

**CAMPUS**

Steering committee to plan U's academic future

Bruininks said all activities in the University system will be evaluated.

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Editors' note: This is the second in a two-part series examining the University's strategic shift toward investing in fewer academic and administrative areas.

University President Bob Bruininks said the most significant way the University of Minnesota can cut costs is by “resetting priorities” — determining which activities merit increased investment, which can afford cuts and which should be eliminated.

Charged with identifying action steps to cut costs and ultimately lessen the blow of decreased state funding, Bruininks formed the “Sustaining Excellence Steering Committee,” announced this week. It was developed to serve as a continuation of the Financing the Future Task Force.

The committee has some membership overlap from the previous task force. Some of the differences are intended to provide a more diverse set of perspectives. Bruininks said the new committee is an attempt to include a variety of stakeholders, including faculty, staff and students.

“We did not succeed completely,” Bruininks said, admitting the list is a little top-heavy, with 16 of the 24 members constituting University vice presidents, deans and chancellors.

For this reason, sub-committees will be established to “broaden the base of engagement,” Bruininks said.

While the committee will have an influence on decisions and will provide some advice for the president, the sub-committees will come together to tackle the priority areas. This will allow the process to be more inclusive, Bruininks said. He added that two groups are already in place looking at the future of the University's Graduate School.

Jay Kiedrowski, a senior fellow at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, served on the initial task force.

Before the steering committee was decided, Kiedrowski, who is not on the committee, said he thought it was necessary to have a majority of senior officials because they are in the position to initiate change.

He also said it is important to have a “cross-section.”

“In some ways, I represented that cross-section — I'm not a dean, I'm just a faculty member. While I was there because of my past expertise, I also knew how it might impact parts of the University,” Kiedrowski said.

Susan Cable -Morrison, who served on the task force as University Senate 's Civil Service Committee chairwoman but is not on the steering committee, said she thought all employee groups were represented.

Phyllis Walker, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 3800 — the University's clerical workers union — said she did not know anything about the committee but would welcome the opportunity to be involved.

Two students are included in the committee: Paul Strain , president of the Minnesota Student Association — the undergraduate governing board — and Kristi Kremers , president of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly.

Kremers served on the initial task force. Before the new steering committee was decided, she said she wanted to be appointed again because students are one of the main stakeholders in whatever decisions are made. She questioned the ability of a committee made up of so many administrative heads to consider taking cuts off the top.

Bruininks said he does not think members' job titles will affect their open-mindedness. He said he is tasking every aspect of the University system — academic and support — to evaluate which areas should be strengthened or maintained and which could be reduced or eliminated.

“All issues are on the table,” he said, except closing campuses. “That’s the one thing I will not recommend.”

The exact number of individuals that make up the central administration is difficult to identify, University spokesman Dan Wolter said in an e-mail. About 80 individuals were affected by the executive salary freeze last year, including the president, vice presidents, the provost, vice provosts, chancellors and assistant and associate vice presidents, Wolter said.

The central administration has not been exempt from cuts in the past, Bruininks said, and they won't in the future. Some reductions are planned, but nothing specific will be announced for months.

Strain said he is “excited but weary” of the task ahead of the committee. The vast number of areas to look at and things to consider will make it difficult to figure out which deserve focus.

“It’s not going to be a happy conversation at all times.”

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