Summary of Q/A

Budgetary and administrative operations

Is it correct to say that if we cut $4.2 million this fiscal year, we do not need to cut the same amount next year?

It is correct that the amount of our base budget reduction ($4.2 million is a reasonable estimate but is not the confirmed amount) is best made this coming fiscal year. If we reduce our base operating budget by that amount for fiscal year 2015-2016, then our base operating budget for the following year will remain at that new, lower figure and no additional cuts will be needed. Conversely, should we for some reason not make any cuts in fiscal year ’15-’16, we would need to cut double the amount of our base budget reduction (i.e., $4.2 million + $4.2 million) from the budget in fiscal year ’16-’17.

Some departments have been asked to spend down their resources. Should this continue or should they now be setting aside money to help offset the impending cuts?

The state legislature is still monitoring fund balances and reserves. We will continue to implement the policy of questioning any balance that is over 12% of operating costs and requesting a spend-down of that amount until it is below 12%, so yes – please continue to adhere to the limitations placed on budget reserves.

Can layoffs be avoided?

While we do not yet know the details of the budget proposal or UW-River Falls’ exact cut, based on previous experience and the likelihood of a large impending base budget cut, the administration does not see how it could implement such a large budget cut without a reduction in workforce.

What happens to our state benefits if UW-River Falls becomes a Public Authority?

That is one part which we do not know. Supposedly, we would be “Public Employees” and would remain in the WRS and state health care plans.

How soon will those being laid off be informed?

The processes for advance notice depend on the category of the employee. Faculty and staff handbooks on www.uwrf.edu contain details specific to each category and also reference UW System policies in this regards.

Will tenured faculty be at risk of layoff?

The only way that would happen would be if we declared a “financial emergency”. That process is unlikely because it would take several months and need Board of Regents approval; declaring a “financial emergency” would also have a severe negative impact on student recruitment.
Furthermore, even if we were to suspend programs under a financial exigency, we would still need to have a 2-3 year “winding up” plan of that program registered with UW System.

Is there a hiring freeze at UW-River Falls? Are travel restrictions being enforced at UW-River Falls?

*There is not a travel ban or hiring freeze at UW-River Falls. The UW System memo regarding “cost containment measures” was not directed at campuses. We are however being advised to exercise prudence during this time.*

Would measures like closing campus for one week over the end of December/beginning of January help save money?

*This would not impact our campus’s base budget. Any savings on utility expenses or similar cannot be applied to our budget. Utilities are paid by the state on a “sum sufficient” model – the state pays the bill based on actual amounts spent, no more, no less.*

**Academic Affairs**

How do the proposed revisions to General Ed requirements help save money?

*We have identified changes to general education as a result of prioritizing academic degree programs and recognizing that the size of the projected cuts drastically reduces our capacity to cover all areas of the university’s curriculum. In talking to the academic deans and chairs we have asked, “What can we afford to teach and what should we prioritize?” We need to preserve the integrity and quality of those majors and academic programs that bring students to UW-River Falls and do our best to maintain a credible university general education curriculum. When we map our general education categories and requirements we appear to have course-level redundancies as well as learning outcomes we might be able to serve within majors. We need to be careful as we work through these issues with faculty governance bodies and academic leadership but we also need to be creative and flexible, all the while preserving the integrity of our students’ education, respecting their ‘time to degree’.*

Why are we moving so quickly, with only two months to decide regarding cuts to academic programs and curricular revision? Don’t Faculty Senate procedures require a more gradual timeline?

*This is the time to take action. The Provost is working with shared governance leaders very energetically, as we all need to be proactive. Curricular advising for the fall begins at the end of March. We should have major decisions made before then. Some changes might not be in place by July 1, but we need to have clarity on what commitments need to be made.*

What is the justification for moving ahead with potentially expensive new programs, like Agricultural Engineering?

*We recognize that implementing Agricultural Engineering on our campus will have a cost in the short term, but we are also cognizant of the fact that in the long term, it represents a strategic investment which will help us to stay competitive in the future.*

How can we help dispel the limited definition of higher education as “teaching classes”?
Recent statements have demonstrated a lack of understanding of what goes into the work of a dedicated professional in higher ed. President Cross and David Ward from UW System are working passionately to redirect this message in their statements to the press and in a series of “day in the life” videos, as well as using data from instructional workload reports. We need to also remember to direct such messages to future voters and future legislators. The hearts and minds of upcoming generations need to be won over if the current trend is to change.

**The proposed Public Authority**

If the Board of Regents is currently appointed by the Governor and affirmed by the state senate, would the Board of Regents having sole control of the Public Authority be a beneficial change?

Currently, the state legislature exercises control UW System by statute and through the rules and processes of the Department of Administration. While the Governor would still appoint the Board of Regents, this body tends to have a greater understanding of the UW System, so theoretically would have a more informed, more campus-focused approach to procedures and processes. One real concern is how shared governance and tenure would be protected if they are managed under Board of Regents policy as opposed to by law. There is hope that the Board of Regents would delegate a certain measure of authority to the single campuses. The UW Hospital is a Public Authority and may serve to inform, in some ways, how the UW System may operate in the future.

How can we be sure the Board of Regents, if given greater control, will make decisions that benefit UW-River Falls?

The Board of Regents has been fair and proactive in promoting each of the campuses, and has shown support and appreciation for UW-River Falls, especially after we hosted their meeting on our campus last April. There is obviously turnover in the group, and we need to remember there is an ongoing education factor to keep in mind. It is the duty of the Chancellor and all others from UW-River Falls who interact with the Board of Regents to help them understand who we are and what our needs are.

Would the potential new flexibilities in procurement under the proposed “Public Authority” extend to travel arrangements and the mandatory use of Fox Travel?

Such details are not yet clear. However, it is worth noting that use of Fox Travel is a UW System policy, not a State-mandated requirement.

Under a proposed flexibility for setting tuition, what would happen to WI/MN tuition reciprocity?

Theoretically WI/MN tuition reciprocity would be negotiated by the Public Authority. At some point UW-River Falls may want to consider doing a price elasticity study, bearing in mind that higher tuition might mean more revenue but fewer students. The quality/affordability proposition would remain a key factor of UW-River Falls’ messaging.

How would the proposed new revenue stream (from sales tax) be considered outside of legislative control?
The proposed new funding source, and indeed the entire Public Authority model, would still mean that we are under the control of the state of Wisconsin. The new funding source could provide more predictability and theoretically would help avoid repeated base budget cuts like the one we are facing now.

Recruitment and retention

How will this budget cut impact student recruitment goals? How can we inform parents and families of this situation while still helping them trust in the quality of the education current and future students receive at UW-River Falls?

Our recruitment and retention goals remain unchanged. Enrollment is still critical for our campus. We must remember that the number of students enrolled here in the fall will also have an impact on our budget. We should also bear in mind that all UW schools (i.e., some of our “competitors”) are facing the same challenge. We must continue to reinforce why UW-River Falls is a good place for students to choose. Recruitment and retention are in our control and each person can make a difference.