

Preparing the Department Budget

Eugene A. Enneking, chair, Mathematics and Statistics, Portland State University. "Preparing the Department Budget." Written specifically for the ACE Department Chair Online Resource Center. Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2003.

The department chair occupies arguably the most important day-to-day position in the institution. The chair is a regular faculty member, yet also is a member of the administration. As a faculty member, the chair is a colleague who advocates for members of the department, creates an atmosphere for faculty development, works with faculty to develop or strengthen programs, and finds resources to support faculty in their efforts, whenever possible. At the same time, the chair is a member of the administration who must ensure that the goals and objectives of the department support and further the goals and objectives of the institution. The chair is responsible to the dean and ultimately to the president for the efficient and thoughtful spending of the budget for personnel, operations, and equipment in the pursuit of these objectives.

For both academic and calendar year operations, the department's key budgetary planning process is preparing the department budget. Once this initial budget is determined, subsequent changes usually represent small or minor adjustments, albeit a continuing or dynamic process. Factors essential to planning the departmental budget (not necessarily listed in priority order) are:

- The budget from the prior year.
- Enrollment trends in subprogram areas.
- Adjustments in program offerings.
- Requests for new line positions.
- Requests for any additional office staff positions.
- Program replacements or coverage for faculty on grants or sabbaticals.
- Number of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and fixed-term or part-time faculty.
- Adjustments to the services and supplies budget.
- Summer session.
- Discretionary or rainy-day funds.

Budget from prior year. The budget from the prior (current) year is a good starting point for planning for the next year. First, it provides a base of reference to ensure that all items to be considered

are addressed. Also, it provides a base on which to make revisions reflecting changes that will occur in the coming year. Revised amounts will include any salary increases and other operating expenses.

It is a good idea to create a spreadsheet with pages linked to faculty salaries, planned course schedules, various funding accounts, and miscellaneous income or expense sources. This budget is likely to include additional funding from an administrative funding pool beyond the initial departmental budget.

Enrollment trends in subprogram areas. For budgetary planning, consider these questions: Where are the pressure points in enrollment? What level of course instruction and research support is needed? Are there sufficient faculty to meet those demands? Has growth occurred over a sufficiently long period of time so that a clear demand is known? If so, can the growth be managed with adjuncts and/or GTAs, or should new faculty lines be proposed?

Adjustments in program offerings. Curriculum decisions made during the normal course of program review play out in program offerings for the coming year. These developments affect faculty assignments and/or course loads, because release time may be necessary to help jumpstart a new course or curriculum development. The budget might need adjusting to accommodate these changes.

Requests for new line positions. As noted above, new faculty positions can be requested to help meet program growth demands in areas within the curriculum and/or can come from planned research area development. Are there areas in which the department is planning to build strength and excellence? Retirements allow the department to reassess its direction and build new research and curriculum strengths. Is there an identified university or community need that can best be met by a specific change of direction or continued research growth in the department? If so, a plan—including development justification and supporting budget—must be proposed for approval by the higher administration. Sufficient lead time is needed for recruitment, and associated recruitment costs must be identified. These are costs to build into the initial budget.

Requests for any additional office staff positions. Continued enrollment growth is surely and steadily felt by the office staff, which represents a first line of contact for students and other institution faculty and staff. As enrollment grows, office staff spend more time in person-to-person contact and have less time to work on projects. In addition, a rise in grants and contract work will add research

associates and/or other additional faculty or graduate students and can also increase grant accounting work within the department. Be alert to the possibility that a grant might include office staff support. This could relieve the department staff of some clerical and accounting work. Can the case be made for extra staff? If so, a request must be developed and budgeted.

Program replacements or coverage for faculty on grants or sabbatical. Graduate programs require external funding for research and graduate student support. External funding streams, in addition to regular or state resources, are essential to the success of these programs and will require a concerted effort by both chair and faculty to identify funding agencies and write proposals incorporating faculty research interests and curriculum development or research directions for the department. However, who will cover classes normally taught by a faculty member who now has a grant or is planning a sabbatical? This question is particularly important for departments in which the grant or sabbatical takes a faculty member with special program expertise out of the classroom. The department can turn these absences into excellent opportunities to bring in visitors or post-docs to enrich the faculty and its research agenda. In these cases, the major questions are, how much can the department afford? What will the recruiting costs for the post-doc positions be? Can classes be arranged so that adjuncts or GTAs can cover them? Specific costs should be budgeted and included in the initial budget.

Number of GTAs and fixed-term or part-time faculty to hire. Once decisions in the previous categories play out, program needs become clear, and support for GTAs becomes available through research funding or other sources, the chair can identify remaining instructional and research support needs and department costs.

Adjustments to services and supplies budget. Past or current budgets will generally be good indicators of overall service and supply needs in the department. Are telephones, equipment, or other day-to-day operational costs straining to meet the department needs? What adjustments should the proposed budget recommend? Are there separate funding sources for faculty giving papers or requesting travel funds?

Keep the dean's office aware of your department's budget position. Although the dean may not always be able to help, it is important to keep up an institutional awareness by constantly communicating your department's needs and cost pressures. As changes occur in any area of your initial

budget, it is a good idea to communicate them at regular intervals to the dean or his administrative budget officer.

Summer session. Summer session planning is an independent process, that is, the budget is separate from the regular academic year budget and includes only the costs of instruction, services, and supplies. Instructional costs are driven primarily by enrollment demands and availability of faculty to teach during the summer. This is another wonderful opportunity to bring in visiting faculty for special programs and special courses.

Discretionary funds or rainy-day funds. What are those? I don't think I've ever had any.