

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—

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

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.

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.