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GSU nAverse

Governors State University's Weekly Newsletter

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"I was thrown out of N.Y.U. my freshman year . . . for cheating on my metaphysics final. You know, I looked within the soul of the boy sitting next to me."

Woody Allen

(The Woodward and Bernstein of GSU who edit this newsletter have decided to carry over for one week news about the GSU community that is not time sensitive in order to give a more complete report on the October 17 meeting with the staff of IBHE. Respectful but to the point, GSU trustees, faculty, students, and administration challenged IBHE's and the State's support of higher education and forcefully spelled out GSU's priorities for FY05: salary increases for faculty and staff, funding for new academic programs, and funding for the operation and maintenance of the FDC and FOC.)

Clearing the Air with IBHE

IBHE staff meets annually with each of the public universities to assess the financial outlook for the current and coming fiscal years, give the universities an advance look at IBHE priorities, and give the universities the opportunity to give IBHE their priorities. IBHE Director Dan LaVista and his senior staff visited the campus Friday for GSU's annual "Big Picture" meeting. Representing GSU were Stuart Fagan, president; Bruce Friefeld, chair of the Board of Trustees; Jack Beaupre, chair of the Board's Finance Committee; members of the President's cabinet; Michael Dimitroff, president of the Faculty Senate; Marsha Katz and Edna Fry, representing UPI; Linda Williams, president of the Student Senate; and Curtis Crims, student IBHE representative. Representative Kevin McCarthy, chair of the House Committee on Higher Education, also attended at the invitation of President Fagan.

Mixed Report on FY04

Revenue for FY04 is projected to be up \$2.4 billion over FY03. However, excluding one-time items such as proceeds from closing tax loopholes, fee increases, sale of assets and a casino license, base revenue for the general fund is projected to be flat with FY03.

Picture for FY05 – Like a Picture Taken Through a Lens Smudged with Vaseline

LaVista used that image in commenting on the upcoming fiscal year. He reported that the Office of Management and the Budget estimates a potential shortfall of \$1.5 - \$2 billion for FY05. Budget pressures include increased health insurance and Medicaid costs, additional funding for retirement plans, anticipated costs associated with the new contract being negotiated with AFSCME, the state's largest union, and the commitment to increase per pupil funding for K-12. LaVista said IBHE did not know the thinking of the governor or legislature regarding appropriations for higher education in FY05

The Justification for Cutting Higher Education's Appropriations Challenged

Trustee Jack Beaupre asked how the state can justify cutting funding for higher education while recognizing the need to fund K-12 programs. The answers: "There is a perception of waste and inefficiency in higher education"; "The state has a legal commitment to fund K-12 education, but no obligation to fund higher education at any level"; "It is politically less difficult to cut higher ed than K-12 programs." Beaupre pointed out forcefully that higher education in Illinois was recently ranked first among the 50 states but has since slipped in the ratings. He warned of the economic and social consequences if the state does not support higher education at appropriate levels.

IBHE Guiding Principles for FY05 Budget Development

IBHE listed five guiding principles for developing the FY05 budget. First, the FY05 budget will support *The Illinois Commitment*. “All funds recommended will be targeted to further advancement of the goals of *The Illinois Commitment*.” Second, recommendations will be policy-based and policy-driven. “The significant reductions to state funding for higher education notwithstanding, funds will not be requested simply to replace those that were lost in FY2003 and FY2004.” Third, there will be a consultative budget development process. “The IBHE Board will consult broadly with the higher education community in developing its recommendations.” Fourth, recommendations will advance the priorities of the governor and the general assembly. “The board’s budget recommendations will reflect the expressed priorities and needs of Governor Blagojevich and the general assembly regarding higher education, particularly in areas such as accountability, affordability, P-16 education, and workforce/economic development. The overall goal is endorsement of these recommendations by the Governor and General Assembly.” Fifth, board recommendations will have a state and system focus. “The Board’s recommendations will take into account the specific and unique needs of individual institutions and agencies, but primary consideration will be given to the best interests of the overall system of high education and the state as a whole, including consideration of the state’s current fiscal situation.”

Applying the Principles: IBHE’s Themes and Priorities for FY05

IBHE listed its five priorities. First, continue to demonstrate good stewardship and fiscal accountability in the use of state and other resources. Second, increase compensation for faculty and staff. Third, address deferred maintenance needs in existing facilities. Fourth, enhance support for need-based student financial aid, that is, the Monetary Award Program. Fifth, restore support for community college special populations grants and adult education funding needs. LaVista asked GSU to respond to each of these five points.

Here’s What We Think...Good Stewardship

On fiscal accountability, Trustee Beaupre, Jeff Slovak, associate director of Planning and Budget, and John Tuohy, vice president for Administration and Planning, emphasized that for GSU, fiscal accountability is not a goal – it is already an accomplishment. They described in detail the programs in place to inform the board’s Finance Committee and involve Trustees, the audits conducted on a regular basis, and the policies in place to assure the transparency of GSU’s fiscal transactions. Dimitroff immediately added that whenever the Faculty Senate requested information, the administration responded promptly – they were accountable.

Here’s What We Think...Salary Increases

Fagan chided the state for failing to appropriate funds for salary increases for each of the past two years. He said that GSU had negotiated “meager” increases of 1.5 percent for FY04, two percent for FY05, and three percent for FY06, and strongly challenged IBHE to at least match those increases. “Compensation must be competitive if we are going to recruit and retain qualified faculty,” Fagan said. To prove the point, he told IBHE that admissions into the School Psychology program had been stopped because a professor had retired and no replacement could be found. To have continued would have jeopardized the program’s accreditation. Provost Paul Keys cited the recent resignation of Dave Parmenter, who was recruited to a university in Texas. Katz said that use of adjunct professors was not an acceptable solution. And Williams supported that position, citing the “passion” of tenured or tenure-track GSU professors.

Here’s What We Think...Deferred Maintenance

Fagan gave a number of examples of what’s been put on the backburner: Leaks in the roof of the main building, restrooms in the main building not fully ADA compliant, cafeteria kitchen struggling to meet Will County health codes, elevators in the main building in need of renovations and upgrades, and an energy management system which could yield significant efficiencies.

Here’s What We Think...Financial Aid

A no-brainer everyone said, given our student population.

Here's What We Think...Support for Community College Programs for Adults

"Remember our mission is to serve the working adult," Fagan said.

"Evil" Administrative Expenses to Increase

Fagan emphasized that "GSU's ability to meet its unique mission and serve the needs of students has been compromised by the 22 percent reduction in appropriations since FY02. Budget officials may have thought that students would be largely immune from these budget reductions. Though we've tried our best to protect our students, they *have* been adversely affected." To illustrate his point, Fagan noted that in the past two years, two positions were eliminated in the Financial Aid Office. The cuts contributed to the 23 percent reduction in administrative costs, which IBHE has commented on favorably. But the elimination of two positions also led to a two month backlog in processing financial aid applications. "That's unacceptable," Fagan said. "We have no choice but to fill one of the two positions we've eliminated, even though that will increase the so-called 'evil' administrative expenses. So be it."

Opportunities Lost

Fagan also emphasized that because of the budget cuts, GSU has had to turn down requests to deliver cohorts to the Chicago Public School system, local school districts, and social service agencies such as El Valor, which serves the Hispanic community in Chicago. "In each case, we've had to deny the request for lack of resources, even though these programs directly support the Illinois Commitment and the governor's program to improve K through 12 education."

GSU's Priority for FY05...Fund Salary Increases

GSU participants said that at a minimum, the state must match the increases the university negotiated with the faculty. They forcefully emphasized that salary increases are critical if the university hopes to recruit and retain quality faculty. Fagan stressed that GSU's faculty is arguably the most productive of any faculty in the system. Typically, a tenured faculty member teaches 8-10 classes a year while conducting research and providing community service. Dimitroff emphasized that a diploma from GSU has value today because of the quality and commitment of the faculty. He warned LaVista that if a brain drain develops in public higher education, with professors leaving for states like Texas, there is a risk that Illinois universities will become diploma mills.

GSU's Priority for FY05...Fund New Academic Programs

Fagan said, "We seek to digitize more of our classes and expand our distance learning programs, with an emphasis on internet programs. As an example of our commitment, we're ready to roll out an on-line undergraduate degree program in Business and Applied Science for the Winter Trimester. Distance learning is a critical initiative for GSU, given the competition from out-of-state schools and the make-up of our student body – working adults. It assures accessibility to a quality education." He also asked for funding for two science programs – requests previously approved but not funded. The first is to equip our physiology lab with state-of-the-art computer equipment and develop seminars for area teachers and their students in its use. The second is to provide equipment and commodities for our Biological Field Station. "We also requested funding for a B.S. degree in Mathematics for Secondary Education. The shortage of qualified math and science teachers in this region has reached crisis proportions. We can't keep postponing the investment in educating the educators – not if we expect to support the governor's initiatives to improve K through 12 education and meet the objectives of the Illinois Commitment."

Fagan noted that GSU did not request funding for other programs, such as additional cohorts to meet the needs of schools and health care providers in the region. He added, "Nor have we requested funding for doctoral programs, though we will have to address that issue at some point, given the doctoral degree will soon be established as the entry-level degree for Physical Therapy. And we need to recognize the strong demand in the region for doctoral programs in other professional areas as well."

GSU's Priority for FY05...Operating and Maintenance Funds

In asking for funding for O&M expenses for the Family Development Center and the Faculty Office Center, Fagan said, "I recognize that will increase the administrative expenses that the IBHE chairman and the board have directed should be reduced, but there is no practical alternative. Our O & M resources are already stretched too thin."

For the Future: Crisis or Common Sense?

At the close of the meeting, the GSU participants pulled no punches in driving home the point that further cuts in FY05 would produce a crisis for universities such as Governors State, work against the governor's programs for education and economic growth, and assure that little or no progress would be made toward *The Illinois Commitment*. LaVista said that he and IBHE staff could only make recommendations to the board, the governor, and the legislature. He emphasized that IBHE staff were not the final decision makers and did not control the purse strings. He also explained that he and the staff had to develop recommendations that advance the goals of the governor and the legislature. And he promised to be forceful in communicating with the legislature.

Challenge to IBHE

Chair Friefeld said that he appreciated the position of IBHE. He then encouraged the IBHE staff to be advocates for higher education, pointing out that advocacy for higher education is not inconsistent with the responsibility to assure that public universities be held accountable for their actions, nor in conflict with the responsibility to advance the educational goals of the governor and the legislature.

Challenge to GSU

Representative McCarthy said GSU and other universities need to be visible and vocal in the upcoming legislative sessions. He praised GSU for vociferously defending the university's interests in the last legislative session and being among only a few universities opposing legislation that would be detrimental to higher education. He tasked the university to continue to be proactive in making its case for funding in FY05. Just as important, he said that GSU and other universities had to fight to maintain control of their income funds and maintain their freedom to set tuition and fees.
