Budget cuts to come as enrollment dips

University President James Dean anticipates a 4% decrease in funding across the school to help combat the imbalance.

Aimee Rothman, Staff Writer

With declining enrolment and a greater need for financial aid and higher costs brought on by inflation, University of New Hampshire (UNH) President James Dean announced an expected 4% budget cut to all operations in an Oct. 24 email sent out to students.

“We must take steps now to reset the university’s budget and organizational structure to achieve our mission in this new reality,” Dean wrote.

This will largely take the form of department heads and “unit leaders” individually reducing their expenses and is aimed to avoid larger, more impactful cuts in the future. He clarified in an interview that while total cuts will be approximately 4%, that is not the standard ask to each department.

“We’re asking leaders to reduce their budget by about 4%. Some perhaps a little bit more and some a little less,” Dean said.

Academic departments and colleges, such as the College of Liberal Arts (COLA) and College of Life Studies and Agriculture (COLSA), were asked to slash even less to maintain the academic standard of the university, he said.

“One thing we tried to do is to not make as many cuts in academics than we have in other areas,” Dean said. “The educational mission is really central to what we’re doing.”

But for student amenities and extracurriculars, the funding decreases could mean less events or programming is available to students. The Memorial Union Building (MUB), for example, is a student building that commonly hosts events such as Make-and-Take series, as well as movie nights in its theaters.
Being home to many students’ clubs and organizations on campus, as well as the Holloway Commons dining hall, the MUB has many fixed costs that cannot be reduced, according to Melissa Beecher, director of the MUB and student activities. She explained they cannot reduce certain areas of the budget because they are essential to the operations of the building, leaving much of the expected decreases to impact programming and events.

“There are only a few components of our budget that we are able to make decisions around, primarily programming (both social programs and leadership programs), because other areas of the budget have fixed costs we cannot control, such as electricity or heating costs,” Beecher said.

“In order to ensure that the building and our operations run, we also cannot cut student employment, so we will have to reduce our programmatic offerings to make a reduced budget work,” she continued.

Beecher said the MUB will work with student voices to ensure that program and event budget cuts will be done thoughtfully, keeping the preferences and needs of the student body in mind.

“We will work closely with students in the Memorial Union Board of Governors (MUBOG) to evaluate what offerings we should keep so that student input informs our decisions,” Beecher said.

She explained that the MUB hopes to keep the ambiance alive, despite budget changes.

“Our top priority is to run a safe, clean and welcoming building for the entire UNH community,” she said. “The MUB will continue to be a place they can meet, study and find their community.”

Student Body President Joseph Skehan and Student Body Vice President M.J. Condon issued a joint statement to The New Hampshire after Dean’s email was sent. As the formal liaisons between students and the administration, they have been meeting with various heads to make sure the student voice is considered throughout.

“We have been and feel assured that this is an opportunity for UNH to right-size some resources so it can continue to serve the student body,” they said. “Throughout this process we will ensure to highlight and advocate for ways to enhance the student experience and limit unnecessary hardships on departments and the students they serve.”

Not an emergency yet

Despite some potentially alarming changes on the horizon, Dean said this does not indicate an emergency but instead represents a proactive change that will help the university in the years to come.

“I want to emphasize that we are not in a state of financial emergency,” his email stated. “Instead, this reset presents us with an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to our core mission as a public research university and meet our commitment to student success.”

According to Dean, advanced financial information made the university aware of these budgetary issues. The announced shrinkage will hopefully stop any future budget issues in their tracks.

He plans to update the UNH community in the coming months as more gets planned out, he said, and he anticipates having a more complete outlook on the changes by the end of the calendar year.

Dean explained that he hopes to know more about these budget changes by November or December and will most likely use the monthly email updates to keep those on campus aware of any budget updates.