

University Budget Advisory Committee

Minutes – 3/25/2021 meeting

Voting members present: Nabil Al-Tikriti (Chair, At-large)
Stephen Davies (Secretary, At-large)
Laura Bylenok (At-large)
Kyle Schultz (COE)
Suzanne Sumner (At-large)

Voting members absent: Liane Houghtalin (CAS)
Chris Garcia (COB)

Non-voting members present: Patrick Catullo (Athletic Director)
Michelle Pickham (Staff Advisory Council President)

Guests: Nina Mikhalevsky, Provost

1. The meeting was devoted to a presentation from Nina Mikhalevsky, UMW Provost. Dr. Mikhalevsky presented a spreadsheet depicting the budget cuts to Academic Affairs that have been mandated almost annually for the past decade. It is sobering to note that this division in particular has seen its funding reduced so severely, given that education is our institution's core mission. This situation extends into the present: we are currently dependent on meeting our enrollment targets in order to avoid further cuts.
2. Dr. Mikhalevsky also noted that even though enrollments have been declining over the past decade, the university's staff and faculty have not. Since the budget for academics (as with most units at UMW) is comprised of about 90% salaries, this means that the budget cuts are particularly troubling, as they invariably have personnel ramifications. Ms. Pickham asked what Dr. Mikhalevsky would do if asked to make yet another substantive budget cut. She replied that all one can do is "look at your people and pray for empty positions" (*i.e.*, retirements or resignations that we can choose not to replace and thus save money). We're so "lean," said Dr. Mikhalevsky, "that this is not a strategic process. But within the cutting process, as we can, we are making strategic decisions, including funding reallocations."
3. Reviewing the institution's recent history, it is apparent that a major contributing factor to the current budget challenge is that around 2008, UMW planned for significant growth in enrollment and entered into a number of agreements and projects (including with the UMW Foundation) predicated on this assumption. Unfortunately, this growth did not materialize, and with the added competition from the larger institutions in Virginia taking more students and the overall decline in the number of students both in Virginia and nationally, these plans have now caused us to face pressures in many different areas. Dr. Mikhalevsky did say that our current total faculty/staff levels actually aren't too far off from what they should have been (had we not planned on this growth), but the distribution of FTEs among programs isn't always appropriate. We need to hire in areas that have strong enrollment demand (Communications, Computer Science, and Psychology, for example) and hope that attrition in areas with less enrollment demand can help compensate.
4. Dr. Al-Tikriti asked a question about raising room and board rates to increase revenue. In addition to general challenges filling residence halls, Dr. Mikhalevsky pointed out that the UMW Foundation owns some of the residence halls and we coordinate with the Foundation on their management. President Paino is presently working with the Foundation on our relationship and Dr. Mikhalevsky encouraged the committee to support President Paino in his current efforts.

She did recommend all department chairs monitor their Foundation accounts as they rely on those to help support their programs. Although the Foundation is an important component of our funding support, it is not sufficient to offset our many budget cuts very well.

5. Dr. Sumner observed that another budget difficulty could be due to the fact that we have so many more administrators now than we once did, yet the same number of students. Dr. Mikhalevsky clarified that although there is some truth to this, the picture is more complicated since not all “administrators” are the same. In particular, much of the increased administrative staffing is for student support services: career services, financial aid, the Talley Center, student affairs, and so forth. It’s not as though we have many highly-compensated “bean counters” who could easily be removed without loss.
6. Dr. Al-Tikriti asked whether the recent losses of the \$500 annual faculty supplemental funds, support for transportation to academic conferences, and faculty sabbaticals are likely to be permanent. Dr. Mikhalevsky said definitely not: as long as Dr. Paino is the university’s president, restoring faculty support items such as these will be a priority.
7. Finally, in short-term budget news, Dr. Mikhalevsky is currently assuming the same level of cuts in AY 2021-2022 as in AY 2020-2021. Also, the recent retirement of Dr. Morello leaves an open position that will not be replaced, although we will be hiring a Budget Manager, which formed a portion of his duties.