

UW-Milwaukee Chronicles: April 2015

It's April, and the UW-System Board of Regents are set to meet in Waukesha this week (April 9th - 10th). The headlines already presage a meeting that's all about budget cuts.

It's hard to remember what life was like at UW-Milwaukee (UWM) as the semester started two and half months ago, before word leaked about the massive budget cuts slated for the UW-System in the Governor's budget, and the radical proposal to scrap Chapter 36 of Wisconsin State Statutes and create a "public authority" to run the University system.

Back then (January 23rd), Chancellor Mone was still talking about the \$98 million in new initiatives proposed for the University system in 2015-17. One month before that, in December 2014, the Faculty Senate discussed the draft Strategic Plan, which was to guide UWM's development for the next decade, with a potential \$70 million price tag of new money to support new programs, buildings, campus improvements, and more.

On February 3rd, reality set in. The Governor delivered his budget to the Legislature. In a matter of days, all talk of new initiatives ceased. All talk of future growth and innovation was swept away by the looming \$300+ million budget cut for the University system in the biennial budget bill starting July 1, 2015. Budget bill (SB21 and AB21) had even more shocking proposals. Gone was the "search for truth" in the University system mission statement, replaced by new language about developing human resources "to meet the state's workforce needs." Gone were the structures for administering the System put in place in the 1970s, including shared governance and tenure, replaced by a sketchy "public authority" overseen by the Regents. Gone was protection for Downer Woods, minority and disadvantaged programs, and more.

So we waited to hear how this was all supposed to work, presuming that somewhere in Madison there were position papers, draft documents, and financial analyses that would clarify the budgetary language and public authority proposal. Only there weren't.

At the February 5th-6th Regents meeting, Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank laid out a 45 minute analysis of the impact of the proposals on UW-Madison. "They're too large for our university and they're too large for the state," she concluded, and received an ovation from the assembled audience.

At the March 5th Regents meeting, Regent David Walsh challenged the proposal for the public authority, calling it "fairy dust," and added, "It's time we step forward and send a message to the people of Wisconsin that this is wrong, it's bad for Wisconsin and it's not who we are."

As we head into April, the proposal for converting the University system to a public authority seems to be faltering, though to date, there is still no indication of how the bill language in SB21 and AB21 may be changed.

And, the potential size of the budget cuts has grown as the full impacts of the Governor's proposal have been analyzed, with barely a dribble of news about how the UW-System will cope with them. UWM's share of the budget cut grew from \$40 million to \$48 million. UW-Eau Claire, Oshkosh,

Superior, Green Bay, and Stevens Point have proposed “Voluntary Separation Incentive Programs” to encourage staff over the age of 55 to “separate” from their jobs. At UW- Eau Claire, where the program got going the earliest, 324 faculty and staff out of the total workforce of 1220 received an “invitation” to sign a voluntary separation offer. One hundred and fifteen did so by the April 3rd deadline, though the total number of departures will likely be less, since individuals can reconsider, and not all individuals who volunteered will be offered a “separation contract.”

Chancellor Mone reported to the media that budget cuts of the magnitude proposed will likely require shrinking the UWM’s workforce by 200-300 positions, a mixture of faculty and staff. Our workforce (without student workers) is about 5,000 people of whom around 3,000 are full time and 2,000 are part time. The full-time equivalent workforce is about 4,000, including a little over 800 faculty; 1,700 part-time and full-time teaching and administrative academic staff; 1,300 part-time graduate assistants, and about 900 clerical and professional classified staff. The projected shrinkage is about 7%. So we wait.

UW-Madison and several other schools are proposing dramatic increases in out-of-state tuition charges, and charges for selected professional master’s programs. The Regents will consider those this week. For UWM, though, such proposals won’t do much good, since overwhelmingly, UWM’s 28,000 students are Wisconsin residents, and we do not offer graduate degrees in medicine, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, or serve a national market for business or health sciences master’s degrees. At best such fee hikes proposals for UWM are estimated to generate \$1.7 million.

So, we wait. And we worry.

We know we are very vulnerable. The Governor’s capital budget also “defers” (read cancels), plans for a new \$75 million science building for UWM in Wauwatosa. Further, the Governor’s capital budget “defers” \$60 million in renovation infrastructure remodeling for the Northwest Quadrant facility (former Columbia Hospital), consigning large parts of these buildings to remaining unusable or only partially useable for more years to come. There are no “reserves” to plug these budget holes. And despite conventional wisdom that costs are growing, UWM costs to educate a full-time equivalent (FTE) student have been stable since 1980 when adjusted for inflation. What has changed is the proportion of that FTE student’s education paid by the state, with more being paid by the student and his/her family. In 1980 the state paid 75% of costs. Currently, the student pays over \$8,000 on average and the state pays \$5,000. With the impending state budget cuts, the students will pay an even higher proportion of their education, even with tuition rates frozen.

The questions that the UWM faculty want to ask the Regents this week are: What do you expect us to do?; and, What are you going to do?

We are on a trajectory for a smaller University system, with fewer faculty and staff. We are also on a trajectory to limit the growth of UWM’s research potential, which has already slowed as we been told to wait biennium after biennium for promised new State funding. If we are shrinking the University system, and UWM in particular, we need to talk about it. How much? 7%? 10%? Does UWM no longer strive to be a research university? Will the System have to shrink an equivalent proportion of its current 180,000 students? Say, 12,000 to 18,000 students? Where would they go? These are the questions before us, as this budget cut “tsunami” rolls toward shore.