

## **University Budget Advisory Council (UBAC)**

**Date:** September 4, 2025

**Members Present:** Michael Harrington, Elisabeth Merkel, Shannon Burchard, Shirley McGuire, Sarah Blackburn, David Ferguson, Will Vitagliano, Brian Young, Jeff Paris, Jenny Lee, Sonia Caamano, Morgan Maich, Bethia Hormoz, Noemi Swierski

**Members Absent & Excused:** Anneliese Mauch, Timothy Redmond

### **Opening and Introductions:**

Members were welcomed and attendance confirmed. The minutes from May 4, 2025 were approved with one abstention.

### **FY 2025 Forecast Timeline Discussion**

The Council discussed the perceived absence of the fourth-quarter forecast for FY 2025 on the university's business and planning webpage. One member noted that the Q4 forecast had been expected in May. It was clarified that the April period forecast, considered the final forecast for the fiscal year, had been posted on the Office of Planning and Budget's website following the Board's June meetings, and that its timing aligns with board meetings and fiscal year-end procedures. The group agreed that the budget timeline should be reviewed and potentially revised to reduce confusion about forecast availability.

### **Overview of an Early Tuition Increase Review Meeting**

This UBAC meeting was scheduled earlier than usual at the request of university leadership to expedite the tuition recommendation process. The goal is to present undergraduate tuition rates for the next academic year at the Board of Trustees' Q1 meetings taking place on September 18–19. This UBAC meeting will then focus on evaluating undergraduate tuition increase scenarios. Members were asked to complete a survey by the following Monday at noon. Results will be summarized and shared with the President and Provost. A follow-up UBAC meeting to review census results is scheduled for September 25.

### **Academic Year and Budget Updates**

The meeting began with approval of the prior meeting minutes. Council members were introduced, and an update was provided on the start of the academic year and the current structure of the financial leadership team. With the retirement of the former CFO, the position's direct reports will report to the President until the appointment of the new CFO. An overview of the budget office's responsibilities was provided, with emphasis on support for the Board of Trustees' Finance Committee. The upcoming Finance Committee meeting on September 18 will focus on presenting enrollment census results and tuition recommendations.

### **UBAC Introductions and Goals**

Council members introduced themselves and discussed their roles, backgrounds, and perspectives. Many emphasized shared goals for even greater financial transparency, improved long-term planning, and enhancements to the student experience. One faculty representative

highlighted their role in communicating fiscal decisions to faculty and their implications for academic operations. The meeting also included the introduction of new graduate and undergraduate student representatives and a newly appointed director of budget operations from one of the schools. This portion of the meeting helped orient new members and align expectations for the Council's work in the year ahead.

### **UBAC Budget and Tuition Planning**

The meeting included a walkthrough of the UBAC website, key planning documents, and the operating budget timeline. Council members reviewed the sequence of Board meetings and deadlines for tuition and fee planning. A survey on undergraduate tuition increases was discussed, with a reminder that responses were due by the following Monday. One member reported an issue accessing the survey, which was resolved within the meeting. There was also discussion about whether Fall Census data would be incorporated into tuition decisions. It was clarified that final census numbers would be available before the Board vote.

### **Tuition Pricing Survey Review**

The Council reviewed results from a market pricing survey comparing the university's tuition with that of peer institutions. It was noted that the institution's recent undergraduate tuition increase of 3.25 percent was below the 4.2 percent average among peer schools. Discussion followed about how endowment income per full-time equivalent student can appear to increase as enrollment declines. Members raised questions about the relationship between tuition increases and student yield and retention. It was noted that there is weak correlation between tuition increases and first-year retention rates.

### **Tuition Increase Impact Analysis**

Council members considered the broader context for tuition increases, including inflation, economic uncertainty, and public perception. It was acknowledged that, over the past 20 years, the institution has maintained a history of moderate tuition increases. Several economic indicators such as the Consumer Price Index and the Higher Education Price Index were shared to inform the discussion. While members agreed that tuition changes have historically had little impact on retention, they discussed whether that might change in the current environment.

### **Tuition Trends and Student Retention**

A presentation on long-term trends in tuition increases and retention rates showed that most tuition increases have remained under 4.5 percent in recent years. The correlation between tuition levels and first-year retention was found to be weak. Questions were raised about yield data for new students, and it was noted that while data is limited, financial aid packaging plays a major role in student decision-making. Additional discussion highlighted how external economic conditions may have varying effects on undergraduate and graduate student enrollment behavior.

### **Tuition Strategy Discussion**

A proposed 3.25 percent undergraduate tuition increase was reviewed. Members noted the increasing competition among institutions due to shifting discount rates and student

demographics. A scenario planning tool was shared to help model different tuition and housing cost combinations. The group discussed the estimated financial impact of small percentage increases, with one model showing that a 0.5 percent tuition increase could yield approximately \$815,000 in additional net tuition revenue. It was suggested that modeling should also account for updated total student enrollment once available.

### **Tuition Strategy and Student Affordability**

The Council discussed the balance between institutional expense coverage and student affordability. It was emphasized that the listed (sticker) price of tuition is often not the amount students pay, due to financial aid discounting. Some members proposed linking tuition increases to visible investments in student-facing services and activities. While recent campus activities were noted as being funded by one-time resources, there was general support for connecting tuition strategy to enhancements in student experience. Members also acknowledged that, for some students, modest tuition increases could signal institutional quality and value.

### **Enrollment and Budget Review**

Enrollment and budget variance projections were discussed. The current net tuition shortfall is projected at approximately \$5 million, an improvement from the previous year's \$20 million gap, and remains within budgeted reserves. It was noted that while overall headcount is close to target, recent declines in new undergraduate enrollment could have an impact. The Council agreed to review detailed enrollment variances at the next meeting using updated census data. It was emphasized that meeting enrollment targets does not necessarily eliminate financial shortfalls due to the effects of financial aid discounting.