Budget Symposium Remarks
by Stacey Lowery Bretz (Chair, Fiscal Priorities & Budget Planning Committee)
April 13, 2020

Before Provost Osborne and Dr. Creamer share an update on our budget for both FY20 and FY21, and before they answer the questions that were asked of them about our fiscal circumstances, I wanted to offer a few remarks to my fellow Senators in my role as Chair of the Fiscal Priorities and Budget Planning Committee.

There is no doubt that we are living through significant upheaval in our lives as learners and teachers. It's been a month or more since we've seen one another face to face. We are limited to interacting largely through screens and chat threads. It's just not the same.

Students have shared both the triumphs and the trials of remote learning. Staff continue to go above and beyond, doing all they can to anticipate and meet the needs of the Miami community.

Senior leadership has worked day and night, doing all they can to prioritize the safety of our Miami family. Difficult choices have been made, and these choices come with financial consequences.

On all these points, I think we can agree.But, there are important matters about which we do not all agree.

Some faculty have spoken up to express not only concern with, but frankly anger about, the fiscal decisions made in this time of crisis. Senior leadership has been accused of abandoning shared governance. Allegations have even been made that senior leadership is taking advantage of this crisis.

I wanted to take this moment to remind you that the Fiscal Priorities & Budget Planning Committee is a standing committee of Senate, composed of faculty, staff, and students. Fiscal Priorities meets each and every week with senior leadership. We are charged to represent Senate in the financial management of the University and in the process of setting fiscal priorities. The highest members of our university leadership, including President Crawford, Provost Osborne, and Dr. Creamer, regularly seek our counsel.

Fiscal Priorities asked to speak this afternoon because we think it's imperative to counter the false narratives that have been circulating. Here are just a few of the accusations that have been levied at the President, the Provost, and Dr. Creamer– *See endnotes*

- "Senate does not have a role in examining budget data, nor has it been given a chance to review budget rationales." Untrue. [1]
- "Personnel cuts and workload changes have been made without transparency, without sharing data." Untrue. [2]
- "Budget cuts are coming from faculty alone. There is no shared sacrifice." Untrue. [3]
- "Faculty have been shut out of the opportunity to participate in generating solutions." Untrue. [4]
- "That the Provost believes that in a crisis, shared governance must be put aside in favor of unilateral decision-making." Untrue. [5]

Each of these statements is simply untrue. Here's what is true.

Fiscal Priorities discusses budget data each and every week at our meetings. We regularly discuss and debate the rationales for fiscal decisions. To spin a tale that there is no shared sacrifice when staff have lost their jobs is both cruel and demonstrably false. Those who repeat these untruths are engaging in inflammatory and irresponsible behavior. [3]

Miami University has known financial losses – significant losses – for FY20. And there is great uncertainty – for many reasons – when it comes to modeling the magnitude of our projected financial losses as we head into FY21. But do not let the false narratives convince you that uncertainty in modeling is evidence of an intentional lack of transparency by senior leadership.

I've served on Fiscal Priorities for four years now, and as Chair of this committee for the last two. Not one time – not once – has any student, staff, or faculty member on this committee asked a question and

been denied an answer by the President, by the Provost, by Dr. Creamer, or by any other member of PEC who comes before us. Not once. They are dedicated people with honorable motives who are making the best decisions they can with the data we currently have.

The trust and communication between your representatives on the Fiscal Priorities committee and senior leadership is, frankly, inspiring. Trust fosters communication, and communication is essential for shared governance.

My fellow Senators, I want to remind and reassure you that you and your constituents have had, and continue to have, a voice all along in the fiscal matters of Miami – most especially during these challenging days of the coronavirus crisis. Your representatives on the Fiscal Priorities Committee are informed and well prepared to serve in our shared governance structure. The faculty, staff, and students on this committee know from first-hand experience how seriously our senior leadership takes their collective responsibility for the fiscal stewardship of Miami University.

So… I'm here today on behalf of my colleagues on the Fiscal Priorities committee to ask you to set aside what you think you already know. What you read on twitter or in a petition. What you may have heard from some faculty. I'm here today to ask you to listen - really listen - to Provost Osborne and Dr. Creamer.

And if, after listening, you still have additional questions or concerns, please reach out to Fiscal Priorities and ask us to bring these to the table on your behalf for discussion and debate. Faculty and staff have an appropriate interest in budgeting, but we do not have primary responsibility. Shared governance requires leadership to seek meaningful input from faculty and staff. Make sure you avail yourself of our established mechanisms for shared governance – which are alive and kicking, even during this crisis, despite reports to the contrary from those who continue to spread misinformation. Your Fiscal Priorities and Budget Planning Committee is happy to report to you on the floor of Senate as often as you'd like.

AAUP comments:

1. FP represents, but is not identical with Senate. FP has a responsibility to share its discussions with Senate. In a normal year, FP might present to the Senate annually. But in an urgent fiscal crisis, does FP not see a need to connect with senators? was there no thought of preparing Senators to discuss with their constituencies the radical changes afoot? Would offering a transparent rationale with numbers to back it up not have inclined the Senate and the faculty to understand the need for the cuts, assuming they are justified? There were over 250 FT contingents (VAPs and instructors) across the divisions in 2018-19. Assuming numbers are similar for 2019-20, if we renew 100 FT visiting positions, that means over 150 people are not being renewed. That, like the workload changes (the provost does not call them changes, but faculty will feel them as such) is a significant change from the previous year. We note that personnel cuts and workload changes were announced as instructions from deans to chairs. They were not discussed in Senate, so came as a surprise to faculty. Would it not have made sense for FP or the Provost to bring up the prospect of these major changes with Senators so that rationales could be shared and the shock of the changes processed?

2. If transparency means that in a budget crisis, FP discusses crucial changes without communicating them to Senators, then indeed there has not been real transparency. On Monday, faculty watched a budget presentation that included no numbers beyond a discussion of reallocation percentages and a note that these had changed. With appropriate caveats about what cannot yet be known about budgetary futures during this crisis, it would have been possible to share data that would provide a rationale for the decision not to renew 150 or more faculty and to alter remaining faculty workloads to enable the nonrenewals.

3. Far from ignoring the staff cuts, AAUP has discussed them extensively and publicly on our website, Twitter feed, and discussion groups. We are painfully aware that cuts have so far primarily affected lower-paid workers, not upper management. We were, when we made the quoted statement, concerned about high administrative salaries and expensive athletic commitments in the context of the crisis. At the time of our petition, the President's and other upper administrators' decision to take pay cuts had not been announced; we welcome that decision, as well as the $2m coming out of the athletics budget over the next 5 years—that's a good start.

4. Apart from the few faculty who serve on FP, Senators and faculty do not know what solutions have been considered, and their input has not been sought. How can we know that FP and the administration discussed options besides cutting well over 100 faculty and raising workloads for others? Can FP share whether a plan for a progressive salary "tax" was discussed?

5. We are not sure what "untrue" can mean here. Faculty all read the Provost's statement, in an email to all of us, that "budgetary crises...do not respect shared governance."