

January 7, 2005

**TO:** Ken Fulgham  
Rick Vrem  
Co-chairs, University Budget Committee

**FROM:** Wayne Perryman  
Faculty Representative, University Budget Committee

**SUBJECT:** Concerns Regarding the University Budget Committee Process

I have several concerns, questions, and suggestions with respect to the University Budget Committee (UBC) process that I would like to proffer. I realize that this budget process is still new to the campus, but I would like to request that the committee undertake a thoughtful discussion of these issues at our earliest opportunity to help us continue to fine-tune and improve that process.

**1) Status of the Library's 2004/2005 augmentation request and the process for committee follow-up -**

You will recall that, at the last UBC meeting on December 10, it was reported that the University had received an additional \$500,000+ from the Chancellor's Office to help offset the costs for funding the rural healthcare stipends this year. In response to that announcement, I asked whether the Library would, as a result of this added funding, be receiving some or all of the \$115,000 that it had requested to purchase books and videos. Remember that the Library was next in line following Enrollment Management (EM) on the committee's prioritized list of recommended non-mandatory budget proposals. Since EM had requested \$300,000, there should, in theory, be at least \$200,000 available to fund other initiatives further down the list. In response to my query, I was told that "the Library is not on the list," that is, the list that the President adopted back in September in response to our committee recommendations. This news came as a complete surprise to me, since Sharmon had previously reported that, during the Provost's Council meeting of September 29, you both thought the Library's exclusion had been an oversight which the President would rectify once it was brought to his attention. Now we are being told that this was NOT an oversight and that the President intentionally dropped the Library request from his list in the belief that, quoting from an e-mail message that Sharmon sent to the Library faculty and staff on December 20, "the campus will not sustain any permanent damage from not purchasing books for this year."

As a sidebar, I have likewise heard informally that the President apparently has other visions about the future of digital information technology, which might portend major changes for the University. Regardless of the merits of his visions, he should be openly sharing them with the University community, so that we will all have the opportunity to explore and debate them.

Back to the case in point, I feel that it is essential that, when we put forward our budget funding recommendations each year, the President provide a response to each and every one of them. If he disagrees with any of the recommendations, as he apparently did in the case of the Library augmentation this year, he should clearly state his rationale for not accepting our recommendation. I understand that the President is the final arbiter of the budget decisions for the campus. Even so, in the spirit of openness and collegiality, it should be the President's responsibility to communicate his thoughts to his advisory team (in this case, the UBC) and other concerned parties in a forthright and thorough manner. It should not be an option to simply ignore an item on the list with which he might not concur.

Having said this, how should the UBC respond when the President deletes a funding proposal from the list, or otherwise disagrees with our funding priorities? What should we do if we need more information about a particular budgetary decision that the President has made? In my view, it should be the responsibility of the committee chairs to communicate our questions and

concerns to the President in writing and to ask for a formal written response from him. In such important matters, which potentially impact the viability of our programs, as well as the strategic directions of the University, we should expect to hear directly from the President. It is not adequate to have to rely upon verbal or informal responses that are communicated indirectly via other persons in the administrative chain. Such informal communication has proven to be less than effective, particularly when dealing with fundamental issues such as the budget.

I would like to make one last point before I move on. That is, even though my concerns in this regard are with respect to the President's treatment of a request from the Library, it is still incumbent upon us to clarify the process for the future. Next time, it might not be the Library which is unilaterally dropped from the list of recommended funding initiatives. Other proposals could fall prey to a similar fate, if we are not diligent in our oversight of the process.

## **2) Prospective funding initiatives for 2005/2006 and beyond -**

I continue to be concerned about the list of "important" funding initiatives for 2005/2006 that was distributed during the November 12 committee meeting, albeit "for planning purposes only." Those initiatives were included on the list without any supporting documentation or indication as to where they came from. (Of course, once again, the Library was not included, but that is another issue. See number 1.) As I voiced during the meeting, a primary concern I have is that when you include specific, but as-yet unvetted, items on such a list, even for planning purposes, they tend to take shape in the minds of those who subsequently review that list. I recommend that we discuss other options that we might use during our planning discussions.

In addition, the committee members need enough information to be able to provide an informed response to the constituents whom we represent. In my case, for example, I routinely share my meeting packet and notes with the Library faculty. Several of those faculty raised questions about items on the November 12 list, to which I could not respond due to a lack of background information.

## **3) Distribution of handouts, minutes, notes, etc. -**

I had meant to inquire earlier about the status of minutes, or at least meeting notes, for the UBC meetings. We need to be documenting our decisions, key discussion points, and important announcements, so that we will all be working with the same facts. We generally have a recorder present during committee meetings, but I have yet to receive any written synopses of our discussions.

I would also strongly prefer that, except in the most unusual circumstances, committee members receive all meeting handouts, notes, agendas, etc., several days prior to the meeting, to give us a reasonable opportunity to review them and gather our thoughts. The handouts, in particular, are often very detailed and dense. We simply cannot have a comprehensive and informed discussion of the topics at hand, when we have to review such documents on the fly during the meeting.

Finally, despite the somewhat negative tone of my comments, I wanted to assure you that I know that you, the President, and others are trying to make the best of a difficult situation. I certainly appreciate your efforts and look forward to continuing to work with you to improve our processes and grow the University. Feel free to share this memorandum with the committee, if you feel that will assist us in our deliberations.

Thanks.

Cc: Sharmon Kenyon, Dean of the University Library  
Carol Terry, University Budget Director