

Furloughs more likely than salary cuts at UI

Idaho public institutions prepare for loss of millions of dollars in state appropriation

By Joel Mills of the Tribune
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Steven Daley-Laursen

MOSCOW - Even though it doesn't officially know what its state appropriation will be, the University of Idaho won't likely cut salaries in the next fiscal year, its interim leader said Tuesday.

More likely are furloughs for selected employees, leaving certain positions vacant, carrying over money from some accounts and reducing other expenses "in every way possible," said UI interim President Steven Daley-Laursen.

"We have to be wary, watchful and diligent to sustain our position and direction," Daley-Laursen said in a half-hour state of the university address.

The UI and other Idaho public institutions of higher education are losing millions of dollars from next year's budgets, although the Legislature hasn't finalized an appropriation to hand over to the State Board of Education, which will then divvy up the money.

"We can't make the final budget decisions, and we don't have all the men on the chessboard," Daley-Laursen said.

But the university has been working throughout the last year to shed degrees and take other measures to focus its academic missions, he said.

More than 30 degrees will be eliminated or consolidated as the result of a "program prioritization process," including several foreign languages, scientific master's degrees and graduate-level teaching degrees.

The last step in closing those degrees is the signature of state board Executive Director Mike Rush. The full board doesn't have to vote on the closures because none of them is above the \$250,000 threshold of financial impact, UI Provost Doug Baker said.

Now that the UI is reducing the scope of what it does, Daley-Laursen said it will begin reallocating the money it does have to areas that have a greater economic effect and that have a better chance of getting external funding, either through grants or private sources. There are 16 such proposals on the table, he said.

The UI has also restructured its internal finance and planning mechanisms so they are more closely linked, he said. In response to a question after his speech, Daley-Laursen said the university needs to do a better job setting goals for the new organizational structure, and measuring how much progress has been made in reaching them.

Each of the measures have been monitored and endorsed by incoming President Duane Nellis, who is finishing his tenure as provost at Kansas State University. Nellis' first official day on the job is July 1.

The blow to the UI's budget will be softened by a 6.5 percent student fee increase, enrollment revenues and one-time stimulus money from the federal government.

But those are just short-term fixes, Daley-Laursen said, so the university is working to build a larger budget reserve for hard times and to preserve a good external rating from outside financial institutions.

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