



URA-AFT budget survey 2009

A survey to determine ways university departments can reduce spending and to elicit staff opinions about budget decisions being made.

Part I: Austerity Spending

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Key findings

- Results suggest there are many ways departments can cut costs, starting with: office decorating, travel, refreshments, consultants, photocopying/printing, mailings, and memberships.
- Results show that department spending is aligned with department mission and meets basic operating needs. However, departments are not sufficiently evaluating the effectiveness of what they are doing and failing to eliminate obsolete projects and activities. Departments are also not using technology as much as they could, e.g., teleconferencing/skype and online conferences.
- People in this survey welcomed the forensic audit and think that there is still too much money spent on travel, meals, cell phones, and other items. They also think more could be done through purchasing controls, e.g., bidding out jobs, bulk ordering, and use of internal suppliers.

Recommendations:

We recommend that President McCormick develop an austerity spending plan for the university. This plan would state that any spending that is not considered vital should be cut, reduced, or deferred until 2011. The plan would provide guidelines for department spending, such as:

- limits on travel and meals
- no refreshments for department meetings
- no holiday parties
- no redecorating or furniture purchases
- no color posters or custom print jobs
- do online publicity for events
- do online conferences instead of traditional ones
- limits on subscriptions
- limits on professional memberships
- ... and so on

Recommendations (cont'd):

The plan would talk about the impact of individual and department spending on the wider university. It would call for a sense of collective responsibility that recognizes that frivolous, wasteful, or inefficient spending by one person or one department affects everyone at Rutgers, especially in terms of tuition costs and affordability of education for students and salaries and job protections for employees.

The plan would encourage collaboration and sharing of information between departments about ways to save money, increase revenue, increase efficiency, the benefits of investing in technology, and so on. Purchasing, the Office of Information Technology, and other centralized departments should find ways to share information between and among departments; information should be provided electronically, e.g., by e-mail, blog, e-newsletter, or searchable database, where applicable.

The plan would promote training programs that bring staff together to share ideas and best practices, increase awareness of university resources, and upgrade computer skills, for example: the communicator certificate program offered through University Human Resources and computer training provided by the Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment Research.

Spending categories that could be cut or reduced in department

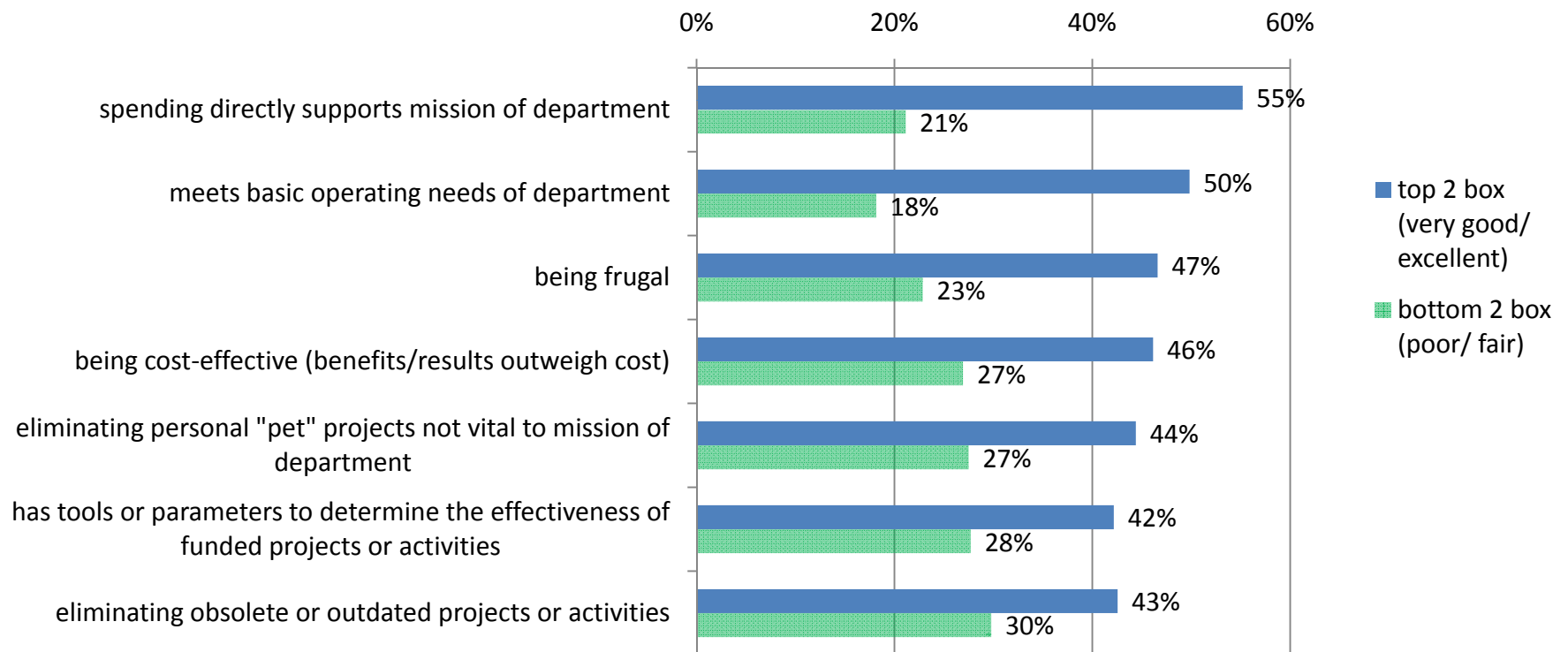
- Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents believe there are categories of spending that could be cut or reduced in their departments. The most highly ranked are: office decorating and furniture (42%), travel (41%), and refreshments for meetings, receptions, and holiday parties (40%).
- Also ranked highly for potential savings are: consultants (34%), photocopying/printing (32%), mailings/postage (27%), and professional memberships (26%).
- In all, there are 14 categories of spending selected by over ten percent (10%) of respondents indicating where their department could cut or reduce spending. See chart below.

categories of spending that could be cut or reduced in department (% selected)					
office decorating or refurbishing (including furniture)	42%	re-location packages	26%	individual research projects	10%
travel	41%	general office supplies	20%	grading support	10%
refreshments for meetings, receptions, or holiday parties	40%	subscriptions to online or print publications	19%	computer equipment, software, or supplies	8%
consultants	34%	marketing, publicity, or promotions	17%	services	8%
photocopying/printing	32%	department-sponsored lectures or conferences	14%	equipment (not including computers or furniture)	7%
mailings/postage	27%	institutional memberships	13%	training/continuing education for staff or faculty	4%
professional memberships for individuals	26%	department-sponsored publications	12%	instructional budget	3%

Q10 In thinking about ways to save money in your department's budget, please review the following categories of spending and consider whether they could be cut or reduced in the next fiscal year. Please select up to five that you think could be cut or reduced, and rank them in the order in which you would cut or reduce spending, with 1 being the first, 2 being the second, and so on (type number in box). Note: You can select up to five. Leave remaining boxes blank. base=475

Budget decision-making of department

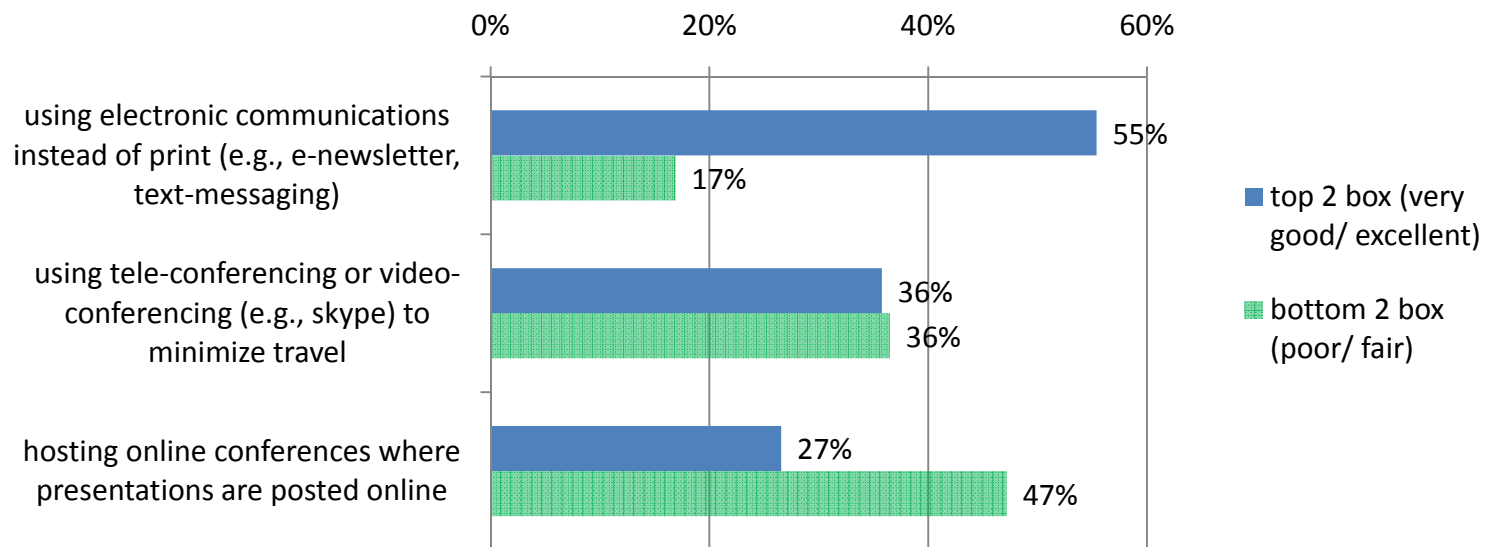
- Roughly half of respondents rate their department as excellent or very good in ensuring that spending supports the mission of the department (55%) and meets basic operating needs (50%).
- Over a quarter, however, (28%) rate their department as poor or fair in having tools or parameters to determine the effectiveness of funded projects; and three in ten (30%) give it low scores for eliminating obsolete or outdated projects or activities.



Q5 Please rate your department in making budget decisions based on the following criteria (five-point scale: poor, fair, good, very good, excellent). bases: supports mission (558); operating needs (578); being frugal (560); cost-effective (557); pet projects (491); tools or parameters (498); obsolete projects (517)

Budget decision-making of department (cont'd)

- Over half of respondents (55%) rate their department as excellent or very good in using electronic communications instead of print.
- Departments got relatively low ratings, however, for using teleconferencing or videoconferencing to minimize travel (36% top 2 box) and even lower (27%) for hosting online conferences where presentations are posted online.



Q5 Please rate your department in making budget decisions based on the following criteria (five-point scale: poor, fair, good, very good, excellent). bases: electronic communications (556); teleconferencing (411); online conferences (320)

Department type

- Over half (57%) of respondents work in an administrative or operational unit.
- About one-fifth (22%) work in an academic department.
- About one-fifth (21%) work in a center, bureau, or institute.

type of department	response frequency
administrative or operational unit	57%
academic department with faculty	22%
center, bureau, or institute	21%

Q3 What term best describes the type of department you work in? base=617

Selected comments

Collective responsibility

- Our department's budgeting process is so secretive it is impossible to know what, if any, efficiencies or cost savings might be achieved. We receive little feedback and are allowed almost no input. Not a productive way to operate.
- There has been poor fiduciary oversight for many years on programs, departments, and individuals.
- I observe that some departments are allowed to spend wastefully while others are cut to the bone.
- Each department needs to be audited at this university for both petty spending and payroll. When the axe falls and departments such as mine are asked to reduce their budget by x amount of dollars, the first instinct and decision is to lay people off.
- Cutting staff while not looking at other money saving measures.
- My department could use help.
- I am willing to work with my peers to find ways we can cut department costs versus allowing one of my colleagues to be laid off. It is through dedication to the university and to people's lives that we must do this.
- Eliminating classes, professors, and staff at a UNIVERSITY...how do they think things get done?

Q7 Are there specific examples of good budget decisions the university has made? List up to five (optional).

Q8 Are there specific examples of bad budget decisions the university has made? List up to five (optional).

Selected comments (cont'd)

Paper mailings

- Far too many print announcements of upcoming events are sent to far too many people.
- No managing of mailing lists to see if people want/need all this information.
- Not eliminating excessive use of paper, e.g., class rosters, purchasing notifications, payroll schedules.
- Publications that get mailed out to faculty and staff, especially the fancy glossy ones. Let's go electronic.
- Think before you print.

Technology

- The university uses outdated office equipment.
- Granting such small budgets to departments that you cannot afford to upgrade computers.
- Usually departments are under-budgeted in my opinion. Digital and electronic resources are not enthusiastically budgeted.
- Lack of teleconferencing equipment and rooms available on the campuses for university-wide meetings.
- Not having enough server space to maintain email service and instead using Google mail.
- Not making every classroom a smart classroom.
- Not requiring on-line courses in every department. At the present time it is optional. We are way behind other universities.

Q7 Are there specific examples of good budget decisions the university has made? List up to five (optional).

Q8 Are there specific examples of bad budget decisions the university has made? List up to five (optional).

Selected comments (cont'd)

Meals, travel, cell phones

- We spend way too much money on food (seminars, breakfast meetings, talks).
- Cuts should be made to nonessential costs such as parties, dinners, and awards.
- Holiday parties should be potluck.
- Cut down on the number of conferences faculty and administrators can attend in a year.
- Issuing cell phones/I-phones for business but not auditing expenses (people use them for personal use and charge the university).
- Hire a TABER watchdog. Keep the auditors.

Purchasing controls

- Individual departments do not do a good job of bidding out jobs.
- The University should enhance the RIAS system so that all departments can cross-reference what other departments are purchasing. This could create cooperative spending opportunities and substantially lower the cost of items.
- Using outside vendors or contractors at rates higher than using internal vendors/RU employees.
- We do not order in bulk because each investigator has his or her own program and money to run it. But I have worked in industry with several different labs, each run by a different researcher with their own budgets, and we all ordered in bulk whenever possible to save money.
- Constant moving of departments with new furniture bought when old furniture is still good. Departments should use Material Services surplus before buying new furniture.

Q7 Are there specific examples of good budget decisions the university has made? List up to five (optional).

Q8 Are there specific examples of bad budget decisions the university has made? List up to five (optional).