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Government Relations gears up for tough times in Tallahassee

As peace settled upon the Persian Gulf, USF's Office of Government Relations braced itself for two months of budget battles that began March 5, when the 1991 Legislative Session convened.

Jeff Muir, assistant vice president of government relations, has seen six years of legislatures struggling to piece together a fair financial picture for Florida's State University System (USU). He said it has been three years since USF had a "good" year, and that things have been getting steadily worse.

"This is the worst financial situation I've seen. Others tell me it's the worst it's ever been," said Muir.

In the budget proposal released by Governor Lawson Chiles last month, the SUS would have to distribute more than $40 million to accommodate thousands of new students. The education budget as a whole stands to lose $71.8 million if all of the governor's suggestions are followed. The shortage of funding has been attributed to the economic recession currently affecting most of the country's spending patterns.

"It's clear to us and to many people that until we broaden our revenue base in Florida, we're going to continue to have these revenue problems," Muir said.

The Governor and Legislature, however, "are not interested in dealing with revenue enhancement" during this session, said Muir. He said a special session may be called in late summer or early fall to discuss how the state can generate new funds.

USF has established several 1991-92 legislative priorities. These include construction funding, on-site student services at the regional campuses, resources for the improved and graduate programs needed for community projects in conjunction with the Colleges of Medicine, Nursing and Public Health, and continued funding of the Center for Urban Transportation Research.

The SUS has its own priority concerns, including management reform, faculty/staff salaries, support for libraries, funding, academic enhancement and student services / financial aid. Muir explained that a priority this session is to minimize any further reductions for the next fiscal year. In conjunction with this, it must be ensured that any reductions that do occur are allocated equally.

"If they're going to hurt us, hurt us fairly," said Muir, adding that a step such as the elimination of FMHI would be unfair.

Muir said Chiles' proposed budget did not specifically address FMHI, which led him to expect USF to be treated equitably in the legislature.

Other SUS priorities include cost-to-continue funding and the restoration of 1990-91 budget cuts. Muir said the universities' "base budget" must be adequately funded prior to the introduction of any new programs.

"In the past, the cost-to-continue budget has suffered," said Muir. He said that in the event that there are any new funds allocated, USF priorities would be faculty and support staff salaries, enrollment growth and the costs for the expected 700- plus FTE students next year, library funds for FMHI and the Health Sciences Center, student services and financial aid.

Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) construction requests are also extremely important for campuses such as USF, said Muir. He said the prospects are good for full funding of USF's 1991-92 projects. PECO funds come from recently increased gross receipt taxes, such as utility fees, instead of sources based on the consumption of goods, like the sales tax.

USF is aiming for full funding for its list of projects. If any additional monies are made available, Muir said concentration will turn to the Pinellas delegation, which would like to move the Pinellas campus library renovation up in priority. This project is currently expected to be part of a three-year plan, however.

Finding the best utilization of the former Eye Institute building is another pending project which requires working with the Legislature. Muir said BOR plans, if approved, would have the building renovated for use by the LEE Morrow Cancer Center and the Department of Ophthalmology.

"We just hope we'll end up with a budget we can live with," said Muir.

Outside of the Education budget, he said USF is concerned with the budgets for departments of Health and Rehabilitative Services (IBR) and of Transportation (DOT).

IBR faces possible cuts that would affect USF health science programs in regional diabetes and memory disorders. USF's Center for Urban Transportation Research, meanwhile, depends on funding from the DOT.

Legislators who support USF's interests include Hillborough County Representative John Long, chair of the committee on Education / Appropriations in the House, and Keith Arnold of Fort Myers. Long is a USF graduate from LanO' Lakes. USF also enjoys the continued support of Representatives Mary Figg and Jim Davis of Tampa.

In the Senate, USF is counting on the support of Bob Johnson of Sarasota and Mary Grizzle of Pinellas County.

Muir and John Thomas, government relations director, will live in Tallahassee during the session, and President Francis T. Borkowski and John Thomas, governor's appointee to the Senate, will lend his personal support during several visits to the capital.

On other matters, Muir said the BOR is hoping the legislature will approve a "management reform package" that will enable it to deal with the difficult task of educating more students with less resources.

The BOR feels that educational improvements made in the past decade can be easily displaced in a year or two if careful choices are not made by those with the power to ensure quality.

Such choices include an increase in permitted management responsibilities of the BOR; improved accountability measures to assure the public that its resources are being used efficiently; a meeting in three years to reevaluate BOR management and accountability; and development of a detailed 10-year master development plan.

The handsome prints

Multi-Campus task force reports ready for review

The USF Planning Commission invites the University community to participate in an open meeting on March 13 to discuss recommendations of the Task Force on USF's Multi-Campus System. The meeting will be held in the KIVA, Room 302 of the College of Education, from 2:30-3:30 p.m. Issues under review concern inter-campus academic and administrative programs.

Planning Executive Director Barbara Sherman felt that in reviewing these recommendations, an understanding of the context in which they were developed is important.

The environments of each campus are significantly different from what they were five or 10 years ago, said Sherman. The University of South Florida now functions as a five-campus system with each campus reflecting its special character and identity. The missions of the campuses include certain components that are common to all, and other components that reflect the different needs of each campus constituency.

Organizational policies and procedures should be created which allow each campus the greatest opportunity to fulfill its unique mission," said Sherman.

The administration of this five-campus system requires direction that coordinates overall university objectives and that also provides appropriate flexibility to accommodate the diverse considerations of the campuses.

This approach has implications for all aspects of campus administration, including program development and support services. Particular concern centers on faculty personnel issues including recruitment, as well as turnover.

Please see COMMISSION Page 5

USF PLANNING COMMISSION:

Shaping the Future

The USF Planning Commission invites the University Community to participate in

An Open Meeting

For the purpose of discussing the recommendations of the Task Force on USF's Multi-Campus System.

Wednesday, March 13, 1991
KIVA, EDU 302
2:30-3:30 p.m.
New College provost honored by Women's group

Margaret Bates, interim provost at New College, was honored by the Women's Resource Center at the organization's Fifth Annual Community Achievement Awards dinner on March 2. Bates is a charter member of the Women's Resource Center, Past President of the United Nations Association, and a member of the Sarasota Commission on the Status of Women. She has taught political science at New College since 1971. Her open house gatherings for students are an integral part of educational and social life on campus.