schill has said.

Despite the university's culture of secrecy, word of the arts cuts — which had not been publicly announced — leaked out when former Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy posted the news on Facebook April 10.

Apparently on orders from above, arts administrators declined to talk about the cuts to *Eugene Weekly*,

referring questions to Molly Blancett, the university's interim spokesperson.

Blancett confirmed the proposed cuts and said priority was being given to revenue-generating programs.

"While we recognize and embrace the value that arts and culture bring to our community, some auxiliary units will experience larger budget reductions to ensure that tuition dollars and state funding are going toward our core mission and our top priorities," she says by email.

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"The university is prioritizing programs that support student success, affordability and public safety, and to the extent possible, protecting career faculty and staff and programs that generate or have the potential to generate general fund revenue."

One UO insider willing to talk is Donovan Mack, a member of the Museum of Natural and Cultural History advisory council.

"Please ask the university administration to explain why it seeks disproportionately greater reductions in the arts and humanities — and in the only UO museum that invests heavily in groundbreaking scientific research," he says in an email to *EW*.

According to Blancett's numbers, the Museum of Natural and Cultural History is slated for a \$225,000 cut, or 16.6 percent of its UO funding; the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art is to lose \$314,000, or 15.2 percent; the Oregon Bach Festival is to lose \$250,000, or 24.3 percent; and the Labor Education and Research Center is to lose \$488,000, or 45 percent of its funding.

It was not clear what the percentages Blancett gave were based on. Mack says the MNCH faces a 19 percent cut, while a LERC faculty member, Gordon Lafer, says the program faces a 66.7 percent cut to its \$720,000 of UO funding.

"That would be devastating," Lafer says, and would most likely eliminate three of six teaching positions from the program.

Most other departments at the university are facing 2- to 3-percent cuts, Lafer said, while administrative departments are looking at a 6-percent cut.

The proposed cuts at LERC, he says, fly in the face of the university's stated commitment to diversity. "LERC is the biggest thing the UO does for economic diversity," Lafer says.

The UO's official vision statement, available on its website, puts humanities and arts at the top of its priorities. "We aspire to be a pre-eminent and innovative public research university encompassing the humanities and arts, the natural and social sciences, and the professions," it says.

On Monday, April 22, the university will hold a town hall meeting to discuss the budget situation. It begins 2 pm in the Erb Memorial Union's Gumwood Room. ■

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