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UCSC looks for fat to cut as budget belt cinches down

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Consultants use the word "transformation" when talking about the future of UC Santa Cruz.

Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood and Executive Vice Chancellor John Simpson made the rounds Monday, updating faculty and staff on what is to come. They are gearing up for cuts of \$15 million to \$20 million from a \$368 million budget as of July 1, and that could mean layoffs or support staffers working fewer hours.

"We're watching the state budget discussions," Greenwood said. "It's very frustrating not to have answers."

The new fiscal year is only six weeks away. There is no campuswide layoff list because those decisions are being made by individual departments.

To deal with permanent cuts, consultants began in January to scrutinize everything from the way classrooms are scheduled to the way payroll is handled and where student records are kept. They discovered numerous opportunities for savings.

"The inefficiencies of the organization surfaced," said Scott Nostaja of AVCOR Consulting in Los Angeles, who expects to have a priority to-do list by mid-June.

Consultants talked with more than 700 of the students, faculty and staff, and reviewed more than 180 cost-saving ideas submitted via the Web.

Managers whittled that down to 44 strategies for streamlining operations at the campus, which has more than 14,000 students, 1,800 full-time support staff and more than 500 faculty.

The idea list includes whether UCSC has the right number of academic divisions — five at present.

Proposals for the business side could be enacted in two months, but academic changes require consultation with the faculty and discussions are likely to extend over the next school year.

One idea on the business side is to reorganize support staff, given that 500 employees are expected to retire in three years.

Staff members have the opportunity to get retrained under a new policy that gives in-house candidates preferential treatment for campus jobs.

Another idea is to reduce worker's compensation costs. UCSC has among the highest level of worker injuries in the UC system, mostly involving custodians, although ergonomics is a concern as well.

Many of the ideas involve using technology to improve efficiency in areas such as hiring, purchasing and payroll.

UCSC has a large technical staff, so the question is whether they could be used more effectively. Nostaja said there are 300 Web servers in 300 locations managed by "who-knows-how-many-people."

In the academic arena, the hottest topic is likely to be changes in the freshman experience. Vlad Godzich, the humanities dean, is co-chairing a committee exploring ways to ensure freshmen are taught by tenure-track faculty who do research, not only by graduate assistants or lecturers.

This has led to discussions about how the 10 colleges at UCSC are governed. Questions also have arisen about the best way to provide academic advising and whether it's possible to streamline the review process for tenure-track faculty.

Greenwood defended that process when questioned by staff. She said it has served UC well, attracting "superb faculty," but she wants to investigate making the process electronic, which reportedly resulted in six-figure savings at UC Davis.

Raising revenues is a key part of the budget solution. The goal is to boost research grants 5 percent each year. Other possibilities include locating cell phone towers on campus, which has large dead zones, hosting higher-paying summer programs and maximizing fund-raising efforts.

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