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UWM is bleeding faculty, but its budget is balanced for the first time since 2012

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has balanced its budget for the first time since 2012 — big news for a campus that was facing a deficit of more than \$40 million three years ago.

The balanced budget came at a cost. And there are ramifications for students.

The university has lost about 15 percent of its faculty since fall 2014, as the campus froze positions and did not replace faculty who retired or accepted jobs elsewhere, according to newly released numbers from UWM.

During that time, student enrollment also fell about 10 percent. Since 2010, when enrollment peaked at 30,470, UWM has lost 18.5 percent of its headcount, assuming the preliminary count of 24,836 students this fall holds steady.

The university says it is strategically managing faculty numbers and academic programs, taking multiple factors into consideration when deciding whether to fill vacancies. Those factors include student enrollment in each academic area and higher-demand majors that need more faculty to grow.

Some new faculty members have been hired to replace others who left, but more lower-paid adjunct instructors who don't do research also are now teaching classes, arguably diluting the expertise at a university that has a dual academic mission of research and access.

Some concentration areas within majors have been dropped, while money and talent are redirected to programs that draw more students and target workforce demands.

In those cases, courses in a dropped concentration theoretically are still taught, but not the higher level courses students would need to meet a degree requirement.

Among UWM's hardest hit schools: the School of Education, which lost about a third of its faculty positions in four years, and the Peck School of the Arts, which lost more than a fourth of its faculty during that time.

The largest college within the university — Letters & Science — has lost about 15% of its faculty positions since 2014, from a full-time equivalency of 396 positions in October 2014 to 332 last March — a reduction of 64 positions.

All of those colleges have seen significant drops in student enrollment, as well.

Tuition losses from lower enrollment figure strongly into decisions not to replace faculty.

Demographic shifts

Like many universities around the country, UWM has been losing millions of dollars in tuition revenue because the number of high school graduates has been dropping since 2010, due to demographic shifts. State budget cuts have hit campuses hard, too.

It's no coincidence that all of the hardest hit academic units on UWM's main campus also have seen drops in enrollment. UWM's two-year satellite campuses — in Waukesha and West Bend — are not included in the analysis.

The School of Education had 2,880 students in 2010 and was down to 1,901 students in 2017. Peck School of the Arts went from 2,128 students in 2010 to 1,579 students in 2017 — 34 percent and 26 percent losses, respectively.

Enrollment in the College of Letters & Science has dropped by 24 percent — from 9,679 in 2010 to 7,320 in 2017.

Budgets for schools and colleges within UWM are tied to total revenues, including tuition. As enrollments have declined, so have budgets.

Provost Johannes Britz said the campus continues through existing committees and policies to evaluate the viability of all academic programs, given enrollment downturns and faculty attrition.

"It is important to note we are seeing changes in student choice, with some trends away from some of the current departmental majors and toward interesting new fields," Britz said.

For example, some of the most popular majors in the College of Letters & Science are interdisciplinary programs like Conservation and Environment Science and International Studies. That means a number of faculty now teach well-enrolled courses in interdisciplinary programs, he said.

"That also means, in some cases, offering fewer courses in current majors," Britz said.

Smaller academic programs may offer students an interdisciplinary theory course instead of a major-specific theory course, he said.

"A shrinking faculty means shrinking educational options and opportunities for UWM students," said Nick Fleisher, an associate professor of linguistics at UWM and president of the American Association of University Professors Wisconsin conference.

"This is a direct result of the austerity budgeting the governor and Legislature have put in place for many years," Fleisher said. "Across the UW System, we are seeing educational decisions made on the basis of financial considerations rather than educational ones."

In 2014, as the university launched its most extensive cost-cutting measures, the campus had 28,042 students. This fall's unofficial headcount is 24,836 students. That's a projected loss from 2014 to 2018 of 11.4 percent.

Preliminary fall enrollment numbers suggest a 2 percent enrollment decline from a year ago.

Tuition + state funds = money for instruction

Tuition and state funding together cover the cost of instruction, including faculty salaries.

Since fiscal 2013, UWM has lost about \$39 million in annual tuition revenue, including a projected, potential loss of \$4 million to \$6 million for the academic year just starting, according to Vice Chancellor Robin Van Harpen.



UW-Milwaukee Vice Chancellor Robin Van Harpen *(Photo: UW-Milwaukee)*

In the fiscal year that ended July 2016, the gap between revenue and operating expenses, including budget cuts and tuition losses, reached about \$40 million — roughly equivalent to the combined budgets of the College of Engineering and Applied Science, College of Nursing and School of Information Studies at that time.

While the university is optimistic about this fall's student enrollment, it will take time for those numbers to shake out, and the final numbers depend on the mix of undergraduates and graduate students, and resident and nonresident students because of differences in the tuition they pay, spokeswoman Michelle Johnson said.

Tuition for undergrad Wisconsin students has been frozen for six years by the state Legislature. So UWM has lost significant revenue it could have gained through inflationary tuition increases.

The university's operating budget also has been affected by state funding cuts, though a large share of state cuts came back to UWM over time through a budget lapse return and UW System-distributed central funding, Van Harpen said.



UW-Milwaukee students walk on campus. (Photo: Michael Sears, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

UWM in 2015 made \$15.7 million in one-time cuts through voluntary employee buyouts, freezing vacant positions and other measures. It then made another \$14.5 million in ongoing cuts.

Those cuts followed a \$150 million state budget cut to the UW System in 2015. Some of that money came back to UW campuses, but this cut was on top of previous cuts, which have taken a toll, officials say.

"UWM's current budget balance is only as good as the state's commitment not to cut further," said Fleisher, the UWM faculty leader.

Employee salaries and benefits by far make up the highest percentage of operating expenses.

While the campus was reducing operating expenses, it invested in a new central student advising initiative and beefed up student recruitment in Illinois.

The university also put \$1.5 million into a faculty retention effort in July to strategically boost salaries.

Student assistance through graduate student wage increases and financial aid are other ways the university has redirected money.

How students are affected

"We have done everything we can to find efficiencies and minimize direct impact on students," Van Harpen said. "We have always run our university very leanly, and we tightened up even more during this time."

Van Harpen said UWM is not planning any large-scale changes to majors, but schools and colleges have the ability to refine course offerings based on student demand.

UWM has retrenched to maintain its dual mission as a research university that also serves students less academically prepared for college.

The new blueprint means doing less overall as an institution.

But UWM aims to focus strategically on what could boost student success, and academic programs that have potential for attracting more students to the university.

The School of Education between 2010 and 2017 took the largest hit in both student enrollment and faculty numbers — a 32 percent loss of faculty (21 positions) and 34 percent decline in enrollment.

Students can still earn a master's in education through UWM, but the school no longer has a faculty specifically dedicated to graduate students and master's level work. Enrollment in UWM's master's in education program has dropped significantly.

The master's in education program was viewed as a "cash cow" for the university prior to Act 10 — the state collective bargaining law that many blame for an exodus of public school teachers and fewer teachers seeking master's degrees.

SPECIAL REPORT: [Act 10 at 5](#)

Since Act 10, school districts no longer are required to bump up salaries for teachers who earn a master's degree, though a majority of districts still reward teachers with master's degrees, according to Alan Shoho, dean of UWM's School of Education.

While Act 10 has had an impact, Shoho said, "we can't keep blaming Act 10 forever."



Alan R. Shoho, dean of the School of Education at UW-Milwaukee *(Photo: UW-Milwaukee)*

Shoho said one of the reasons he came to UWM over three years ago was because a mentor used to say there are opportunities during challenging times.

UWM is looking to partner with other four-year UW System campuses to share faculty and students for some education degree tracks, Shoho said.

UW-Whitewater, for example, has a small science education program. So those students will soon be able to take online or Skype courses through UWM's science education program under a new agreement.

Shoho said he hopes to see more collaborations between campuses within the UW System that would both save money and preserve opportunities for students in lower-enrollment degree programs by sharing faculty.

For the Peck School of the Arts, loss of enrollment and faculty has led to hiring only a few faculty members to replace those who have left. The school filled course gaps with lower-paid adjunct instructors.

"We've been very careful about reducing the number of class sections and making sure students have courses they need to graduate," said Scott Emmons, the school's dean.

Some smaller-enrollment, higher-level courses that used to be offered each semester are now only offered every other semester. In some cases, those class sizes have gotten larger because of pent-up demand, Emmons acknowledged.

Film production is a growing field, and enrollment has gone up about 100 students to 450 this fall, Emmons said. That school is likely to gain faculty because of that.

But the School of the Arts has dropped a couple of less-popular tracks within majors.

The African Diaspora track within the dance major is no longer offered. Dance majors can still take African Diaspora classes — just not the upper-level courses needed for an African Diaspora concentration within a dance major, Emmons explained.

Jazz performance also was eliminated as a concentration for music majors, but the school still offers concentrations in improvisation, jazz band, and jazz ensembles. Jazz performance courses continue to be available, but not upper level, typically smaller classes that would be needed for a concentration in jazz performance.

Art and design used to have two faculty for each art concentration area, such as sculpture, but now there's one faculty member, and gaps are filled by adjunct instructors.

Enrollment is beginning to stabilize in the Peck School of the Arts, now that the economy has improved and parents aren't as uncomfortable with their kids majoring in music or art, Emmons said.

Music education, art education and theater education all have seen enrollment drops — a collective 30 percent drop in the last few years. But those numbers also are starting to improve, Emmons said.

"We're trying to determine in which places we can make faculty hires, and we will do it very carefully in areas that follow student interest and enrollment," Emmons said.

"Now my challenge is to right size the number of faculty to go with our programs," he said.

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When Emmons became dean of the school, its operating budget was roughly \$13 million. Today, it's just under \$10 million.

The relatively new School of Freshwater Sciences hasn't been allowed to grow faculty numbers at a time when enrollment is on the rise.

That's in part because promises from state lawmakers and the UW System weren't kept when that school and the Zilber School of Public Health were built, according to the university.

The state provided \$10 million toward the schools of freshwater sciences and public health, but not another \$20 million promised to help fill the newer schools with faculty and equipment.