The University of Louisiana at Lafayette has managed to avoid drastic measures so far despite cuts to state funding.

**UL-Lafayette making do with less — so far**

**BY RICHARD BURGESS**

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette President Joseph Savoie said when he took the job in 2008, state funding for higher education in Louisiana had reached a historical peak. It’s been in free fall ever since.

Years of cost cuts have built UL-Lafayette with roughly half the state’s core academic mission, a task recognized seven years ago, forcing administration in the university’s core academic mission to manage the shared responsibility for student housing, athletics and other auxiliary services. Meanwhile, just like their peers at other campuses, they’ve forced students to trade in tuition increases and fees that have nearly doubled over the past seven years.

The net result is that the university now has to make do with about 8 million less than it had in 2008, an overall cut of about 6 percent. While UL-Lafayette wound down, only LSU and Louisiana Tech have fared better among Louisiana’s four-year universities.

Savoie and his staff have made the most of the layoffs, furloughs and deep cuts that have built up in recent years, but they are less able to talk about the ability of students to pay lower tuition and share their education.

States have reduced state commissioners of higher education, and at UL-Lafayette, does not hold the bal- ances, even if he’s proven adept at it.

“You have to improve your schools. You have to make out more attractive, affordable and productive. You don’t get there by cutting them,” he said.

While UL-Lafayette faces challenges, it’s in better shape than some other Louisiana universi- ties. In part, that’s because the university recognized early on that the first round of cuts likely was the beginning of a long, deep period for higher education funding in Louisiana.

Even in 2008, when times were relatively flush, universi- ties officials opted to keep recurring expenses in check, anticipating that any additions to the budget would be pain- ful cuts, said the school’s vice president of administration and finance, Jerry Luke Ledlans, who also is a former legislative and state commissioner of ac- commodations, and hotelier Kumalans.

“If that money would have been poured into the general operating account, increasing your expenditure base, while at the same time you’re being cut, that only would have com- mitted the problem,” Ledlans said. “So that strategic decision was made early on to do that in what we believe will protect our core and have a bloodletting in the academic aid. But times have been lean, some academic programs were nixed and others elimi- nated, including undergradu- ate programs in sustainable art, fashion design and art education and the graduate program in cognitive science.

Budgets for travel and equip- ment have been cut. Salaries were frozen from 2009 to 2011. Faculty numbers, though, have remained stable.

“We never did layoffs. We never did furloughs. We kind of built a wall around the aca- demic staff and pushed every- thing else to become more self- sustainable or just generating revenue,” Savoie said.

He said custodial services and food services were out- sourced, and professional management was brought in to oversee university operations at the university bookstore. Atlantis, which handles more than 100 offices, both through a deal with the university’s public radio sta- tion, KRUV, has been pushed on.

Parking is new expected to cover its own expenses, and student resident at the new resi- dence halls is structured to cover the debt for construction and long-term maintenance. Savoie said services and pro- grams not directly tied to the school’s core academic mission were put on timelines to be- come self-sufficient.

Some have been successful, he said, and others still struggle.

“Because I have to work, I can’t work more hours. I have to just take out more loans, navy,” said Tiffany Mathews, a sopho- more in speech pathology from Lake Charles, who said she was forced to take on more work to save.

“My parents don’t pay for my tuition, so I had to pick up extra shifts,” she said.

Savoie said he sympathizes with the students but still be- lieves UL-Lafayette is a barg- ain.

“If you compare us to similar schools, even with the signifi- cant increase that we’ve had, and we’ve gone up 10 percent, we’re not far from that,” he said, even with that, we are still relatively low,” Savoie said. “I don’t think it should be higher, but I don’t know that we can provide services without the revenue. So we have to come up with ways to generate revenue, at the same time preserve that which are most vulnerable through scholarships, which is a private-school model.”

Deaton, the biology professor, and the shift in state higher ed- ucation policy has taken Louisi- ana back in time, back to the days when only the well-to-do could obtain a college education.

“We are sort of going back to the days when we were in the 1890s,” he said.

Savoie said he is keenly aware that some students — espe- cially those of limited means — could be left out if the cur- rent trend continues, but he is not counting on higher educa- tion funding being restored any time soon.

“We are approaching this like we are moving to a private- school model. We are planning for being 40 percent self-suffi- cient,” Savoie said.

Acadiana Advocate contributing writer Holly Duchman con- tributed to this report.

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