

Bowling Green, Ohio university to lay off 12 percent of faculty

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Administrators at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in northern Ohio announced last month that 100 professors, one-eighth of the teaching faculty, were being dismissed in the spring semester. The school said it was eliminating positions based on faculty who were nearing retirement and on one-year contracts. Faculty members were sent termination notices effective May 1.

As a result of the cuts, the average student-to-teacher ratio will rise from 18-to-1 to 20-to-1. Students will have less flexibility in the fall because, with fewer professors available, as many as 800 classes could be cut from the weekly course schedule, including at least 300 general education classes. This will have a dramatic impact on the ability of students to graduate on time, since the courses they need may be full or unavailable.

The cuts will realize a cost-savings of \$5.2 million, a drop in the bucket for the university, which has a student population of more than 18,400. According to the BGSU Faculty Association, the faculty union, the campus has \$17 million on hand and another \$200 million in assets. The university, disputing that estimate, has said it has \$152 million in assets.

In the past five years, the university has implemented other cuts to its workforce and services, including early retirement deals, mandatory furloughs for non-faculty, the contracting out of dining services, and consolidation of many departments.

In addition to raising caps on student-teacher ratios on currently smaller classes, the university plans to implement digital technology to raise the capacity in already large classes. "It's not always the teacher in front of the classroom anymore," BGSU President Mary Ellen Mazey told the *Bowling Green Sentinel-Tribune* February 1.

Mazey has framed the layoffs as part of an effort to lower student costs, which currently run between \$371 and \$790 per credit hour. "In today's world, we have to be worried about the cost of higher education and the cost to our students," she declared. Students must complete 120 credit hours in order to graduate.

Faculty at BGSU are modestly paid, both compared to administrators on campus and their state peers. On average, compensation is around \$63,000, which Mazey admitted was "very much below market right now." That calculation counts administrators, including Mazey, who receives an annual salary of \$375,120.

In fact, the average obscures the low pay rate for a substantial section of the workforce. Of the 848 teaching faculty, more than 300 are non-tenured, many of them working at far lower wages on one-year contracts.

While avoiding specifics, the administration has pledged that after the layoffs, remaining faculty will receive raises to boost the university's reputation. This is nothing more than an effort to sow disunity among the faculty. A Monster.com search on job listings for BGSU quickly unearths numerous listings seeking part-time and adjunct instructors with closing dates of May 1, 2013.

Adjunct instructors are typically paid \$2,700 per three-credit course. According to data from the American Association of University Professors, at four courses per semester, a typical adjunct earns less than \$22,000 per year, one-third that of a newly hired tenure-track professor.

BGSU faculty have been working without a contract since July. The Faculty Association, which unionized the teachers in 2010, has offered little resistance to the administration. On its web site, the FA suggests "options and support" for the faculty targeted for

layoffs, including a petition that has garnered more than 5,000 signatures. On Wednesday, the union staged a march across campus.

The FA explains that these efforts are aimed at “bringing pressure on the administration to realize the negative impact on students’ education.” To those who have received termination notices, the union urges, “please contact the BGSU-FA to let us know so that we can best keep you informed and help you navigate the way forward during this difficult time.”

At nearby University of Toledo, a similar situation is developing. UT administration announced new criteria in January that would raise workloads on full-time professors, increase class sizes and reduce “low-enrollment” course offerings. Professors are required to teach 12 credit hours, in addition to conducting unfunded research and devoting 10 percent of their time to “service.” Other lecturers are required to teach 15 credit hours.

The intent behind the criteria is to eliminate a large number of adjunct and part-time professors, by putting their workloads onto full-time professors and forcing more students into “cost-effective” mass online courses.

Significantly, courses with fewer than 30 undergraduate students will no longer count toward a professor’s credit-hour requirement. This requirement will serve as an incentive toward teaching only core classes rather than specialized studies. Mathematics professor Don White told the *Toledo Blade*: “The enrollment requirements ... will devastate our programs, graduate programs, and undergraduate programs, which will in turn devastate our good faculty, which will in turn devastate our attraction of good students.”



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