

Protesters rally for programs in peril

WSU students, faculty rally to register their displeasure at losing degrees to budget cuts

By Joel Mills of the Tribune

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Washington State University students and faculty members protest the planned closure of the school's sports management degree program on Monday. Hundreds of people rallied on campus to show support for other programs that are also on the chopping block.

PULLMAN — Hundreds of Washington State University students and faculty members took time off from a busy finals week Monday to show their displeasure with proposed program and pay cuts.

Theater and dance students, whose department faces complete elimination, pitched tents in front of Todd Hall on Friday and camped there throughout the weekend in protest. And sports management students and professors, also facing extinction, marched through campus to a noon budget forum.

"We understand that we are facing budget cuts," said Katy Nuttman, a 21-year-old junior with a double major in theater arts and English education. "We never dreamed that they would cut the entire program."

Theater student Andrea Gonzales, 33, said students in her department are able to get good jobs after graduation because they learn every facet of the theater business, from performance to production.

"Actors don't always get jobs, but technical people do," she said.

Sports management faculty members rallied their students outside of Cleveland Hall before they started a chant of "save sports management" and marched up the hill to the Compton Union Building.

"They're eliminating a viable program," shouted professor Tammy Crawford, who noted sports management faculty salaries total \$293,000 per year, while students pay about \$1 million in tuition annually.

Those two factions and others from throughout the university later converged at the CUB to grill President

Elson Floyd and Provost Warwick Bayly. WSU's 2009-2011 budget is being cut by \$54 million, a 10.4 percent reduction in state funding.

"I have served as a university president for 15 years. I've never been through a fiscal crisis as dire as the fiscal crisis that we are responding to," Floyd said in his introductory remarks to the several hundred people at the forum. "We've made every effort to be as responsible as we possibly could. We've made every effort to be as collaborative as we can."

He also acknowledged the volatile emotions felt by students who could lose the programs they love, and the faculty and support staff that go with them.

"I know your passion, I know your concern," he said.

WSU will lay off 206 people under the budget proposal, and leave 165 vacant positions unfilled.

But many in the audience still challenged several parts of the proposal. Crawford, who could lose her job, questioned the rationale used by the College of Education to cut sports management.

"I was one of four faculty that sat with Dean (Judy) Mitchell on Thursday and was told that I was done," Crawford said, explaining that Mitchell told her sports management didn't fit in with the college's core mission. "I would heartily beg to differ with that. Not only are we economically viable, but we do in fact prepare students to be educators and have an impact on our youth."

Brian Bickford told Floyd and Bayly that he only came to WSU to get into the sports management program after failing to find a career direction at two other colleges.

"I thought I had finally found a home and was going to graduate here," said Bickford, who wasn't able to become a certified sports management major before last Friday's deadline. "Now that I can't get certified, what is a student like me to do?"

Floyd said Bickford should sit down with WSU career counselors to figure out a new direction for his studies.

The Department of Community and Rural Sociology and the major in German will also be cut under the proposal. If the cuts are approved, the programs will be phased out over a two-year period so students with those majors can finish their degrees.

The WSU community will debate the proposed budget throughout the month before it is finalized on June 1.

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