

FAMU President Announces Layoffs, Cuts

Contributed by Matthew Richardson - Black College Wire
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Ammons says actions result from state fiscal crisis

Florida A&M University is beginning to feel the wrath of a stormy economy in the state.

At a forum on Friday, Feb. 1, President James H. Ammons announced that due to a \$4 million-dollar budget cut, the university will undergo significant change, which will include staffing reductions.

"With the cuts that we have taken with the one percent per quarter reduction, we have essentially done away with all of the vacant positions in the University, so we cannot manage these additional cuts by using vacant positions," Ammons said. "So now what we're looking at as all of these other cuts come about, we're going to have to lay off faculty and staff."

Ammons also announced the possibility that very few courses would be offered during the summer term. There would also be larger class sizes, not as many courses and sections to choose from. Faculty and staff numbers will also decline.

"If you all have seen and heard as you watched the news and read the newspaper, the state of Florida is in a financial crisis," Ammons said. "The fiscal situation here in the state of Florida is as bad as I can remember and I was born here in the state of Florida, spent all my life here except the six I spent in North Carolina. It's bad."

The state of Florida has the lowest tuition rates and the worst student/teacher ratio in the nation. The budget crisis was discussed at the Board of Governors meeting in December.

"What we have seen over the last few months is that every source of revenue for the state of Florida, all of the tax revenues, all of the collections are down again this year and the economic forecasters believe that we're going to have this kind of situation next year and maybe the year after next," Ammons said.

Ammons said the severed financial allotments are not only plaguing the university.

"The budget for the state of Florida right now, based on those projections, will experience a \$1 billion short fall," Ammons said. "It takes a billion dollars to operate the state of Florida at the level that we're operating today. We have already absorbed a four percent cut, which meant for Florida A&M \$4 million from our state budget. That happened in July. July 1, 2007 was the beginning of the fiscal year and we had to reduce our budget."

Ammons announced there exists the possibility of another cut as forewarned by the BOG. Ammons said the BOG asked the University to come up with a plan just in case another cut occurs.

"The state of Florida has reduced the allocations to the state each quarter; that's how we get our money. The state gives us an allocation every quarter, so they've reduced those allocations by one percent each quarter," Ammons said.

"So that money never makes it to the University. In addition to that, they can now ask us to make plans for second round cuts that will begin next month in March. That's what we're preparing for."

Although the plans have been made, they have not gone into effect. This strategy was made as a backup plan in case a budget cut reoccurs. Faculty has been notified.

"We don't know yet if we will have to reduce these budgets again by another four percent which would be another \$4 million, but we have prepared for it," Ammons said.

"All of the vice presidents, the deans, department chairs, directors across the University have put in for a plan to reduce our budget. With these cuts, after cuts that we are experiencing because our enrollment has declined, we could possibly lose nearly \$19 million to \$18.8 million to be exact."

With no specific department or school in mind, the layoffs that could occur will be across the board.

"Right now, it appears that in order for us to meet the target that has been set for Florida A&M, we would have to cut 30 positions. All 30 of these positions are occupied and so we're talking about layoffs," Ammons said.

The decrease in staffing sizes have led to the decision to amalgamate summer options.

"This means that we're not going to be able to offer that many sections that we have offered in the past. We're not going to be able to offer as many courses so all of the electives and all of the choices that you've had since you've been here, you will not be able to have all of those choices any more," Ammons said.

"And the classes in English, math and science, we're going to see the class sizes go up, and we've always tried to keep those classes at a manageable size."

Some students are displeased with the cuts, but remain understanding.

"I think the budget cuts are something that is inevitable considering the financial situation the state of Florida has been in right now," said Gallop Franklin, 20, third-year pharmacy student from Tallahassee. "Hopefully, the billion dollars that Governor Crist is trying to get to factor in education will come through. But it's going to be tough times for FAMU."

"I think that with all of us working together, we can get through these tough times," Ammons said.

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Matthew Richardson writes for The Famuan, Florida A&M University's student newspaper, which originally published a version of this article.
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