



# Budget Squeeze

## University copes with cutbacks in services, personnel

**T**he assignment the Idaho Legislature gave higher education was clear and concise: Next fiscal year operate with 10 percent less than you received this year.

Boise State has been sharpening its pencil over the last three months to meet the resulting \$9.34 million shortfall, most of which legislators

attributed to an anticipated decline in tax revenues as the state's economy continues to struggle. Current fiscal year revenues are running \$100 million below projections.

The solution boiled down to simple arithmetic — add \$4.34 million from increased student fees, subtract \$5 million from the university's general account budget and the \$9.34 million is covered.

The seemingly simple solution is fraught

with consequences, especially at Boise State where enrollments are at an all-time high, in part because when the economy slows people return to college for additional training. To put it into private sector terms, the university's market share is growing at the same time as it must reduce its capacity to serve customers.

"The reality is, we can't do more with less. A reduction of this magnitude means a reduction in our class offerings and our services," says President Charles Ruch.

Because 80 percent of the budget is devoted to personnel, the university had no choice but to reduce positions. Forty-one slots — 22 faculty and 19 staff — were eliminated. Thirty-one of those were positions that were vacant due to resignations or retirements. Ten people were laid off, including four faculty.

With 22 teaching positions eliminated, the university won't be able to offer as many class sections as it has in the past, says Ruch. "If high demand core classes fill earlier than usual, students may have to wait to take required courses. That could mean a delay in their progress toward a degree," he says. The

*"This is a temporary setback in what has been a long history of growth at Boise State. This essential trend line will reassert itself when the economy recovers."*

—Charles Ruch

*FOCUS* magazine wasn't spared from the university's budget reduction. The quarterly magazine will now be published three times per year. Readers will receive the fall issue in November, one month later than usual. The magazine will then be published every four months throughout the year rather than every three months. The summer 2002 issue will still be published on schedule in early July.

university is trying to mitigate that situation by encouraging students to enroll in summer sessions and giving registration priority to degree-seeking students.

It will take years, says Ruch, for the university to recover the lost faculty positions, which were slowly added as the university's enrollment grew. Now the university must return to where it was four or five years ago and rebuild its faculty numbers a few at a time — if the state budget picture improves.

The university closed two programs — entry level respiratory therapy, which was not meeting enrollment projections, and paramedic education, which was in its first year. The university still offers associate and bachelor's degrees in respiratory therapy in the College of Health Sciences.

"We don't have many undersubscribed programs to eliminate or colleges to reorganize. We are already operating at a very efficient level ... closing entire programs really wasn't an option," Ruch says.

The fee increase could close the door of opportunity for some students already on tight budgets. While Boise State anticipates an increase in federal financial aid packages, the

potential remains that the \$160 per semester increase could force some students to forgo a college education.

"We were left with few options. No one wants to see fees increase, but without that additional revenue our personnel cuts would have been much deeper. With help from our students, we can maintain quality, even though the quantity of our programs will decrease," says Ruch.

It will take some time for the university to recover, both from a budget and morale standpoint.

"Most of us in higher education are in this profession to build a better university, not to dismantle programs people need," Ruch says.

"We can't underestimate the effect these reductions will have in the future. On the other hand, given the enormous scope of the problem, we did well to preserve as much as we did."

"The whole reduction process was amazingly civil. While people were discouraged by the impact, they showed a cooperative spirit and a desire to do what was best for the institution given the circumstances."

—Daryl Jones, Provost and chair,  
Executive Budget Committee

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