

Your budget shortfall

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Over the summer, Susan Allen, an assistant professor of social work at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, registered to attend a professional conference in San Francisco later this year.

But a 4 percent state cut in funding to all Florida universities for the 2007-2008 school year leaves her wondering how she will pay for it.

"I have to figure out how I am going to get it funded," Allen said. "The regular sources are no longer open to me."

From warmer classrooms to prohibitions on paper copies, faculty, staff and students feel the squeeze of budget cuts.

The 4 percent cut in state funding means a revenue decrease of nearly \$1.2 million for USF St. Petersburg, said Dr. Asbok Dhingra, the regional vice chancellor for administrative and financial services.

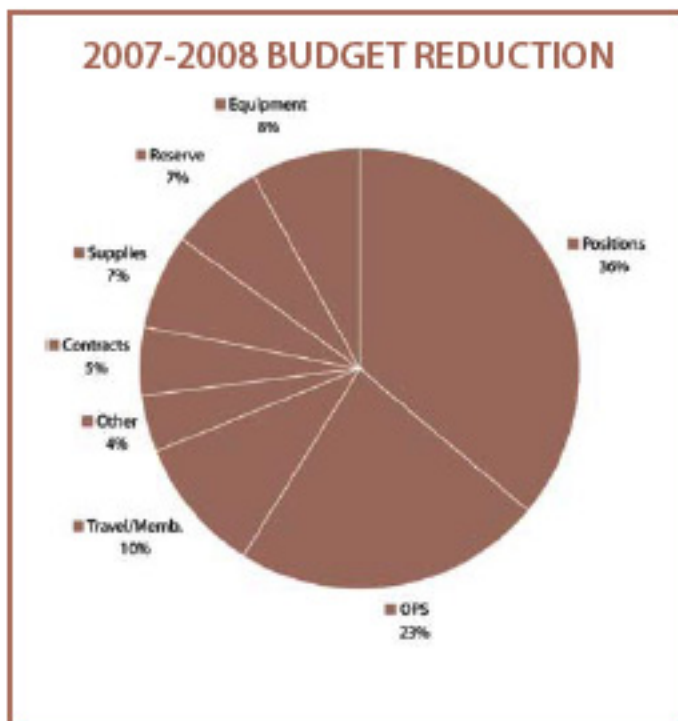
State appropriations, consisting of taxes and lottery money, account for 78 percent of the school's revenue. Tuition makes up the remainder. The flow of tax money into state coffers slowed significantly last year due to the housing slump.

More cuts loom in the future. Even with the 4 percent budget reduction, the state still projects a \$1.1 billion shortfall. Unless the legislature can find additional revenue sources, more cuts may occur later this year, Dhingra said.

Faced with the task of cutting the operating budget, USF St. Petersburg administrators developed a set of three principles to guide the process.

After establishing the criteria, the deans and vice chancellors decided on specific cuts within their departments.

"I'm a big believer in deans and vice chancellors making these decisions," Dhingra said. "They know their situation.



GRAPHIC BY MONICA WELUSZEWSKI

We allow for differences to occur (in areas cut) as long as our guiding principles are not sacrificed."

The following criteria guided the process:

- Avoid cuts in areas affecting the quality of instruction or the recruitment and retention of students

- Remain competitive in research and faculty scholarships because they directly correlate to retention of quality faculty

- Avoid staff layoffs

"We were able to accomplish these goals," Dhingra said.

The university saved 23 percent by decreasing the OPS budget. OPS, which stands for "other personnel services," includes non-staff positions such as temporary, seasonal and contractual employees.

Adjunct faculty also fall under this category and some were let go.

Adjunct professors who possess specific skills or knowledge were not touched, Dhingra said. One example he gave was that the university would retain an adjunct in the business college who has years of banking experience and

eliminate someone teaching English 101.

Remaining instructors will teach extra sections or larger classes to make up for the eliminated adjuncts, Dhingra said.

"People are going to have an increased workload."

The elimination of four staff positions accounted for 36 percent of the budget cuts. The positions were either vacant or will become vacant during this year, Dhingra said.

Physical Plant eliminated an unfilled supervisory position and changed the reporting relationship for those employees.

Dhingra moved two-thirds of the cost of a facilities-planning architect from the operating budget to the projects budget. Budgeting for projects such as building construction and renovation derives from separate sources not affected by the cuts.

A staffer in Student Affairs resigned. Only one-half of the funds designated for that position remain in the budget, providing the option to leave the position unfilled or create a lower paid position.

The Environmental Sciences

Program eliminated a vacant staff support position.

Funds allocated for faculty travel and conferences made up another 10 percent of the cuts. Administrators slashed 35 to 40 percent of those budgets, depending on the department.

Dhingra said he gave up his own national meeting, saving the school \$2500.

Extending the replacement cycle of some equipment will save another 8 percent. For instance, a three-year replacement cycle for some computers

will increase to four years, Dhingra said.

It is also a little warmer in campus buildings.

Physical Plant raised thermostats about two degrees in office areas and one degree in classrooms.

Dhingra projects \$200,000 in energy savings.

"Consider, that represents two faculty positions," he said.

Though not part of the current budget cuts, the savings from raising the thermostats represent a proactive step in anticipation of further cuts.

"Providing an environment conducive to learning is important. We don't want people sweating in the classrooms," Dhingra said. "But we have to be patient and wait for people to adjust. Saving \$200,000 is a wise thing to do."

Dhingra said that an inability to predict the future makes things more difficult.

The stress trickles down to faculty, staff and students.

"Our job is to do the best we can," Dhingra said. "There is no crystal ball. We have to prepare so we cause the least impact for our students."