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UVa, PVCC brace for state cuts

BY DEREK QUIZON 15 hrs ago

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The University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College have an uphill battle ahead the upcoming General Assembly session, as legislators contemplate across-the-board cuts to up for a budget shortfall.

The budget is at the top of each college's legislative agenda going into the session. Both are bracing for cuts, as the budget proposed by Gov. Terry McAuliffe calls for about \$10.2 million in reductions for UVa and roughly \$700,000 in cuts for PVCC.

The state needs to make reductions to meet a \$1.5 billion revenue shortfall. When they can, lawmakers try to exempt critical public services such as public safety and K-12 education. Higher education does not typically make the list because institutions have other streams of revenue outside of state funding, including tuition and fees.



UVa President Teresa A. Sullivan and PVCC President Frank Friedman both say their institution weather the cuts, but they're concerned about faculty hiring and retention. The shortfall means state will have to hold off on promised salary increases for state employees, but McAuliffe is trying to soften the blow by providing a 1.5 percent one-time salary bonus.

The situation could affect PVCC more, Friedman said, because community colleges have less freedom to manage their own budgets. PVCC can't raise faculty salaries without approval from General Assembly — even if it has the money in its foundation to do so. The faculty at PVCC had had one raise in the last six years, he said, and it is “absolutely having an impact on retention and hiring.”

“This is becoming increasingly a problem as other states have increased their salaries,” Friedman said. “We're facing the problem of competing with these states [for faculty hires].”

Sullivan, addressing a group of local officials and policymakers last week, said the university will remain committed to retaining and hiring high-quality faculty. The university has been trying for past three years to push the average faculty salary into the top 20 among major universities. It has been slow going, according to UVa officials, as the university struggles to catch up with peer institutions that have been ahead for several years.

The university's priorities have not changed, Sullivan said.

“As we work to identify savings in fiscal year 2018 and beyond, we remain committed to supporting our faculty and staff,” she said. “We understand how important it is to remain competitive in

recruiting and retaining talented faculty and staff.”

The relationship between UVA and the General Assembly has been tense at times this year.

UVA was the subject of an investigation by the General Assembly into its Strategic Investment which former Rector Helen E. Dragas called “a slush fund.” The controversy died quickly once auditors found the university had not acted improperly when it combined budget surpluses across departments with investment returns to create the fund.

This month, the university released a study — written by the outside consulting firm Tripp Umb showing UVA injects about \$5.9 billion into the economy each year. The study is at the center of a new public relations campaign, titled “A University for the Commonwealth.”

Sullivan touted the results at the forum last week.

“The study quantifies UVA’s economic and fiscal impact on the vitality of the region and state,” said. “Overall, the study found that UVA is a major driver of the Virginia economy.”

Student involvement



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Students may be more involved in the upcoming General Assembly session than the last.

Virginia21, a Richmond-based group that calls itself an advocate for young voters, re-establish chapters at UVA and PVCC this year. Though the group used to have a presence at both schools they had gone dormant.

The students are planning outreach campaigns and trips to Richmond in the hopes of swaying legislators to keep cuts to a minimum. In the long-term, they want to get students permanently engaged in state politics — something that few students pay attention to, but that directly affects tuition and fees.

Many students are aware of the connection between the budget and their tuition, but they don't understand how much they can influence legislators, said Grayson Katzenbach, president of the PVCC chapter.

“My goal is to show students how closely connected they are to their legislators,” Katzenbach said. “If you can get involved in local politics, that’s when you can really make a difference.”

UVA’s chapter will be in Richmond on Jan. 31 and Feb 1 for meetings with General Assembly members. The organization is still in the planning stages for the campaign, but it likely would focus on the stories of ordinary students, who would talk about the benefits they’ve received from attending college, according to members Sajiid Hassan and Lizzie Forward.

Hassan said the group gives students a more organized collective voice.

“Individual colleges lobbying lawmakers is one thing, but it’s really important for students to have one voice,” he said.

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