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Proposed closures come as 'shock' to FSU department chairmen

BY DOUG BLACKBURN • DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER • APRIL 14, 2009

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Joe Sanders, chairman of the art department at Florida State, received no advance notice that the ceramics, sculpture and studio art programs that he oversees have been targeted for elimination.

Sanders didn't learn about the news that could affect more than 100 undergraduate majors until he read a story in today's *Tallahassee Democrat*.

FSU administrators on Monday afternoon released a draft proposal that listed numerous steps the university was preparing to take in anticipation of massive reductions in state aid, including the elimination of 21 programs.

"I had no warning. It was a total shock," Sanders said. "We did not receive any indication from upper administration that we were even being considered.

"I'm sure other departments in the university are in the same boat."

Jane Ohlin, director of the Dedman School of Hospitality, was stunned to discover her program could be ended. She didn't think an endowed program would be vulnerable.

"I couldn't believe it. In Florida, tourism and hospitality is the name of the game," Ohlin said. "For this program to be at risk makes no sense."

Victor Mesev, chairman of the geography department, another unit that would close if the plan drawn up Monday becomes reality, also received no advance warning.

"There were some suspicions, but nothing specific," he said. "I think maybe we're on the list because we're such a small department, but there are many, many students taking geography classes."

The state Senate and House have yet to meet in conference to decide on final appropriations for higher education.

But the House proposal represents a staggering reduction in revenues for the 11 schools in the State University System. FSU would take a \$73 million cut, while the University of Florida is poised for a \$107 million hit.

The Senate versions are considerably kinder to the universities. FSU, for example, would receive \$28 million less state revenue in the Senate version.

FSU President T.K. Wetherell said university administrators prepared their proposal with the idea that the school would receive approximately \$45 million less than it did for the 2008-09 school year.

Their proposal – which includes closing the Panama City campus, suspending the Ringling Museum in Sarasota and reductions or mergers for 19 programs – isn't even a worst-case scenario. That would be the current House budget for higher education.

"It's hard to fathom the worst-case scenario," FSU Provost Larry Abele said. "It's a very, very worrisome time for the state of Florida, not just Florida State University.

"What do we want to be? It's a very, very difficult and complex question."

Wetherell has scheduled a town hall meeting for 3:30 p.m. April 21 in the auditorium of the Askew Student Life Building, during which he expects to hear counter-proposals to the plans the university made public on Monday.

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