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UH Mānoa releases new budget: Revamped fiscal plan doesn't impress everyone

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Courtesy: University of Hawai'i

Chancellor Robert Bley-Vroman discussed the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's new budget plan for the upcoming Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 academic school year during a campus conversation.

To stabilize the budget, the Dean and Directors are to stay within this year's allocations, according to the presentation. Any departments that went into deficit in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 need to submit their own

plans on how to recover.

UH Mānoa administration also wants to reinstate centralized budget oversight and accountability by having all units participate in hearings and quarterly reviews. The budget committee plans to take on a new budget methodology by focusing on long-term sustainability.

The public presentation was an effort by the administration to allow for increased transparency and accountability for students and faculty. Still, not all were pleased with the campus's efforts.

"Announcement of the conversation is less than 24 hours in advance, making it hard to plan to attend," said Marguerite Butler in a phone call as an associate professor in the UH Mānoa biology department and convener of I Mua Mānoa, a group that aims to improve the campus community. "And questions are not totally answered, we want to know college by college or research unit spending and they gave us aggregate data which came off as disingenuous."

She felt that the new budget was not much of a change and failed to prioritize students.

Breaking down the numbers

Bley-Vroman's budget recap showed a 19 percent increase in undergraduate degrees from the 2009 through 2014 during a time of declining enrollment. There was an increase in the four-year graduation rate during the same time period.

In his presentation, he vowed to establish the following as priorities in the coming years:

- Reduce spending by having some departments leave certain positions empty, delay recruitment and reduce overtime expenditures;
- Increase efficiency of research by increasing efforts to generate extramural funding and recruit faculty who qualify for nine months of state support;
- Renovate facilities such as the installation of a chilled water loop system in the John A. Burns School of Medicine and Cancer Center or rooftop solar panels on the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology; and
- Delay classroom renovations, upgrades and reduce lease expenditures to save money.

The FY 2016 budget process to realign current allocations is constant with FY 2015 levels. The 38.5 percent increase in tuition will be allocated based on the degrees awarded, majors declared, and students taught.

“It’s ridiculous,” Butler said. “Why should students have to pay more tuition if it’s not increasing the quality of their education? They’re not a subsidy for administration waste.”

Mānoa Fund Sources

The Mānoa campus is funded by 17 active special funds dedicated by law for a specific purpose. A majority of the funds are restricted and can only be used for their designated purpose, with the exception of the Tuition and Fees fund, which is one of the most flexible funds.

There are also eight active revolving funds that are established by a state statute that governs their usages. The expenditures of these funds are covered through their own income, such as the Student Activities fund.

The Research Training and Revolving Fund is a fund established by Hawaii Revised Statute § 304A-2253 to enable research and training and help with new discoveries and inventions. Revenue is generated from indirect costs, facility and administrative overhead, grants and contracts. This has grown from \$193 million in 2001 to \$300 million now.

More than 50 percent of fund distributions go to the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology and the John A. Burns School of Medicine, which enroll 22 percent of the entire student population.

“It’s very clear that the money is going to medical school and research units. Why is tuition going to support facilities that students never use? Students should demand to know more about how their money is being managed,” Butler said.