

From: Ralph Wilcox
Sent: Saturday, March 1, 2008
Subject: Final Report of the Budget Priorities Advisory Task Force



Dear Drs. Ward and Johnson,

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest appreciation for the leadership that you have provided in ensuring fulfillment of the *Budget Priorities Advisory Task Force's* charge. I understand that for you, and the 40 or more members of the *Task Force* (including USF Faculty Senators and members of the broader USF community), this has been a difficult, time-intensive and challenging assignment. Moreover, at a time when we face unprecedented budget cuts across Florida's State University System such efforts are, more often than not, seen as thankless tasks. However, I do want you to know that I will give the utmost consideration to your *Task Force's* recommendations in the days and weeks to come, as we are challenged to identify \$34 million in budget reductions for Academic Affairs alone. While difficult, it would be naïve for any of us to think that we will be able to balance our budget without transformative shifts in the way we look, deliver our core academic and research programs, and conduct our business activities at USF. Indeed change is inevitable and, while some may not find comfort with the prospect of program reduction, redirection, consolidation and elimination, the clear reality is that we cannot expect to maintain the status quo in this time of severe economic decline. Nor should we – if we are serious about pursuing the new and ambitious strategic path that USF has set for its future. Accordingly, both structural realignments and functional shifts in organizational behavior will be necessary.

I commend you and your colleagues for the serious and professional manner in which you pursued your charge. The fact that you have acknowledged the challenges and shortcomings presented by data gaps and incomplete qualitative narratives, will help the leadership in Academic Affairs complete its due diligence and deliberations in advance of shaping and implementing final decisions. Moreover, such experiences will contribute to "lessons learned" as we seek to improve and sustain stakeholder input into such important decision-making in the years to come. In recognizing that the *Task Force's* report is just one element of a necessarily, comprehensive analysis, I have already spoken with several unit leaders to explain that while final decisions will be framed around the principles of **quality, centrality, demand, and viability** – we will be further scrutinizing institutional data and options in the coming days. That having been said, I find your three point summary of the *Task Force* findings to be helpful. It is clear that we must improve upon operational efficiency and productivity, particularly for small programs that seemingly lack an appropriate critical mass of faculty and/or students. We will consider a variety of options as we seek to strengthen such programs providing, of course, that they are determined to be essential to the University's strategic mission. I also concur that, where realistic sources of external funding (both public and private) exist, centers and institutes will need to work harder to sustain their future without continued reliance on state support. Finally, it is apparent that some strategically important programs are poised for national and international prominence, a position that might be realized with some modest, yet focused, infusion of new resources.

In conclusion, we are presented with some difficult choices. At a time when the Tampa Bay community, the State of Florida, and nation, each find themselves positioned to benefit immensely from USF's impressive growth as a top-tier public research university, we are faced by the challenging prospect of a 15% base budget reduction. Foremost in our decision making will be the choice between preserving (and, I hope, enhancing) quality and maintaining access to a comprehensive array of programs. As I have stated quite clearly in the past, I will not compromise quality and I remain fundamentally committed to appropriately serving the needs of those students currently enrolled along with providing the support that our faculty members need and so richly deserve to expand their research, scholarly and creative portfolios. To this end, the valued contributions of the *Budget Priorities Advisory Task Force* will be very helpful in informing our future decisions.

Best regards,

Ralph

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