

October 30, 2020

From: The undersigned department chairs, directors, and campus chairs of the College of Arts and Sciences

To: The President and Senators of the USF Faculty Senate

Re: Budget Cuts

Summary

We view with alarm the budget cuts to USF's academic units recently announced by University leadership. We call upon the Faculty Senate to engage proactively and constructively with University leadership to ensure that any and all cuts to academic units be (1) explained to and considered in detail by all University stakeholders; (2) subject to the constraints of the "transparent working and learning environment that promotes honesty, fairness, and trust" stipulated in the USF Principles of Community; and (3) proportional in magnitude and timing to reasonable estimates of current and future funding shortfalls. We ask that in pursuing such engagement the Senate be guided by the values of "productive communication, dialogue, and constructive disagreement" enshrined in our Principles of Community, where it is understood that "constructive disagreement," while never disrespectful, can in the interest of the common good, sometimes be adversarial.

Community, Austerity, and Strategic Realignment

We take note of two institutional milestones USF has achieved over the past year. First, we have excelled on all of the State of Florida's performance-based funding metrics, cementing our status as one of Florida's preeminent universities. Second, we have adopted new Principles of Community. While under other circumstances we would join with University leadership in celebrating these achievements, the present situation gives us pause. To the extent to which institutional rankings and metric scores genuinely track the quality of a USF education and its value to our students, our success in meeting targets is indeed cause for celebration. We are aware, however, of respects in which the targets themselves are arbitrary, and of other respects in which the needs of our students and of our regional community are not tracked by the canonical metrics at all. Furthermore, though our decades-long ascent up the ladder of national recognition is a real achievement, it has been a costly one. Financially, we have invested beyond our means, and whereas the expectation that success would be rewarded with new recurring funds was at times reasonable, it was certainly never assured. The human cost has been more significant. USF faculty and staff have worked tirelessly and seemingly, at times, thanklessly, to make this a university to be proud of, in many cases devoting our entire careers to this cause. We have chosen to do this because we felt our students deserved it, and in doing so we have considered ourselves, our colleagues, and our students not as line-items, but as members of a community, one in which we could, as our Principles of Community enjoin, "commit our time, talents, and resources to building a culture of caring that promotes the integrity of our relationships and the sustainable well-being of the entire community." Were we to discover, in the midst of a global pandemic and economic crisis, that leadership was seriously contemplating the dismissal of any of our devoted colleagues, fellow educators, and friends when it was not absolutely necessary, we could not then be blamed for wondering whether in considering ourselves members of a

community, we had not been deluded all along. Such a step would be inimical to a culture of caring, and indeed unconscionable.

In the face of evidence of strategic missteps, a strategic realignment is reasonable. Such realignment is the prerogative of University leadership under the guidance of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Governors. USF has chased regional and national rankings for years, in the expectation that recognition and rewards would be proportional to our progress as measured by such yardsticks. That we have been disappointed in this expectation does not mean the strategy should be abandoned altogether, but it does suggest that the urgency with which we pursue it should be tempered by experience. We cannot continue to do what we have done before, repeatedly, and imagine that this time the outcome will change.

We welcome the vote of confidence given by the Board of Governors in endorsing our most recent legislative budget request. At the same time, given the prevailing conditions of austerity in the State budget, we see no grounds for optimism that the Legislature will be able to grant it. Having received no performance-based or preeminence funding for the current fiscal year and facing the Governor's 8.5% retention of previously allocated E&G funds, we must certainly seek savings where we can. However, to treat the current budgetary shortfall as a pretext for sudden and drastic restructuring is a mistake. Intelligent strategic realignment requires care, consideration, and time. The Governor has retained a portion of our allocated E&G funds, and the Board of Governors has announced that it would more rigorously enforce rules against using E&G carryforward to fund recurring expenses. While significant, the magnitude of both measures, taken together, does not approach the magnitude of cuts to the Library and several USF colleges announced by University leadership. We have not seen an analogous response to the current financial crisis anywhere else in the State University System and have not heard any arguments to the effect that it is warranted at USF. To the best of our knowledge, very specific though widely divergent budget targets have been presented to the deans of our colleges with very little guidance as to how they should be achieved. There has been no public discussion or explanation of the differential treatment of academic units. Our deans have been charged with bearing the entire burden of faculty consultation under conditions not conducive to substantive dialogue and have been set up to serve as primary targets for faculty dissatisfaction. Neither our deans nor we, as chairs and directors, are in a position to provide any of the faculty and staff who report to us with any reassurances, nor to explain to any of them why some might be at risk while others are not.

We ask the Senate to ensure that answers to the questions formulated by the Senate Executive Committee and circulated on October 26 be answered in full, in public, and in writing, allowing for their distribution to faculty and other community members.

A public university is many things. It is a State agency, charged with delivering services to the public. It is a corporation, owned by the State and run by its Board. It is a mechanism by which the State and Federal Governments invest locally and regionally. In these three respects, a public university is no different from a state prison. In this letter we have taken seriously the proposition that, unlike a prison, USF is also a community. We call upon the Senate to put this proposition to the test.

Respectfully submitted, with signatories in alphabetical order:

Golfo Alexopoulos, Director, USF Institute on Russia
James E. Andrews, Director, School of Information
Andrew Berish, Chair, Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
Patrice Buzzanell, Chair, Department of Communication
Charles E. Chalfant, Chair, Department of Cell Biology, Microbiology, and Molecular Biology
Brian Connolly, Chair, Department of History
Michael DeJonge, Chair, Department of Religious Studies
Sara E. Green, Chair, Department of Sociology
Antoinette Jackson, Chair, Department of Anthropology
Brad Kamp, Chair, Department of Economics
Ippokratis Kantzios, Interim Chair, Department of World Languages
Alex Levine, Chair, Department of Philosophy
Beatriz Padilla, Interim Director, Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean
Diane Price Herndl, Chair, Women's and Gender Studies
Mark Rains, Director, School of Geosciences
Melanie Riedinger-Whitmore, Saint Petersburg Campus Chair, Department of Integrative
Biology
Leslaw Skrzypek, Chair, Department of Mathematics and Statistics
Melissa M. Sloan, Saint Petersburg Campus Director, Interdisciplinary Social Sciences,
Department of Sociology
M. Scott Solomon, Chair, School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies
Sarath Witanachchi, Chair, Department of Physics