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Board of Trustees meets, approves controversial 2003-04 budget

Faculty and staff divided over salary freezes and cuts in part-time benefits.

CHRISTY SADLER
Editor in Chief

The Meredith College Board of Trustees voted Friday to approve a controversial new 2003-04 budget for the College.

The budget includes a 10 percent cut in operating expenses for all divisions and departments, as well as the elimination of health insurance benefits for part-time faculty and staff and a freeze on salaries for all faculty and staff. In addition, full-time faculty and staff will be asked to pay 20 percent of their health insurance each month, amounting to an approximate cost of \$70 per month.

According to Dr. Rebecca Oatsvall, chair of the Faculty Affairs Committee, the College has paid the full cost of employees' health insurance in the past, and both full- and part-time faculty have been covered under Meredith's plan.

Oatsvall said the cuts came as a surprise for many employees. "The budget process is confidential so no employees, other than those on the budget committee, knew what cuts would be made," Oatsvall said. "We had been told that medical insurance costs were rising dramatically, and we knew that last year there was a large extra amount for medical insurance, which the College absorbed."

Although employees as a whole were left out of the budgeting process, Oatsvall did note that the process this year was "much more inclusive" than in years past. This was the first year that one representative each from the faculty, staff and students was allowed to sit on the committee.

According to College President Maureen Hartford, the cuts were necessary because of some new expenses that must be paid for next year.

"The budget for 2003-04 is actually larger than the budget for 2002-03, so what we are working on is not exactly budget cutting, but rather budget realloca-

tion," Harford said. "The extra costs include the debt payment on the new building, a major increase in health insurance, an increase in financial aid, the new academic administrative structure, some addition to library acquisitions, and a few already-approved faculty or staff positions."

Hartford said much of the money the College has received recently has been designated for projects such as the construction of the Science and Mathematics Building and the renovations of the Hunter and Harris classroom buildings. This money cannot be transferred to cover other areas of the budget.

Another problem area for the College has been a decrease in enrollment. "We have had two smaller freshman classes than we planned for, and although next year's class looks as if it will be larger, we still have those smaller classes in the pipeline and a large number of students graduating," Hartford said.

**See Budget
Page 2**

Trustees Meeting News Brief

CHRISTY SADLER
Editor in Chief

In addition to the budget, the Board of Trustees also voted on several other issues during its meeting on Friday.

According to Hartford, major decisions made by the Trustees include the approval of a new academic structure that will create four new schools within the College and approval of the plans and site for a new administration building that will house the Offices of Admissions and Institutional Advancement. However, Hartford said the Board was not asked to move forward on the construction of the building yet.

Other decisions made by the Trustees include the appointment of a new member and the approval of faculty tenure candidates.

Issues that more directly concern students include the Trustees'

approvals of changes in the College's anti-discrimination statement (see article on page 2), the decision to leave the undergraduate student alcohol policy unchanged, and plans to renovate the Faircloth residence hall. Hartford said the funds for this renovation will come from a designated gift to the College.

Tillman said this renovation to Faircloth will include upgrades to the roof, floors, paint and furniture. "I think all students would agree this is a much-needed step in the right direction of improving campus life," she said.

Hartford noted that although the undergraduate alcohol policy will not change, the Trustees did approve a proposal from graduate students to be allowed to have alcohol at their off-campus events.

According to Hartford, Meredith's full Board of Trustees meets three times

**See Trustees
Page 4**

On the inside:

Nondiscrimination policy amendment approved.

Page 2

Meredith basketball gets a big win and receives its second NCAA tournament bid.

Page 3

Want to know what went on at the Student Services Forum? Find out.

Page 5