Finance Committee Report, Part II:
Dealing with a Possible 6% Budget Cut
(corrected March 18, 2008)

Introduction:

At the start of Spring semester, we were advised that CLAS had been asked to find a way to cut its budget by $3 million. This cut had to take effect at the start of FY 2008-2009. Our report in response to that request was prepared and published on February 25, 2008. It may be found on our webpage, at http://www.clas.ufl.edu/gov/comm/finance/2008-final-report.pdf.1

Just as that report was published, we learned that the University faced another budget cut. We were asked to propose ways in which $3 million more (that is, in addition to the $3 million covered by our earlier report) might be cut from the CLAS budget. This second cut, like the first $3 million cut, is part of a larger budget crisis that extends beyond CLAS to the university as a whole and the State of Florida.2

We stand by our previous report. Our recommendations with regard to that second request follow.

Assessment of the impact of a $ 6 million budget cut in CLAS:

This University’s Strategic Work Plan, prepared almost exactly a year ago, proclaimed that:

The University of Florida belongs to a tradition of great universities. Together with its undergraduate and graduate students, University of Florida faculty participate in an educational process that links the history of Western Europe with the traditions and cultures of all societies, explores the physical and biological universes, and nurtures generations of young people from diverse backgrounds to address the needs of the world's societies. The university welcomes the full exploration of its intellectual

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1 We want to thank Elizabeth Dale for her extraordinary contributions to the work of the CLAS Finance Committee. Her collegiality, knowledge and dedication have been crucial to the Committee since its inception.

boundaries and supports its faculty and students in the creation of new knowledge and the pursuit of new ideas.  

Most, if not all, of the educational processes identified in that paragraph take place in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. For the University to remain a part of that grand tradition it must preserve the teaching and research mission of CLAS. As we pointed out in our February 2008 report, cutting just $3 million from the CLAS budget will severely damage that mission in the near and long term. If CLAS is to continue to fulfill its role in the University it cannot sustain an additional $3 million in cuts.

It is clear that the additional $3 million cut cannot be passed on to the various departments in the college. They are already struggling to try to make the previously required 1% cut.

Nor, as we show below, do we believe it is possible to cut the college budget by an additional $3 million.

Assessment of possible college-wide cuts:

In our view, an additional $3 million cut to the CLAS budget can only be achieved through layoffs arising from the closure of entire units of the college. For CLAS to cut an additional $3 million out of its budget it would have to eliminate one mid-sized department or a combination of two or more smaller departments. Alternatively, CLAS would have to eliminate the entire graduate program in two large departments.

We are neither able nor willing to recommend anything so drastic. The layoff procedures that would have to be employed to eliminate any of those units are established in various collective bargaining agreements and are beyond the purview of this committee. We also note that recommending the elimination of any unit in CLAS would be inconsistent with the principles articulated in the University’s strategic plan. And in the spirit of shared governance, which that same strategic plan identifies as the key to preserving the intellectual integrity of the University of Florida, we believe it is important to make sure that any decision of that magnitude be conducted with deliberation, according to a process that involves all the stakeholders and seems fair to all concerned.

Once we determined that we could not recommend layoffs, we considered whether we could make some cuts to “extras” that were less vital to CLAS’s core mission. Our thought was that by doing so we might come up with a figure that was less than $3 million but more than nothing. We identify below the areas we considered “extra” when trying to determine if such savings might be found. And we also explain why we decided not to recommend these cuts.

1. **Eliminate all elective Honors and General Education courses:**

   Savings: Unknown. No data are kept that would allow us to calculate the precise cost to CLAS of these electives

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3 The Strategic Work Plan for the University of Florida (March 8, 2007).
http://www.president.ufl.edu/workPlan.html

4 For this reason, we also recommend that any department that can only achieve a full 1% cut to its budget with layoffs be exempted or released from the full 1% reduction.
Many CLAS departments teach elective honors courses and elective general education courses every semester. These purely elective courses are not required for any major, but instead are used by students seeking to either complete their general education requirements or fulfill their obligations as part of the Honors College.\(^5\)

Staffing these elective courses puts a strain on departments. The UF website estimates that 90-100 honors courses are taught each semester; a sizable number of those courses are taught by faculty in CLAS. In addition, departments in CLAS teach quite a few elective general education courses, such as AST 1002, Discovering the Universe, or MET 1010, Introduction to Weather, each semester. As a practical matter, offering these courses means that the faculty members who would otherwise teach required undergraduate courses or graduate seminars must teach electives. In a period when budget cuts mean that faculty who retire or resign will not be replaced, these elective courses are a luxury that few departments can easily provide.

At the same time, these courses help introduce students to subjects, expand their intellectual horizons, and generally provide the well-rounded education that a graduate of a major university needs. In addition, the Honors courses attract some of our best students and provide them with instruction in small classes that offer them intellectually challenging experiences. We recognize that these courses are vital to the CLAS mission of providing a general liberal arts education and to the University’s goal of attracting and keeping top students.

2. **Eliminate the entire Enrollment Management budget:**
   
   **Savings: approximately $390,000**

   In our first report, we concurred with the Dean’s recommendation that CLAS surrender $500,000 of its Enrollment Management budget. That budget totals approximately $890,000, so cutting it entirely would be a savings of an additional $390,000. Of course, eliminating this budget will make it impossible for many departments to meet critical tracking needs. So long as we are committed to trying to graduate students on time, we need Enrollment Management funds. If CLAS were to eliminate elective courses that would make this less of a problem, but we have already argued that there are real costs associated with removing elective courses.

3. **Eliminate all but two Associate Dean positions:**
   
   **Savings: We estimate it would be at least $200,000**

   The Dean’s office in CLAS has a total budget of over $5 million. Of that, roughly $2,500,000 is in the reserve fund and goes to chair summer salaries, enrollment management, and other budget areas that may be subject to cuts already. Another $1,746,000 or so goes to pay the salaries of the various Associate Deans and staff in that office. If we reduced the number of associate deans to two, the others could return to their departments and help fulfill CLAS’ teaching and research mission. Of course, that transfer of their assignment would mean that there was no significant salary savings, since they would still be paid their nine-month salaries. But some savings would result from the fact they were no longer being paid to work in the Dean’s office during the summer months.

   But when we tried to be more specific about this, we were hard pressed to figure out which associate dean positions were so extraneous they could be cut without harm to the faculty and

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\(^5\) The General Education requirement is described here. [http://www.cba.ufl.edu/gened/genedinfo.asp](http://www.cba.ufl.edu/gened/genedinfo.asp) For the Honors Program, see [http://www.honors.ufl.edu/](http://www.honors.ufl.edu/)
students. The CLAS infrastructure is not overdeveloped for a very large college. All the people working in the Dean’s office play a role in the administration of the college and we are certain that their work could not be redistributed to other faculty, staff, and department chairs already over-burdened with administrative tasks. Further, several of the associate deans are directly involved in helping bring grant money into the university, so eliminating their positions would be counterproductive.

4. **Eliminate all chair support:**
   *Savings: $320,000*

CLAS provides research and operating expense support to department chairs. Eliminating this support would save CLAS roughly $320,000 a year. To save this, CLAS would have to renegotiate all its contracts with the department chairs and directors, so we are not sure if this savings can be achieved. Nor are we certain that any chair would be willing to renegotiate under any circumstance, and it would be grossly unfair to ask them to do so, particularly in a time of crisis when their workload and responsibilities have increased drastically.⁶

5. **Eliminate long-distance calls:**
   *Savings: approximately $35,000*

CLAS pays for work-related long-distance calls by faculty and staff. In 2006-2007 that bill added up to almost $35,000 which CLAS would save if it eliminated all long-distance coverage. However, doing so would interfere with the faculty members’ ability to network with their peers and would also hinder recruitment of graduate students, postdocs, and new faculty. We are not sure the savings makes up for those losses.

6. **Eliminate Spring graduation:**
   *Savings: $25,000*

CLAS spends approximately $25,000 of its state budget funds for graduation every spring. It might be possible to find a donor to pick this cost up (donors pay approximately $5000 towards the cost of graduation now), and if that is possible we recommend it. If it is not, we do not think the savings is worth the cost since we recognize that graduation is an important event for many students and their families.

In the end, these were the only “extras” we could identify. These cuts would amount to a savings on the order of $1 million, probably more once the savings from canceling elective courses is factored in. Yet as we noted above, we cannot recommend these cuts be made, since we recognize that implementing them will harm the students and the faculty in CLAS.

**Final observations:**

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⁶ In this, we are influenced by the Board of Trustees analysis with regard to President Machen’s bonus. As Board President Morgan noted, in explaining why President Machen would not be asked to take a pay cut to help pay for the budget “When times are tough, … it’s more important that you have great leadership.” Kim Wilmath, “Machen’s Pay Tops List of Florida University Presidents,” *Independent Florida Alligator*, November 16, 2007, at [http://www.alligator.org/articles/2007/11/16/news/uf_administration/salary.txt](http://www.alligator.org/articles/2007/11/16/news/uf_administration/salary.txt).
As we write this document the Alligator reports that President Machen has advised the Board of Trustees that across-the-board cuts are not the answer to the current budget crisis and that he has “a good idea” of which cuts will be made to the University budget.\(^7\) We applaud his recognition that across-the-board cuts, either to all colleges or to all departments will not serve UF well. As we have shown, repeatedly, the under-funding of CLAS over a series of years has already interfered with its ability to carry out its teaching and research mission.\(^8\) We do not believe CLAS will find it easy to handle the initial $3 million cut; we do believe that additional cuts will make a bad situation worse.

But while we agree with President Machen that across-the-board cuts that hit all colleges equally cannot be sustained, we are disturbed by his delay in advising the University community of the cuts he has identified. The delay exacerbates the uncertainty that demoralizes students, faculty and staff. And while financial uncertainty is difficult at any time of year, it is particularly difficult at this point in the academic calendar. Fall registration is about to begin, departments need to know whether and how budget cuts will affect their opportunity to offer courses. Programs that are trying to retain current graduate students and recruit new ones need to know what sort of funding they will have and how many offers they can make. Faculty and graduate students who believe that their positions may be cut need to be given a reasonable time to try to find work somewhere else. We urge President Machen to provide information about the cuts he has already identified so that the University community can respond by making these difficult choices in a timely fashion.

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