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Cuts are not enough; Cal State must reinvent itself

By Hamid Shirvani

Difficult decisions were made this month at California State University, Stanislaus. Due to several rounds of state budget cuts, enrollment growth, and unfunded mandates, CSU Stanislaus had to trim its general fund budget to cover a shortfall of \$6.2 million — and we are not done yet.

After the failure of Propositions 1A-E, which led to even more dismal revenue projections from the state, we anticipate the governor will impose additional cuts to higher education that will force our campus to cut another \$3 million to \$6 million.

To close the initial gap, we have expended all available one-time funds, reduced operating and utility expenses, cut 11 management positions, reduced summer course offerings by 47 percent, and decreased part-time lecturers and some temporary staff.

These actions were not taken lightly and were only implemented after an advisory process involving the University Budget Advisory Committee and consultation with multiple campus constituencies.

The top priority at CSU Stanislaus is instruction and service to students. As a public university, we are accountable to the public and to our students and, therefore, must make responsible decisions in these challenging economic times.

All members of the campus community are making adjustments in their workload, some in major ways, and we all need to be part of the solution.

The university must continue to depend on all of its employees — faculty, staff, and managers — to function efficiently and to fully serve our students.

Nevertheless, there is a new reality that we cannot continue to ignore based on the false hope that things will return to the status quo. We must reinvent ourselves by re-engineering what we do and how we do it.



Modesto Bee - Portrait of CSU Stanislaus President Ham Shirvani after his first three years as president. Tuesday morning, March 4, 2008. (Bart Ah You / bahyou@modbee.com)

As a public institution of higher education, if we cannot refocus and break free of our old ways of thinking to redefine our place in society, then we've already failed.

As society changes, so must we also readjust, re-evaluate, re-engineer, and implement new ways of doing things that will enable us to be more efficient and accountable, while also preserving the quality of our academic programs and student services.

Public universities can remain true to their diverse educational missions by sustaining the best parts of their past, but we must also boldly reshape and reinvigorate our institutions for the future. If we don't, someone else will.

As California's fiscal crisis continues, we will continue to face, head on, some tough and unpleasant choices at CSU Stanislaus. Through it all, we will come out leaner but stronger and better prepared to educate students in a new society.