



*Representing UW-Madison Faculty.
Strengthening Wisconsin.*

Statement by PROFS in response to JFC action on the UW System Budget

May 30, 2015

On Friday, the Joint Committee on Finance voted 12-4 to approve a budget proposal for the University of Wisconsin System that will, if passed by the full Legislature, inflict lasting damage on a highly successful institution that was built and nurtured with major investments by Wisconsin taxpayers over a period of 167 years. The biennial budget cut of \$250 million, while slightly reduced relative to the Governor's original proposal, remains not only irresponsibly deep but irresponsibly rapid, forcing immediate and indiscriminate staffing reductions and program closures without the benefit of long-term planning or prioritization.

In particular, departments across the UW System are already being forced to curtail access to courses, advising staff, lab materials, and other resources students need both to get the most out of their education and to graduate in the shortest possible time. Substantial progress that has been made over the past few years in improving time-to-degree at UW-Madison – progress that was the direct result of targeted investment of campus resources – will be reversed. The result will be more student debt and a degraded educational experience.

In addition to the profoundly damaging effects of the budget cut, it would be difficult to overstate how destructive and unnecessary the JFC's proposed changes to tenure and shared governance are. Destructive because the changes will make it particularly difficult to attract and retain top faculty. Unnecessary because the changes to tenure and shared governance are not driven by any documented problem with the existing structures and procedures. On the contrary, tenure and shared governance have both been integral to the exceptional success of the UW over many decades, both as an educational institution and as an economic engine for Wisconsin.

It has long been clear to us that the proposed cut to the UW budget is a solution to a manufactured fiscal crisis – one that exists solely because of irresponsibly large permanent tax cuts and credits passed over the past four years in response to an all-too-ephemeral projected surplus. PROFS has been meeting with legislators over the past five months, attempting to inform them of extreme negative consequences of large and rapid budget cuts to the university. We have argued that the Wisconsin Legislature of today has a fiduciary responsibility to those taxpayers of the past century who elected to invest untold billions of dollars building the University of Wisconsin into the exceptional asset that it is today. Even the Legislature's own Legislative Fiscal Bureau's paper on the UW System (#676) found that it is a conspicuously efficient and cost-effective institution.

It is also abundantly clear that the changes to shared governance and tenure are non-fiscal policy items that have no legitimate place in a budget bill. They do not solve any documentable problem at UW-Madison, they are not based on any substantive analysis, and they will almost certainly inflict irreversible damage on the university.

We call on the Wisconsin State Assembly and Senate to (1) restore historical funding levels to UW System, seeking new revenue sources as needed to accomplish this, and (2) remove all non-fiscal policy provisions, especially those related to tenure and shared governance from the budget bill. As stewards of a great state university system, they can still choose to defend it rather than defund it.

Signed by the following members of the PROFS Steering Committee

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