

RE: Letter to the Editor, Athens News
From: Bernhard Debatin

Budget Cuts Happen – Should We Care?

OU community to discuss the university's mission and future on January 29

For almost a decade, Ohio University has gone through the painful ritual of annual budget cuts. At least in the academic area, these cuts were typically done across board to the point where nothing is left to cut unless people are being fired. Due to severe reductions in state subsidies and increasing expenses, the university is now facing budget shortfalls of \$15 million for 2010/11 and another \$15 million for 2011/12.

Yes, we should care: The harsh budget challenges that confront OU represent the risk that the proposed cuts into academic programs will increasingly sidetrack the university from its academic mission. On the other hand, the challenges also offer faculty, students, and administrators an opportunity to pull together as a community, redefine our institutional purposes and culture, and to become a stronger academic community. The odds are against us, though. OU is ill prepared for the challenge. Over a period of many years, increasing busyness, weariness, and other factors have diminished community coherence at OU, just as they have at institutions throughout the country. The most simple and probable outcome of budget cuts is not more determined commitment to our highest priorities, but a long spiral of incremental weakening of all our functions, and the emergence of feuding coalitions of *us vs. them*.

FutureOU, an informal group of OU faculty, Student Senate and the OU chapter of AAUP will hold a public forum for faculty, students, staff, and other OU community members on Friday, January 29, from 2-4 p.m. in Walter Hall 135. The forum begins an all-campus dialogue about OU's ongoing budget challenges and to encourage informed and wise decision-making. Geoff Buckley from the Department of Geography and Student Senate President Robert Leary will moderate the conversation. The forum will focus on our priorities as members of the OU community and discuss questions such as:

- What kind of community do we want OU to be?
- What kinds of activities and what community qualities should we be most determined to preserve?
- And what are we willing to do without in order to preserve what is most important to us?

Community fragmentation under financial stress is natural and easy, but it is not inevitable. The alternative is careful, reasoned, community dialogue aimed at achieving consensus on difficult decisions. We believe that the OU community—faculty, students, administrators, staff, alumni—can achieve reasonable, committed consensus, but it cannot happen either spontaneously or by top-down decision. It will require difficult, honest dialogue. That's why we are calling the community together for this meeting, which we hope will be the first of several.

We invite everybody to come to the public forum on January 29, 2-4 p.m., in Walter Hall 135.

Bernhard Debatin
Associate Professor of Journalism and member of FutureOU