

# BMCC plans deep cuts to faculty in budget

Proposal would close criminal justice, college prep and industrial systems technology programs

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
Hermiston Herald

After warning about impending budget cuts for months, the other shoe has dropped at Blue Mountain Community College.

At an April 25 budget committee meeting, BMCC administration will propose shuttering three programs and eliminating 10 full-time faculty positions in addition to several part-time positions. Should the BMCC Board of Education approve the move, the college would lose its criminal justice, college prep and industrial systems technology programs while also dropping instructors from its business, English, humanities/fine arts, math/computer science, science and social science departments.

In an April 13 interview, Blue Mountain President Mark Browning said the budget cuts need to be made to help close a \$2 million shortfall in the 2022-23 budget.

"We have to start living within our means," he said. "That's the bottom line."

The news was not well received by the Blue Mountain Faculty Association, the union that represents the college's instructors.

Union President Pete Hernberg described the list of proposed cuts as "extraordinary and shocking" and raises questions about the college's commitment to the community.

"These cuts are shocking," he said. "They are arbitrary. And they are unnecessary."

Hernberg questioned why BMCC administration wanted to cut the college's criminal justice program at a time when law enforcement was trying to recruit skilled personnel. He added that eliminating the industrial systems technology department represented a "broken promise" to Boardman, which would still have its Workforce Training Center but not one of the signature programs the center houses.



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

**A tree blooms on the campus of Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton, April 14, 2022. At an upcoming April 25 budget committee meeting, BMCC administration will discuss budget cuts and potential layoffs.**



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

**Blue Mountain Community College will consider proposals to shutter three programs and eliminate 10 full-time positions and additional part-time positions.**

Browning was prepared to defend his administration's choices.

He said a degree from the college's criminal justice program isn't a requirement to enter the law enforcement field, and while he admitted the industrial systems technology had been a "good idea" when it was started, the program's low enrollment meant

it can be replaced in Boardman by the higher-demand diesel tech program.

Browning turned his focus to the English program, which would lose one of its instructors under the administration's proposal. He said the department's four-person staff is the same size as it was a decade ago, even

because it mostly focuses on making cuts to faculty. With previous staff reductions focused on administration or classified staff, Browning said there was little room to cut in those areas.

But Hernberg argued that BMCC was using its budget to deprioritize instruction and programming in favor of contracts with consultants and tech companies.

"What our community needs is jobs and training for those jobs," he said. "What our community needs are degrees and classes toward those degrees. That's the promise that our taxpayers expect us to keep. They don't expect us to hire some consulting firm. They don't expect us to send a giant chunk of cash to some tech company."

Browning contested Hernberg's interpretation of the proposed budget, saying they were one-time investments in improving the college's website and conducting a review of Blue Mountain's programs, moves that will better position the college for the future.

At a time when BMCC is facing increasing competition from nearby community colleges in Washington and trade schools, Browning said the staffing cuts could actually help with recruitment.

"We're not actually offering fewer classes," he said "We're having fewer people offer the classes that we do currently have, and we'll be offering new and different approaches to some of the outcomes so that (students are) better employable upon completion. The assertion that we're offering fewer classes is simply not borne out in the data."

While BMCC is holding firm on its cuts, the faculty union is not treating them as a settled issue. Hernberg said the union plans to explore its legal options and is also planning a "vigorous" public campaign to convince the college to reconsider its plans.

"We believe that there is a sacred trust between this community, these educators and our students, and we're going to do everything we can to protect that," he said.

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**Pete Hernberg**, president of the Blue Mountain Faculty Association

though enrollment has shrunk 65% over the past 11 years.

BMCC, and other community colleges across the state, have seen significant enrollment declines in recent years, and Blue Mountain staff are starting to see the effects of that trend.

Since 2019, the college has reduced its workforce by 39 positions, albeit under different presidents. Those figures don't include additional staffing cuts made when Blue Mountain was forced to renegotiate its prison education contract with the Oregon Department of Corrections during that time period.

This round of proposed cuts differs from previous years

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