

Eastern Michigan University to cut staff, raise tuition

Janel Flechsig
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Eastern Michigan University (EMU) is planning cuts to staffing levels and compensation as well as a substantial rise in tuition for students. Public universities across the state are planning similar measures in response to deep higher education cuts.

The budget of Republican Governor Rick Snyder calls for a 15 percent reduction in higher education spending. Projecting a campus-level budget deficit of at least \$23 million for the coming fiscal year as a result of the state-level cuts, EMU is planning to cut 70 positions, freeze wages for unionized workers, and raise tuition by 7 percent.

The university's All Union Council, which represents the five employee bargaining units on campus, rejected EMU President Susan Martin's budget proposal on Friday. In a press release issued June 8, the Council enumerated its reasons for rejecting the budget, stating, "It is immoral to layoff low-paid employees while administrators give themselves high raises."

The Council also insisted that EMU's administration had overstated the financial crisis facing the school, inflated expenses and underestimated revenues in order to force the unions to give back their raises. They called instead for cuts on athletic and administrative staff pay and a reduction in athletic programming.

After Friday's announcement, All Union Council President Susan Moeller declared, "Good leaders should treat their employees with respect and not lead with intimidation and needless threats in misguided attempts to turn employees against each other." By characterizing the financial woes of EMU as simply a product of administrative waste and spending on athletics, however, "turning employees against each other" is precisely what the Council is doing.

The budget crisis facing EMU and other public universities across the country is the result of a broad-

based assault on the democratic rights and living conditions of the working class.

The university's state appropriation for fiscal year 2012 was figured to fall from \$76 million to \$64.6 million, a reduction of \$11.4 million. Combined with an increase in annual operating expenses of approximately \$12 million, the cut leaves a shortfall estimated at more than \$23 million.

Other public universities throughout the state have seen similar cuts to their state support, averaging an approximate 22 percent decline in appropriations across the board.

In addition, Governor Rick Snyder has approved tuition increases of up to 7 percent, but said that schools approving increases higher than this rate will see even deeper funding cuts. In response, many universities have instituted tuition hikes to levels just under Snyder's 7 percent mark, including Oakland University at 7 percent, Western Michigan University at 6.6 percent and Michigan Tech at 6.68 percent. These increases come atop years of tuition inflation.

President Martin, speaking on the anticipated cuts in April, said a failure to accept wage and benefit cuts by university staff could result in a tuition hike for students, thereby pitting the student body against the faculty. Though the university boasts of a 0 percent tuition rate change for 2009-2010, it has raised tuition every year for the 10 previous years. It is unlikely that the 0 percent tuition increase can remain in place without significant cuts to staff and services.

Fifty employees will lose their jobs as part of the 70 positions that will be cut. President Martin has sought to portray the planned cuts to staff positions as unrelated to the quality of education that students will receive. However, with 140 positions cut since 2004, basic programs and course offerings have been

constrained. As a result of these cuts, students must wait to take necessary courses, delaying their graduations and compounding their debt loads.

Taken together, these budget cuts and the resulting tuition increases and staff layoffs point to the dismantling of public higher education and the pernicious growth of corporatism in academe. Working class youth are being increasingly pushed out of four-year colleges and universities, not because of any lack of interest in attending and studying, but simply because they cannot afford the skyrocketing increases in tuition, room, board, and other fees. Millions of college students must take on a lifetime of debt to underwrite their degrees. Many have turned to community colleges and vocational training programs, resulting in record enrollment at the same time that budgets for these systems are being sharply curtailed. At the same time, faculty have been subjected to systematic wage cuts and rising workloads.

Eastern Michigan University is overwhelmingly a working class campus, located near Detroit in the industrial town of Ypsilanti, once home to the Willow Run B-24 Bomber Plant and a number of other large factories. After World War II, Willow Run manufactured automobiles continuously until 2009, when it was shuttered as part of GM's bankruptcy deal.

As a result of auto plant closures across southeast Michigan, unemployment has soared and home values have plummeted. A consequent collapse in local and state tax revenue, coupled with regressive tax policies, has bankrupted municipalities, school districts, and stripped bare the social infrastructure of the region.

Fully 80 percent of students at EMU receive financial aid, including 38 percent of the undergraduate student body who depend on the federal Pell Grant, which is awarded on the basis of financial need. The university draws much of its student body from the Detroit metropolitan area, including many black working class youth. The majority of students are either commuters or local off-campus residents, many holding down low-wage jobs and raising families while pursuing their education.

Like public universities all over the country, EMU has a faculty body composed increasingly of part-time, contractual, non-tenure lecturers. The majority of EMU instructors work on adjunct, or part-time contracts, with only 37 percent in tenure-track positions. The campus

employs more than 450 part-time professors every semester, who are responsible for teaching more than one-third of the campus's courses.

Nationally, one third of non-tenure track professors have been held on short-term contracts for more than five years, essentially holding them to outdated terms, according to data from the Coalition on the Academic Workforce.



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