



## USF Officials Take Prudent Course To Cut Budget, Spare Academics

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University of South Florida President Judy Genshaft has the unenviable job of cutting \$35.6 million from the university's budget in what's described as the worst fiscal crisis to hit higher education in a generation.

But the president and her deputies deserve credit for wielding their budget ax more like a scalpel.

The cuts announced Wednesday spare tenured and tenure-track professors from layoffs, and shield all graduate and undergraduate programs from elimination. About 70 people will lose their jobs, a number that would have been far greater had Genshaft not frozen hundreds of vacant positions last year. Only two instructors face layoffs.

It could have been worse. Much worse.

The University of Florida, which faces a \$47 million budget cut, is eliminating some degree programs and restructuring some academic departments. An estimated 18 faculty and 120 staff members will lose their jobs.

Florida State, which must cut \$17.5 million, plans to shut down the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory - one of Florida's premier research centers - for two months to save \$1 million on electricity.

And Florida International University, which faces a \$12 million shortfall, plans to close at least six research institutes and centers, and cut funding in half for five more.

USF seemed more surgical in its cuts. It expects to reduce energy and security costs by closing some buildings at night. It also plans to schedule more classes on Friday, a day when the campus is typically quiet. Frankly, this move should have been made years ago - on every Florida campus.

Genshaft and her vice presidents also are forgoing raises, an important symbolic move.

It's distressing to see budget cuts arrive just as USF prepares to charge a higher "differential" tuition, which was approved by lawmakers to enhance undergraduate offerings at the state's three research universities. Student government leaders accepted the increase because it

came with a promise of more class offerings and academic advisors. Now the prospect of providing greater access is nil.

Yet next fall, USF students in Tampa will pay tuition that is 15 percent higher - from \$2,211 annually to \$2,543 for a full-time student - without the benefit of a better, more efficient course of study. Instead, university officials warn that students should expect larger classes and longer delays.

The responsibility for this dire situation extends beyond the economic slowdown. The problem lies with state lawmakers who have continually shortchanged Florida's universities and refused to reform the politically popular Bright Futures program, which gives nearly free tuition to marginal students and leaves universities holding the bag.

State legislators like to pretend they're doing Florida students a favor by keeping tuition and university investment artificially low.

Once the budgetary bloodletting is done, perhaps they'll see the folly in trying to develop a world-class university system on a shoestring.

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