

Facilities management faces outsourcing due to budget cuts

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The North Carolina General Administration, suffering from nearly \$4 billion in budget cuts, called for N.C. schools to prepare proposals for at least 10 percent budget reductions next July.

"The state has a \$19 billion budget, and the shortfall right now is, depending on who you ask, anywhere between \$3.2 to \$3.8 billion, the key components of that being \$1.6 billion of federal stimulus money and roughly \$1.3 billion of sales tax increase," said **John Pierce vice chancellor of finance for UNC Asheville.**

According to Pierce, UNCA faces a roughly \$4 million budget cut next year and university officials must find ways to cut spending.

"What we did was allocated that 4 million out across campus to various vice chancellors and we used some prioritization," he said. "We wanted to strengthen the academic core, affirm the student education experience and reaffirm our accreditation."

Outsourcing allows the university to cut spending in salaries, fringe benefits and extra personnel costs, according to Pierce.

Facilities management consists of housekeeping, groundskeepers, design and construction, maintenance, recycling and mail service.

"It's always preferable to find alternatives through preserving vacancies and doing that type of thing," he said. "But there's a sense of urgency to trying to figure out where we can save money. What would an outside vendor provide these services for?"

According to Pierce, the general administration is still determining what is needed from facilities management in relations to the budget.

"Those are possibilities, but no decisions have been made. We're very early in the process," he said.

Western Carolina University officials planned last year for possible future budget reductions, according to **Chuck Wooten, vice chancellor for administration and finance at**



Vaughn Griffin collects trash outside of Karpen Hall. Griffin has been working with facilities management for 10 years.

Katie Saylor/assistant photography editor

WCU.

"We took some actions to go ahead and put in place some budget reductions that allowed us to address the budget reductions for the current year," he said. "And we still had some additional funds that were not part of the current reduction that we could pledge toward any future budget reductions."

The proactive budget reductions at WCU allowed their departments to plan for the 10 percent cut only, since they already reduced the budget by 5 percent, according to Wooten.

"We want to protect the core, which is the instructional component of the university," he said. "At the same time, we had to acknowledge that almost 75 to 80 percent of the institutional bud-

get is taken up in personnel costs?"

Tuition increases, enrollment growth funding, state budget and revenues and political shifts may all play a part in these budget cuts, according to Pierce.

"There are a lot of variables that are out there. It's a real uncertain environment," he said. "The legislature will start meeting in January and will consider all of this throughout the spring."

Last year, the university cut adjunct professor positions due to budget reductions but, according to Pierce, these cuts require more strenuous work.

"This is the deepest cut that we've had to face. We were able to do those cuts with preserving vacancies, reducing travel and purchasing supplies in a

better form," he said. According to a budget update Chancellor Anne Ponder sent in an e-mail during the summer, the university plans to keep core values intact despite budget reductions and possible position eliminations.

"While we plan conservatively for the future, we will be faced with some difficult decisions. Our university remains committed to the crucial work of educating students and responding to the issues facing our world and community," she said.

WCU focused its budget cuts across the entire institution, attempting to mitigate the impact on students and employees, according to Wooten.

"We really didn't highlight any particular area, but rather we charged every division of the institution to look at their own areas and to try and determine where there were opportunities for savings," he said. "Not everybody was able to complete their entire evaluation before we had to respond to this request, so a lot of this is still ongoing."

According to Wooten, budget reductions of this magnitude make it difficult for universities to avoid cutting personnel positions.

"There's no way for us to get 5 percent or 10 percent reductions without impacting positions," he said. "We've been focusing on vacant positions to try and eliminate the need to displace any employee that's currently in a position."

According to Ponder's e-mail, the coming financial issues continue to present new challenges to the university and planning will be difficult.

"It will take all of our creativity and resilience to remain focused on the reasons we are here," she said. "Not only do our students deserve the very best from us, but our colleagues do as well."

Pierce spoke with facilities management recently to inform them of the situation and ask them for input.

"There may be something coming out of that that are alternatives," he said. "It would be best if we didn't have to do this, but we have to come up with the budget cuts one way or another."