MES Budget Overview for Self-Study

3/29/12

The MES budget is made up of two components: Academic and Support. The Academic budget is meant to cover any costs associated with courses, including field trips, classroom office supplies, and faculty travel. The Support budget is mainly related to anything administrative, including the Assistant Director’s and Student Assistant’s salaries, as well as recruitment costs such as travel and conference fees. Each budget is posted typically a month or two into each fiscal year, making it difficult to plan for the upcoming year.

Since the 2004 fiscal year, the academic budget had been given the same amount of $9800 up through fiscal year 2010, when it was dropped to $7400, presumably due to state cuts. Starting in fiscal year 2010, a portion of leftover money from the prior year had been added to the budget, making each year after 2010 have a different base budget amount, which has typically been a bit more than $9800.

Because of the consistent amount of $9800 given every year and then the sudden drop to a consistent $7400, it is clear that the budget was not adjusted each year to match projected enrollment. A year that saw an incoming class of 26 students received the same amount of base money as a year that had 42 incoming students. Looking back, there are also no clear spending patterns. For example, fiscal year 07 saw a class of 27 students and spent $8469 while a year with 34 incoming students, fiscal year 05, spent $5334 and another year of 34 students, fiscal year 08, saw expenditures of $10,040.

For most years since 2004, yearly spending was under budget, and looking at the 9 year spread, the total amount was most definitely under budget. The primary expenditures change year to year. Some years saw higher motor pool costs due to an increase or decrease in field trips, for example. Copying costs were also high up until fiscal year 2011, when the Lab 1 administration allowed faculty to print without charges going toward the MES account (this was true for all Lab 1 faculty). While printing costs went down, office supplies expenditures increased due to requiring faculty to purchase their own textbooks in lieu of free copies from publishers (this practice has stopped due to low new textbook sales). Also, until fiscal year 2011, some years saw $2000-$3000 spent on non-MES faculty readers. This practice changed along with the new Collective Bargaining Agreement and a tightening of faculty workload in which only MES faculty can be readers and anyone who is not a faculty but become a reader actually signs a contract directly with the university versus being paid a lump sum. Finally, a consistent cost over the years has been travel costs to the twice yearly National Council for Science and the Environment/Council of Environmental Deans and Directors meetings.

Again, although there is no real pattern year-to-year, so it is difficult to assign percentages to specific parts of the budget. However, it does seem that the following categories make up the majority of the yearly academic budget: field trips, guest speakers, director travel, office supplies (including books), and copies.

As MES heads into a more predictable number of students (40 per cohort, or about 100 active students) who demand more field trips and hands-on activities, as well as a likely reduction in budget (or at least a reduction in roll forward funds), it is crucial that the program define the amount every year that will go toward field trips, guest speakers, books, and other classroom supplies. This will allow faculty to plan their courses in a responsible way, as well as allow them to determine how much in fees students may be asked to spend on courses.

The administrative budget shares a few similarities with the academic budget, namely in its predictability in amount regardless of program needs. This budget focuses on 4 categories: salaries and wages, benefits, goods and services, and travel. The salaries and wages category and benefits category changes as benefit costs increase and as the assistant director’s wages increase. One thing to note about these two categories is that if there is any leftover money, it can be used towards the other parts of the budget, namely recruitment. It seems that in the last few years, the amount given to us has been more than needed, and it would be wise for the program to make sure that money gets spent to completion in future years. The extra money should be used to hire students to work on MES newsletters or other leadership projects, such as graduation planning. One thing that would change this situation is if work/study was no longer available for the student assistant – it seems that work/study has helped MES spend more of its budget on recruitment versus personnel.

Since fiscal year 2004, the administrative budget has always put $4800 toward travel, despite upper administration asking the MES program specifically to increase its nonresident population. The MES program, out of the three grad programs, has always had the most nonresident students, and the university would like us to continue this tradition by increasing this number. Over the last couple years, the assistant director has traveled more than previous years, especially out of state – this has increased travel costs significantly.

The goods and services part of the budget was consistently $10,360 until fiscal year 2010, when it went down to $7960. Roll forward made up for the loss, however, in the subsequent years. It is unclear if this practice will continue in the future, making it even more difficult to travel long distances for those nonresident students. Should the budget be reduced, the recruitment part of the budget will likely be spent more on web advertising to eliminate travel costs.

As with the academic budget, there are no clear patterns with spending over the years. Mainly, salaries have increased and it also looks like the MES program no longer pays stipends to student association coordinators as it did up until 2007 (it is now handled by Student Activities). The primary costs for this budget, besides salaries and benefits, are travel, office supplies, postage/phone, event support, and advertising. This budget is responsible for orientation and the MES hooding ceremony (which separated from MPA in 2011, increasing costs), as well. Also, most years the spending has been under budget (except for two years).