

**Middle Tennessee State University
2008 Budget Cut Impact Study**

**Submitted by Dr. Alfred Lutz
MTSU Faculty Senate President 2008-2009
October 3, 2008**

**Contact information:
Dr. Alfred Lutz
Office of the Faculty Senate, JUB 100
MTSU P.O. Box 621
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
alutz@mtsu.edu
(615) 898-2655**

Summary

On September 11, 2008, the MTSU Faculty Senate distributed to the entire faculty a document entitled “Budget Cut Impact Feedback” in an effort to assess the impact on the work of MTSU faculty members of the 6.1% reduction in state appropriations for fiscal year 2008-2009. MTSU faculty members were asked to respond to the following question:

If the recent budget cuts have affected your work in any way, would you please be so kind as to send the Faculty Senate (preferably by October 1) a brief description of those effects?

The Faculty Senate received 81 responses from both individual faculty members addressing primarily, though not exclusively, their own situations as well as from department chairs, program and support-center directors, and leaders of other campus units, speaking for larger groups of faculty members and staff. This survey thus represents the views of a representative segment of the MTSU faculty.

Most respondents (all except two) are convinced that the budget cuts are having a negative impact on both their own work – their teaching, their research, and, in several cases, their service – and the proper functioning of their department or unit.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Major Concerns.....	5
Travel Budgets	5
Technology	6
Technology Required for Research Purposes	6
Technology Needed for Instructional or Pedagogical Purposes	6
Faculty and Staff Positions.....	6
Other Concerns.....	7
Program Development.....	7
Recruiting	7
Supplies	7
Reassigned Time.....	8
Related Concerns	8
Conclusion	8
Acknowledgments	9

Introduction

This report is an attempt to assess the impact of the 6.1% reduction in state appropriations for fiscal year 2008-2009 on the work performed by the MTSU faculty. Although the faculty feedback covered a wide range of concerns, the following three were listed by at least 40% of respondents:

- Cuts to the travel budgets
- Technology-related cuts
- Cuts in academic and support positions

In the estimation of those responding to the survey, these cuts have a negative impact on research (both by faculty members and by undergraduate and graduate students), teaching and pedagogy, and departmental, institutional, and professional service.

In affecting those essential aspects of faculty members' work, these cuts also impede the university's primary mission as well as MTSU's pursuit of the goals stated in the Academic Master Plan, certainly Goals I and II:

Goal I: MTSU will promote academic quality by enhancing learning, teaching, scholarship, and service and by celebrating MTSU's distinctive strengths.

Goal II: MTSU will promote individual student success and responsibility for accomplishments through fostering a student-centered learning culture.

Although this document may strike readers as critical of MTSU and the university administration, this is neither its purpose nor intent. The MTSU administration is not responsible for cuts that originate elsewhere. This report, then, is offered in a spirit of cooperation, offering information that we hope will be useful in helping the institution respond to a difficult situation.

This report does not focus on particulars, i.e., no effort has been made to provide a detailed description or analysis of a particular issue. In addition, we have not conducted any research into any topic mentioned in this report. Instead, this report summarizes, accurately we hope, faculty members' views in order to provide a sense of what they perceive to be the most serious and severe consequences of the recent budget cuts.

Major Concerns

This section covers the major categories of concerns identified by respondents: travel budgets, technology, and problems related to faculty and staff positions.

Travel Budgets

More than 80% of all respondents consider the reduction in travel support as one of their major concerns, and a sizable minority of those has either already missed a conference they would have attended had funding been available or have decided not to attend a conference or a professional meeting in the course of this academic year.

The travel budget is always among the first resources to take a hit. Since cuts to travel budgets don't make a perceptible difference in the way a college campus functions on the surface – no classes have to be cancelled – these cuts might be called 'invisible' cuts. The travel budget is one of the 'usual suspects' rounded up whenever budgets have to be reduced.

Yet, as the responses suggest, the impact on all aspects of a faculty member's work can be drastic. Even before the cuts, travel budgets in many departments were inadequate. In many cases, an individual faculty member's share of the departmental travel budget would pay for only part, though sometimes a substantial part, of a single conference. Faculty members regularly incur substantial (and now even more substantial) out-of-pocket expenses for attending conferences.

As numerous respondents pointed out, cuts in departmental travel budgets affect a variety of processes that are integral to the university. The following were reported by respondents as being adversely affected by reduced travel budgets and concomitant reduction in conference participation:

- Professional development
- Networking opportunities
- Converting conference papers into journal articles
- Professional service opportunities
- Recruiting efforts
- Opportunities to promote the visibility of programs, especially our fledgling Ph.D. programs
- Opportunities for students to attend conferences along with their professors

This situation is especially devastating for faculty members in so-called low-paying fields and for the vast majority of assistant professors, the latter being required by the 2004 Tenure & Promotion Policies to establish "national recognition." As one faculty member points out, "It's hard to see how candidates for promotion can establish 'national recognition' on a regional (at best) travel budget."

'Invisible' cuts are often a convenient solution, but, as the responses indicate, they come with a steep price tag of lost opportunities that affect all aspects of faculty members' work.

We should point out here that at a meeting with the Faculty Senate Liaison Committee on September 24, President McPhee identified faculty travel "as a crucial issue," and he informed the committee that about \$150,000 will be restored to departmental travel budgets.

Technology

Technology-related concerns were expressed by an equally large number of faculty members. Their concerns fall into two major categories: technology required for research purposes and that needed for instructional or pedagogical purposes.

Technology Required for Research Purposes

This issue arises primarily, though not exclusively, in technology-based or technology-heavy programs and departments. The key concerns were:

- Outdated technology
- Lack of crucial research tools such as databases – this was also a concern in Liberal Arts
- Over-extended repair and support staff

Technology Needed for Instructional or Pedagogical Purposes

Although this area, too, is of more concern to faculty members in technology-based fields, where the use of certain technologies is either precisely what students are supposed to learn or provides an irreplaceable component of it, these problems were also frequently mentioned by respondents in other fields.

The key concerns were:

- Outdated technology (students learn to use machines and programs that they will no longer encounter in their work lives)
- Lack of technology-based research and teaching tools (e.g. databases that undergraduate and especially graduate students need to be able to access to produce competitive theses and dissertations)
- Inadequate number of master classrooms
- Out-of-date and unreliable classroom technology (cuts to Instructional Technology Support Center)
- Faculty members using their own money to buy equipment and pedagogical materials, particularly non-print media (cuts to Media Library)

Faculty and Staff Positions

The number of positions cut or remaining unfilled as a result of the budget reduction is comparatively small. Nevertheless, a substantial number of respondents reported a

significant impact on their work. The key concerns were:

- Increased teaching loads, thus reducing time needed for the following:
 - research opportunities for undergraduate students
 - research and service obligations
 - researching and developing grant proposals
 - organizing and conducting conferences at MTSU, which serve many outreach functions
 - course development, including new course development
 - faculty development, including training in new technology, online and other distance delivery methods
- Cancellations of comparatively small upper-division courses in favor of high-enrollment general-education classes
- Shifting of duties from administration to faculty
- Loss of support and secretarial staff exacerbates problems in already understaffed units
- Loss of student workers who support secretarial and administrative staff

Other Concerns

This section lists (in no particular order) other concerns voiced by a substantial number of respondents.

Program Development

A sizable number of respondents argue that the budget cuts jeopardize program development. As one colleague puts it: “We have little money to market and advertise the [Ph.D.] program, much less to fund Ph.D. students’ research, precisely at the time THEC is pressuring MTSU to increase its doctoral output.”

Recruiting

The cuts, as several respondents point out, also affect recruiting of both faculty and graduate students. The inability to increase graduate stipends further hinders efforts to recruit top candidates for graduate study. In addition, the budget cuts make it ever less likely that MTSU will be able to build a Ph.D. level research collection in the library.

Supplies

In several departments, copying course documents has been cut to the point where it is perceived as something more serious than an inconvenience. One respondent writes: “Due to budget cuts, we can only make copies of our syllabi. So no other handouts are possible. We could have a secretary scan in the documents and put them on-line. Now we

can't do that because of budget cuts we have lost the secretary that could do the scanning and others don't have time."

Reassigned Time

In several cases, faculty members lost reassigned time they had been promised for taking on major service commitments to departments (program review; program directorships) or the profession (conference organizing).

Related Concerns

The following concerns were each mentioned by several respondents. Several of these rank among the most important ones, but, since they have been or are being addressed in other contexts, respondents, though concerned about them, did not name them as such. I merely list them here:

- Inadequate salaries (suspension of market adjustment; significant impact on ability to recruit and retain faculty)
- Over-reliance in some departments on non-tenure-track instructors
- Economic exploitation of non-tenure-track instructors
- The unflattering appearance of MTSU
- The dirtiness of buildings
- Postponement of the Science Building
- Low faculty morale

Conclusion

Most respondents (all except two) are convinced that the budget cuts are having a negative impact on both their own work – their teaching, their research, and, in several cases, their service – and the proper functioning of their department or unit.

There is a pervasive sense among respondents that, even before the cuts, they were working under difficult circumstances. The budget reduction exacerbates the difficulties and, in a substantial number of cases, is beginning – or has already begun – to affect faculty members' ability to perform their work up to the professional standards they themselves have set and which they consider to be essential.

As one respondent argues, "Much MTSU progress does continue apace...thanks to the good organization generally observable at the university. Nonetheless, we cannot go on like this for long while also hoping to maintain current levels of quality."

Another writes, "I don't think anyone appreciates all of the little things faculty members do every day to work around the difficulties. It's impossible to list and hard to quantify, so it gets ignored."

Considering the goals of the Academic Master Plan, more is being expected from faculty members, but the support needed to carry out the additional work to reach the new levels

of excellence is sometimes unavailable. If we read the faculty responses correctly, they appear to share a belief that MTSU is beginning to totter under the increasing strain of this contradiction. If additional cuts were to occur, it would, to remain with the same metaphor, begin to totter rather more perceptibly. As one colleague put it, “We will survive this round of cutbacks. Another round will seriously affect our ability to accomplish our teaching mission.” Or, more pointedly, from another colleague, “I just think it’s tragic to watch an institution I value so much and have worked so hard for be gutted time and again, and be criticized in the process for not doing more with so much less.”

We hope that this report will stimulate a conversation involving all members of the MTSU community, and we offer it to that community in the spirit of cooperation.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge Ms. Gay Johnson (Faculty Senate Secretary) for her secretarial help, Dr. Rebecca King (English Department) for reading an earlier draft of this report, and, of course, all MTSU faculty members who took the time to respond, sometimes in great detail, to our initial request for information.