

Idaho university officials report program, staff cuts

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — All four of Idaho's four-year public universities and colleges have eliminated degree programs, dissolved academic departments or reduced staff during the past year as part of a statewide effort to cut costs and prioritize college programs.

Boise State University restructured several of its academic departments, resulting in the replacing of its College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs with a new School of Public Service. Meanwhile, the University of Idaho discontinued 19 degree options. Those options included bachelor degrees in American Studies, Art Education and Medical Technology. Lewis Clark State College consolidated a student testing center, and Idaho State University eliminated eight degree and degree emphasis programs.

Idaho's State Board of Education first directed college officials to evaluate programs in 2013 after seeing a decrease in revenue from tuition and state funds. College officials gave an update to the board last week and will report annually to the board as they continue to make changes.

The board only required colleges to review programs rather than uniformly trim each budget the same amount. However, colleges were given instructions that programs that evaluated poorly must find ways to improve.

Each school assessed its programs differently, but according to the universities, reviews were based on demand, student retention, graduation and efficiency.

"The question was: Are we providing programs students need?" said Blake Youde, board spokesman. "There has been a consistent concern over the cost of higher education and falling revenue from the state legislature."

In 2008, state lawmakers approved more than \$259.5 million to help cover 26 percent of the combined budgets of all four universities. This year — following the economic downturn and slow recovery— lawmakers approved \$246.5 million or less than 20 percent of the combined budgets. At the same time, schools have seen stagnant enrollment.

Boise State University faced substantial expense cuts during the 2014-2015 school year because of a shortfall in its \$440 million budget at the same time that it carried out its program changes, said Jim Munger, vice provost for academic affairs for the university.

The academic division had to find a way to reduce more than \$1 million in its budget. Non-academic divisions left multiple positions vacant and reorganized to cut costs. For example, officials are now looking to invest in their own campus security rather than rely primarily on the Boise Police Department.

"The first year we talked the talk. But this past year we really had to walk the walk," Munger said.

Up north, the University of Idaho not only cut degree and certificate programs, it also consolidated six programs into different departments. The biggest hit went to the university's music departments. The school reduced nine degree programs to three with different areas of emphasis and made the university's music theatre major degree program a minor.

Lewis Clark State College had the least amount of changes. It discontinued three academic degrees and two certificates.

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