

Vertical
Cuts
Cut Down
By
Curators



IT BEGAN quietly last fall—President Jim Olson's plan to "reshape and refocus" the University in light of bleak financial forecasts. "I am prepared," he said, "... to do fewer things well rather than to carry out all of our present activities at a level of quality that is unacceptable."

By the time Chancellor Barbara Uehling appeared before the Alumni Association Board in May, things were anything but quiet.

IN THE PICTURE AT LEFT, Uehling listens to and answers questions of board members concerning the reallocation process, especially as it affected the areas targeted for elimination: the School of Library and Information Science, the School of Public and Community Services, the Department of Industrial Engineering in the College of Engineering, and the Departments of Housing and Interior Design and Clothing and Textiles in the College of Home Economics. There also were questions about the severe, \$1.2 million reduction recommended for the College of Education. Alumni listened intently, and several made observations. The alumni board itself took no official position.

Not so with the University's governing body, the Board of Curators. At its June meeting, the curators unanimously passed a resolution stating that they "will not terminate any academic departments of the University system solely for financial reasons in the foreseeable future. The departments that were targeted for elimination or reduction are not to be held in jeopardy, but will remain viable programs of this University."

WHAT HAPPENED between fall 1981 and spring 1982? When the vertical approach to reallocation was announced, approval was widespread. Administrators, the Faculty Council and, according to one poll, faculty members strongly favored eliminating or reducing specific programs rather than, once again, undergoing devastating across-the-board cuts.

When the criteria for making the tough budget decisions were announced, there was no outcry. Each program was to be evaluated on the basis of utility, cost, quality and socio-political impact. When the curators received a report on the process in December, they made little comment. It was true that several deans believed that the Council of Deans had not had sufficient input. However, for the most part, they kept whatever objections they had to themselves.

The trouble started when the targets of the \$10 million to \$12 million in reductions were announced, especially the \$7.5 million in the academic areas on the Columbia Campus. Uehling, a take-charge, charge-ahead administrator, was far in front of the other three chancellors in getting her process under way. Therefore, it was the Columbia Campus that drew the attention.

Persons in the affected areas fought back with a massive barrage of letters and phone calls to curators

and state legislators. Alumni were brought into the fray. The strategy worked. University administrators clearly were surprised by the scope and intensity of the pressure. The Board of Curators clearly was not prepared for it. By mid-May, it was obvious that the board would not easily approve the tentative recommendations.

In early June, Uehling reacted to the uproar in a letter to Olson. She said she was "delaying forwarding any recommendation for phasing out academic programs. . . . It has become evident that there is a lack of clarity of purpose for the University of Missouri and for the Columbia Campus as a part of that University among representatives of the people of Missouri, members of the legislature, the Board of Curators, central and campus administrators, and faculties and students of the four-campus system. Fundamental questions have been raised regarding even so basic an issue as the nature of a land-grant institution and how a four-campus system relates to that mission."

Uehling called for the establishment of a task force comprised of citizens, members of the Board of Curators, central and campus administrators, faculty, staff and students "to be charged with reexamining the purpose of the University of Missouri, the expectations it must fulfill in the future, and principles on which future planning must occur."

Olson responded by recommending to the curators that no academic programs be eliminated for the next two years. Of Uehling's task force proposal, he said it "has much to recommend it. I would like to consider the matter further, however, before bringing to you a recommendation about specific procedures for our continued planning."

The curators, of course, went further. They completely halted the reallocation process and set up a long-range planning committee of its own to "review before October 31, 1982, savings employees have identified, progress toward increasing University resources, and the development of the Long Range Planning effort."

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS of the aborted reallocation attempt? Some of them probably should have been learned during the Role and Scope controversy of the early 1970s. That's when a proposal would have transferred some programs from the Columbia Campus to the other three. That's when, once again, there was talk about doing "fewer things better."

The fact is that there is no strictly internal process in major decision-making involving public higher education, especially in a land-grant institution. Decision-making is both public and political. Any blueprint for higher education in Missouri must have grassroots support. Uehling may be right when she calls for a task force that includes citizens.

And Curator President William T. Doak is right on target when he tells Missourians, "If they want a good University, they're going to have to pay for it."—*Steve Shinn.*