

2020 Vision:

Higher Education As A Public Good

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Introduction

Ohio University in Athens, Ohio is in the midst of the latest iteration of a decades-long series of budget cuts which, faculty fear, will result in the “non-renewal” (i.e., the firing) of dozens if not hundreds of our non-tenure track colleagues (referred to at OU as “instructional faculty”). It is also likely to lead to higher workloads for tenure track faculty, diminished course offerings, and possible cuts to entire programs, not to mention low morale, all of which will no doubt negatively impact the student experience at OU. Why has this happened and how can we shift the direction of the university so that the firing of faculty and the dismantling of programs becomes its very last resort instead of its first? A positive, forward looking vision is needed. There are historical reasons for the predicament in which we now find ourselves, and these must be avoided as we go forward.

During the fall semester of academic year 2019-2020, Ohio University faculty and staff were told in a variety of forums, emails and announcements, that the university was in a serious budget crisis. By mid-January, we were told that we were not currently in a budget crisis, but that we would be soon. Since then, communications from various deans and higher-level administrators have been internally contradictory, with some deans communicating almost nothing at all to their faculty about this crisis, and mixed messages coming from all levels. At the same time, executive proposals designed to meet the shortfall have been arriving with alarming rapidity. These have ranged from plans for the termination of a large percentage of instructional faculty, to raised teaching loads for many tenure track faculty, to possible program elimination and the reorganization of departments into schools.

We need an alternate starting place for our university’s future health. The claim I am making here is not that fiscal challenges do not exist. There is no question that the university needs money. But we should all question how that money is attained and what goals those funds service. The suggestion is rather that in reframing the underlying goals of the university to concretely prioritize teaching and research, a different set of fiscal priorities emerges. The current budget cut proposals and fiscal expenditures are embedded in a vision of the university that prioritizes things such as management, bureaucratic infrastructure, and marketing over and

above the key components of teaching and research. In short, under the current thinking, the university is conceptualized as a business. Grappling with corporate influence on higher education is not new. In fact, was being discussed as far back as the early 20th century, though it has resurfaced with renewed vigor and in a new global form since the 1980s.¹ In this current model, budget shortfalls are systematically mitigated by slicing into the very heart of the university by cutting faculty. This includes the additional problem of faculty members' time. An example of this is the way in which is increasingly taken up with gathering data for ever-changing business models. When one reframes the values that form the basis for the discussion of the overall health of the university to the idea that higher education is a public good, a very different and clearly identifiable mission emerges. It is not the mission that we see being defended and codified in current university practices. Indeed, cutting faculty lines and programs should be the absolute last thing to go. Not the first.

A Brief History of the Business Model at OU

Understanding the university as a business has completely reversed the priorities of higher education, and this is no less true at OU than it is at other public universities. While there continues to be lip service to the missions of teaching and service, actions speak louder than words. We can see what values are privileged over others in the ways that these values are embedded in budgets, conversations about budgets, fund-raising goals, the hiring of expensive outside consultants, the repeated invocation of online education as a revenue panacea, and a whole host of other strategies employed by the university. The fact that the university's response to budget woes is to hire more executives and more consultants while cutting faculty, raising tuition, and expanding online education, demonstrates the true values being concretely supported by the university despite any verbiage to the contrary. These actions are not suggestive of a vision that puts teaching and research first. In fact, it further entrenches a misplaced private sector model that wrongly supplants a public goods model by prioritizing executive salaries and

¹ Rudy H. Fichtenbaum, "What's New About Today's Corporate University?" <https://www.aaup.org/article/president-what%E2%80%99s-new-about-today%E2%80%99s-corporate-university#.Xl6bsJNKh0t>, see also Jennifer Washburn, "Academic Freedom and the Corporate University," <https://www.aaup.org/article/academic-freedom-and-corporate-university#.Xl6bupNKh0t>

buildings over people and ideas. The accompanying calls for ever more and better marketing strategies forget that these come at the expense of the very thing that universities have to offer: quality education and the production of knowledge.

If this argument against the business model is not compelling so far, consider the fact that business models for public education fail even on their own terms. They are not able to solve the very problems they have identified. From the point of view of the institution, business models are not mitigating any of the major pressure points faced by universities in the 21st century such as the high cost of tuition or the seemingly perpetual financial crises faced by all but a very few (most often large public flagship) universities. Ohio University has arguably faced more years with budget cuts than without for close to two decades. From the point of view of faculty and student, the framing of the university as a business is an outright disaster. One of many examples of this is the shrinking of the tenured workforce. Data published in 2018 shows that the proportion of non-tenure track hovered between 30-50% of all faculty at R1 and MA granting universities.² The enormous expansion of non-tenure track faculty has been a national trend for some time, and it is directly tied to the business model of the modern university. So too is the problem of shrinking enrollment. Students and their parents have been persuaded that a university education is no more than job training. As tuitions rise while at the same time the value of education is normatively devalued in the national consciousness, it is no wonder that students and parents find higher education an expensive waste of scarce family resources.

“What the Market Will Bear”

Clearly those principally affected by the rise of an untenured labor force are the non-tenured faculty or “instructional” faculty. They are often paid extremely low wages for high teaching loads offered to them via year-to-year contracts, if they get contracts at all. In economic terms, they cost less than they produce. They are easily fired should cash-poor universities need revenue. Ultimately the reliance on these workers affects all faculty and will change the character of the university writ large. If the logic of the university-as-business continues to play out, the increasing proportion of non-tenured faculty is a precursor to the end of tenure itself, and

²“Data Snapshot: Contingent Faculty in US Higher Ed,” <https://www.aaup.org/news/data-snapshot-contingent-faculty-us-higher-ed#.XjCDLRNKjUo>

along with it, the end of academic freedom. The appeal of a low paid but highly skilled workforce that can be expanded or retracted at will according to financial “need” rather than educational mission emanates directly from the business model. Recently, Tulane University law school made national headlines for posting a job for a “volunteer adjunct” who would not be paid at all. Similarly, in 2018, Southern Illinois University sought to fill a “zero-time volunteer adjunct” position in the social sciences. While this volunteerism is not yet a widespread trend, universities appear to be testing the waters to see just how little they can pay people to teach. In the language of the market, teaching means nothing if teaching costs nothing. This is the situation that is created when the sole variable considered is financial cost. If “what the market will bear” is treated as a normative standard, it is only a matter of time before tenure can only be viewed as an impediment to a sound fiscal policy of low wages and higher output.

Executive administrators, on the other hand, have enjoyed unprecedented salary increases while offering few demonstrable success stories. In fact, executive expenses are one of the few places in the entire university where we see these kinds of flush budgets. Indeed, rising from faculty ranks to the administration is one of the few ways to get a meaningful raise in academia. High executive salaries are justified by the false logic that we are paying executives “what the market will bear.” This argument obfuscates the fact that these bubbles of prosperity have been created by those very executives themselves, insofar as they, along with boards of trustees, are the ones who control the compensation pools. By giving themselves the lion’s share of raises, executives have in fact created the highly inflated micro-economies in which executive salaries have become dramatically higher than those of faculty, which are then cited as the “market” which in turn governs the salaries of executives. The attempt to explain the disparity as a value-neutral effect of the market hides the fact that the market has a driver, and that driver is the executives and the boards of trustees. In short, the gross inflation of executive salaries is a result of their systematic valuation of their own work as more important than the work of teaching and research.

Neither has the business model been able to curtail rising tuition costs. States have abdicated their financial responsibilities to public higher education following the private sector logic that universities should be self-sustaining. And university executives, possibly related to the fact that they are reaping vast material benefits from this system, have failed to push back hard enough against this political idea. The University of Cincinnati, for example, receives state

support to the tune of only 17 percent, relying instead on tuition dollars for a whopping 37% of their operating budget. At University of South Carolina, 50 percent of the budget comes from tuition.³ Tuition covers 39.7% of Ohio U's total budget for 2018-19. Tuition, Room and Board covers 50.9% of Ohio U's total budget, while the state's share of instruction covers only 22.6% of its budget.⁴ Similar percentages have become the national norm. State disinvestment in public education forces universities to look elsewhere for funding. At schools like Ohio University, the solution has been to recruit more students who pay higher tuition. While Ohio University has touted "The Ohio Guarantee" as a lock on tuition for 12 semesters for students who commit to attend, it has not prohibited the university from continuing to raise tuition yearly. That is, while it protects some students, it does not address the overall problem of rising tuition costs and in fact may exacerbate it, a point made extremely well in a series of student protests in 2014.⁵

Faculty salaries can be among the convenient scapegoats used to explain the rising cost of tuition, because the financial reality of state disinvestment from public institutions is not widely known outside of academia. This partly explains why freezing or offering minimal raises, not replacing retired faculty, relying on relatively lower cost contingent labor, and passing things like the costs of healthcare and parking onto faculty can be accepted as solutions to budget deficits. All but 27% of Americans erroneously believe that state spending for public universities and colleges has increased or held steady over the past decade. In fact, in the aggregate, states have cut funding to public higher education by some \$9 billion, when adjusted for inflation.⁶ Of course, unlike the general public, administrators know this reality. The question they face is where necessary cuts should come to make up for revenue shortfalls due to state disinvestment. And they are not wrong to think that the biggest slice of any university's budget is instructional personnel costs.

³ John Warner, "Budgets Are a Reflection of Values," Inside Higher Ed (December 1, 2019) <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/budgets-are-reflection-values> and https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/11082019-LaBerge?utm_source=at&utm_medium=en&cid=at&source=ams&sourceId=10235

⁴ OU-AAUP White Paper, Fall 2019-2020, "Ohio University's Budget Crisis"

⁵ "College Matters: Trustees Dismiss Student Concerns About Tuition Model," *The Post*, January 26, 2014.

⁶ "John Marcus, "Most Americans Don't Realize State Funding for Higher Ed Fell by Billions," PBS.org (February 26, 2019) <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/most-americans-dont-realize-state-funding-for-higher-ed-fell-by-billions?fbclid=IwAR0doRoKNefc2O9HhtihXy7U2wdeK2BeoIK6KqaQibpHI2BXDrnpmds4Gw>

Market Irrationalities

But there are other places to cut costs that could conceivably result in a balanced budget. One is administrative bloat, especially at the executive level. Another is intercollegiate athletics. Recent data shows that in 40 states, sports coaches are the highest paid public employees in the state.⁷ At Ohio University, the men’s basketball and football coaches each earn over a half a million dollars per year, and each earn more than the university president. By way of comparison, consider the fact that Ohio Governor Mike DeWine’s yearly salary is \$154,248.⁸ These priorities do not support education, the hallmarks of which are teaching excellence and the production of knowledge through research. And it is not even good business practice. The NCAA’s own data is consistent in showing that athletics programs that make more than they spend are in the vast minority. In 2014, only 24 schools made money from athletics. The others, of which Ohio University is one, require that their deficits be covered by raises in tuition, student fees, or pillaging monies formerly earmarked for the academic mission. This is true across all three sports divisions in almost every state in the United States.⁹ A truly remarkable set of data, published in 2020 reported the shocking statistics that a total of \$192 million in student fees and subsidies is diverted to Division I sports in ten public universities in the state of Ohio, up from \$164 million five years ago. “On average, subsidies amounted to \$1000 for every student on

⁷ John Duffley, “In 40 States, Sports Coaches are the Highest-Paid Public Employees,” FanBuzz (December 31, 2019) <https://fanbuzz.com/national/highest-paid-state-employees/> and “Who’s the Highest-Paid Person in Your State?” ESPN (March 20, 2018) http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/22454170/highest-paid-state-employees-include-ncaa-coaches-nick-saban-john-calipari-dabo-swinney-bill-self-bob-huggins

⁸ Andrew Tobias, “Here are the Salaries for Gov. Mike DeWine’s Top Staff--and How they Compare to John Kasich’s,” *Cleveland.com* (January 30, 2019; Updated September 19, 2019) <https://www.cleveland.com/news/g66l-2019/01/41c1357dce2849/here-are-the-salaries-for-gov-mike-dewines-top-staff-and-how-they-compare-to-john-kasichs.html>

⁹ Brian Burnsed, “Athletics Departments That Make More than They Spend Still a Minority,” *NCAA* (September 18, 2015) http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/athletics-departments-make-more-they-spend-still-minority?fbclid=IwAR3bFvPqAZbnaGfyU99Fc6ifqsb_08ULOrFxnGHorBmFuJlJ39egrAjE0Fg. See also 2017-18 data, <https://sports.usatoday.com/ncaa/finances/?fbclid=IwAR2QxiG9SM2IdZkPjFokiqczGn0iAk85c8ZfbLTBhkqkSU7526qQowB6Lqk>

campus, regardless of whether the student plays sports or even attends a game.”¹⁰ Here is one place that universities should look for misplaced funds, and some universities are doing just that. Northeastern University, for example, recognized the damage inflicted by inflated athletics budgets, and made the bold move to eliminate its 74-year-old football program. “In the decade since, Northeastern has basked in its success, with applications nearly doubling, research funding almost tripling and the institution’s ranking in U.S. News & World Report’s best colleges list jumping to 40 from 96.” At Northeastern since 2009, applications have increased to more than 62,000 annually from 34,000. The average SAT score has risen to 1,457 from 1,288 and research funding has grown to \$178.6 million from \$63.9 million. According to Joseph E. Aoun, the president of Northeastern since 2006, “Honestly, I’ve never heard anyone asking to bring back football,” he said. “No one.”¹¹

The business model has also failed to protect research. Federal funding for research has declined since 2008, and midwestern universities are further hobbled by severe declines in state funding. A quick look at some results of this defunding demonstrates the now topsy-turvy world of the public university. Private corporations have been able to successfully outsource their research and development (“R and D”) offices at the public’s expense because declining public support has forced scientists to seek more and more of their research funding from corporate sources. To be clear, this means that the public is now indirectly funding private corporate profit through the relatively low costs of academic scientists.

The obvious solution, fundraising, ignores the reality that public universities are simply not in the same structural position as the privates in terms of fundraising and endowments. Private universities, which have long existed without state support, have the benefit of extraordinary endowments and alumni with deep pockets who are able and accustomed to donating large sums. While universities perform more than half of all basic research in America, public schools in the Midwest are particularly vulnerable to the failed business model. As one recent article explained, “The endowments of the universities of Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois and Ohio State which together enroll nearly 190,000 students add up to about \$11 billion – less than a third of Harvard’s \$37.6 billion. Together, Harvard, MIT and Stanford, which enroll about

¹⁰ \$192 Million in Student Fees, Other School Subsidies for Sports At Ohio Division I Public Universities, Cleveland.com, February 19, 2020.

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/27/sports/dropping-football-northeastern.html>

50,000 students combined, have more than \$73 billion in the bank to help during lean times.” One result is that midwestern universities are already declining based on NSF rankings as measured by total research expenditures.¹² At Ohio University, despite an increasingly aggressive corporate model, our national ranking in places such as the *U.S. News and World Report* continues to decline. In 2004, we were ranked 107, in 2015-16 we were ranked 146¹³ and in 2020 we are ranked 185.¹⁴ In fact, Ohio U declined 48 ranks between 2005-2016, having one of the steepest drops in the country between 2004-2015.¹⁵

Endless Crisis

The business model has not solved the fact that Ohio University has been in a budget crisis for most of the last two decades. A brief overview of some key events suggests a long train of poor leadership. In 2006, 75% of faculty voted “no confidence,” against the then-president, and then did so again in 2007, with 77% of about 48% of faculty participating in the vote. 67% voted no confidence in the provost.¹⁶ OU students voted no confidence by a margin of 78% prior to faculty vote.¹⁷ Many of the people currently serving as executive administrators in Cutler Hall are holdovers from these previous disastrous administrations. In subsequent years, executive administrators have promoted grand schemes to promote financial health that often leave Ohio University to foot the bill. This was the case with the relatively recent, financially aggressive business-based strategy of the most recent former head of finance at Ohio University who has

¹² Jon Marcus, “The Decline of the Midwest’s Public Universities Threatens to Wreck Its Most Vibrant Economies,” *The Atlantic* (October 15, 2017). <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/10/midwestern-public-research-universities-funding/542889/>

¹³ Conor Morris, “OU’s Drop in Rankings Stirs Concern Among Trustees, Faculty,” *The Athens NEWS* (November 6, 2016). https://www.athensnews.com/news/campus/ou-s-drop-in-rankings-stirs-concern-among-trustees-faculty/article_4490ceb4-a44d-11e6-bbfd-8b8775460378.html

¹⁴ “Ohio University,” *U.S. News & World Report* <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/ohio-university-3100>

¹⁵ Conor Morris, “OU’s Drop in Rankings Stirs Concern Among Trustees, Faculty,” *The Athens NEWS* (November 6, 2016). https://www.athensnews.com/news/campus/ou-s-drop-in-rankings-stirs-concern-among-trustees-faculty/article_4490ceb4-a44d-11e6-bbfd-8b8775460378.html

¹⁶ Elia Powers, “Leaders Under Siege at Ohio U.” *Inside Higher Ed* (May 31, 2007). <https://insidehighered.com/news/2007/05/31/leaders-under-siege-ohio-u?fbclid=IwAR1o7YiSyRR-WeQTy7qiMX5FBpLj7e1q241EtlLHMNgLiHPEL2MTJZWLjA8>

¹⁷ “Faculty Delivers No-Confidence Vote Against Ohio University President,” *The Columbus Dispatch* (May 30, 2007; Updated May 31, 2007). https://www.dispatch.com/article/20070530/NEWS/305309829?fbclid=IwAR0f_Qt-pk0ivwwFpT8AYINmUySX5pJan57qoVjrSyiEeko_6o-DjmqnLeQ

since left OU for a new job. The plan to leverage debt in order to address infrastructure issues across the university costs the university \$27.7 million in interest annually (2018-19), the payment of which is now roughly the size of the budget cuts that the university is seeking and constitutes a key component of the budget shortfall.

Another component of the former strategy was to move the university to an entirely new budget model rooted in market principles, “Responsibility Centered Management.” This became another failed attempt to improve effective budgeting, claiming to use market principles to assess costs and revenue of various units. Its quiet abandonment in 2019 demonstrates its failure as a financial fix. In fact, its most proximate outcome is that it incurred an untold number of transaction costs in its implementation and abandonment, and the perverse financial incentives it created that continue to affect curriculum as units made grabs for high-yield courses that would inflate revenue by shifting funds from one unit to another. Colleges and schools remain saddled with inflated financial staffs hired for the sole purpose of gaming the RCM system.

Savior Consultants

Along with tuition increases, executives often look to online education as a way to raise income for struggling universities. The ostensible advantages of online education are manifold. It can reach non-residential students, can be quickly deployed for credentialing programs, and in principle it can increase labor efficiencies since a single faculty member can teach more students online than they can in person. This latter is further optimized if such faculty are hired on a course-by-course basis which can shrink labor costs to a pittance. There are several obvious problems with this strategy. First, every university is trying to increase online enrollments, and many universities are further along in this process than Ohio U. Second, delivering online education demands high levels of technological, marketing and design expertise. Enter the highly problematic practice of using paid consultants and outsourcing, such as the recently hired and ominously named marketing firm, “Truth&Consequences.” Surely someone must have noticed that there is some redundancy involved in a highly paid administrator who needs to hire a highly paid outside consultant to do their job.

By way of illustrating the ethical and financial costs of hiring such firms, consider the business model used by Pearson, an Ohio University partner. While more online technology

firms with more integrity exist, Pearson demonstrates some of the worst practices in the online world which clone the logic of the “for profit” universities such as the University of Phoenix. The British company Pearson, established in England in the 19th century as a construction firm, entered the publishing market in the 1980s and the testing and online markets in 2000. This was a year before the “No Child Left Behind” act mandated standardized testing for public schools, prompting satirists to lampoon its slogan “Pearson: Always Learning,” to “Pearson: Always Earning.”¹⁸ Capitalizing on this K-12 market, as well as on the faculty blaming “outcomes based” or “assessment” strategy, Pearson became a forerunner in standardized testing, online learning and Common Core standards reaping a profit of \$8 billion in annual sales from its North America education division.¹⁹ From this platform, it was able to launch into public higher education in a series of highly profitable no-bid contracts. A “no-bid contract” means that universities hired them without looking at alternatives. For example, the University of Florida hired Pearson in a no-bid contract worth \$186 million, and the University of Texas gave Pearson a no-bid contract for its online classes.²⁰ Historically, Pearson’s cut has been up to 60% of student tuition whether or not it reaches its enrollment targets. At University of Arizona, for example, the online program was projected to bring in \$69 million annually, with Pearson’s share being \$38 million. The ethical problem is, as one writer put it, “Pearson’s business strategy is to turn education from a social good and essential public service into a marketable for-profit commodity.”²¹ These extremely expensive firms are often of questionable utility in terms of truly engaging the mission of public higher education.

Failure to Invest in the Region

At OU, we have a special mission to educate the citizens of the state of Ohio, especially those in the region of Appalachia. “Today, fewer Ohio adults age 25-64 have at least an

¹⁸Reingold, J. (2015, February). “Everybody Hates Pearson,” *Forbes*. Retrieved July 17, 2016 from <http://fortune.com/2015/01/21/everybody-hates-pearson/>

¹⁹ Stephanie Simon, “No Profit Left Behind,” *Politico* (February 10, 2015).

<https://www.politico.com/story/2015/02/pearson-education-115026>

²⁰ <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/02/pearson-education-115026>

²¹ Alan Singer and Eustace Thompson, “Pearson and the Neo-Liberal Global Assault on Public Education,” *The Huffington Post* (June 1, 2007; Updated June 2, 2007). https://www.huffpost.com/entry/pearson-and-the-neo-liberal-global-assault-on-public_b_592fe501e4b0d80e3a8a336c

Associate's degree or a high-quality workforce credential compared with the rest of the nation. The numbers are even more alarming for minorities. In Ohio, 26 percent of African Americans and 27 percent of Hispanics have at least an associate's degree or high quality workforce credential compared to 40 percent of whites... The lack of access to higher education in Ohio has not only hurt prospective students, it has harmed whole communities."²² This particular aspect of our mission points to the importance of the regional campuses of Ohio University. These campuses have suffered greatly even to the point of being ignored as meaningful parts of the Ohio University structure. In recognition of this fact, the university devised the "One Ohio" plan, intended to unite the Athens campus with the regionals in a common mission to serve the state of Ohio. Key features of One Ohio included financial plans to tie the regionals more firmly to the Athens departments in order to incentivize the integration of regional faculty into their respective departments. It seems as though this plan has also been abandoned, and the fate of the regional campuses, their students and faculties, remain tenuous.

In short, at Ohio University, faculty have been reeling from a merry-go-round of budget emergencies and failed solutions for decades. The aforementioned are just a few examples. An untallied amount of labor time has been spent by faculty responding to executive requests for a dizzying number of plans and data only to face the abandonment of this plan or the irrelevancy of those data. Faculty labor has been squandered even as administrators flee outward and upward to higher-paying jobs attained with resumés built on their time at Ohio University, irrespective of whether their initiatives actually left the University better off. Meanwhile, major structural problems at Ohio University remain unsolved. From 2008-2009 to 2017-2018, a period of 9 years, average faculty salaries only increased a total of 1.7% in real inflation adjusted terms, while tuition was increased 13.9% in real inflation-adjusted terms. During the period 2009-2010 to 2018-2019 spending on administrative salaries increased 23.4% in inflation adjusted terms. Note that spending on administrative salaries was increased in real terms at close to twice the rate of inflation of the increase in tuition, 23.4% versus 13.9%, indicating that in a short period of time a significant amount of resources shifted to administrative salaries and away from the

²² Mark Nevin, "To Make College Affordable Increase State Funding," <https://www.lancastereagle.com/story/opinion/2019/01/19/make-college-affordable-increase-state-funding/2605386002/?fbclid=IwAR1cyvRvQ2SSCYt-uineOIKG0DwPARm0arLY9581n-BYAQBfK1V8LdSdN0I>

core teaching and research functions of the university.²³ In short, the problems we now face are not just the fault of the current administration. They come from decades of poor leadership and mismanagement.

Lessons in How Not to Plan

The current strategic plan, “Fearlessly First,” is neither fearless nor first. In fact, it is entirely predictable, looks like the plans of almost every other university, and repeats the past mistakes of previous leadership at OU. It looks to the very same set of solutions to which every other public university is looking: recruit more students, offer more courses online, create a more fluid faculty workforce that can – as the OU document often repeats – “pivot” to respond to market trends, “rapidly deliver market responsive programs,” “rapidly launch new programs” and “sunset old ones” if they are “ineffective,” presumably, as measured in terms of financial stability.²⁴

Like many strategic plans, it is a budget model wrapped in housekeeping issues that masquerades as vision. Far from being “fearless,” this strategy is born of financial panic and offers nothing that is not present in dozens of other university strategic plans. No public universities will be “first” with these tired solutions. As Arthur Levine has argued in his observations about higher education’s new status as a “mature industry:” “Most colleges and universities in the country” are “fundamentally alike” and vary primarily in the “number of professional programs” or in size of undergraduate and graduate programs.²⁵ “The answer to the ‘revenue problem’ has always been ‘get more students who can pay’ or ‘go recruit in a new market.’ Those wells are drying up.”²⁶ In short, if Ohio University adopts the same hackneyed point of view of every other university, it can only hope to keep its head above water in the sea of universities adopting the very same strategies, eventually sinking as it diverts more revenue from the academic mission to marketing and recruitment.

²³ OU-AAUP White Paper, Fall 2019-2020, “Ohio University’s Budget Crisis.

²⁴ Molly Young, “Garbage Language: Why Do Corporations Speak the Way They Do?,”

https://www.vulture.com/2020/02/spread-of-corporate-speak.html?fbclid=IwAR0XImrh_I4IO1epn9I1K51e5mJV8G_x_-rsqua5Q-gaUlbj4hF3vsfNYqk

²⁵ Arthur Levine, “Higher Education’s New Status as a Mature Industry,” *the Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 31, 1997). <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Higher-Educations-New-Status/76222>

²⁶ Cristina Spano, “Where Did All the Students Go? Five Views on the Great Enrollment Crash,” *The Chronicle Review* (October 2, 2019). <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20191006-A-Crisis-in-Enrollment>

In an ideal world, the State of Ohio would understand its financial responsibility to educate its citizens and would increase the state share of instructional costs to its state universities and colleges. But we do not live in an ideal world. And given recent national trends, increases in state funding are extremely unlikely to be forthcoming, especially if university leaders do not aggressively advance the case for higher education as a public good. It does not take a business model to know that an institution needs money to run. However, money management cannot substitute for or drive the strategic vision. An alternate vision can demonstrate what kind of goals emerge if we begin with the principle that higher education is a public good whose primary mission is teaching and research. If we follow the path of cutting university expenses based solely upon administrator's perceptions of economic inefficiencies, we will lose our hearts and souls as academics and as citizens. More to the point, we will participate in the destruction of public education. The ultimate losers will be our students and their parents, who make substantial financial sacrifices for a college education, and the citizens of Ohio, all of whom benefit from the public good of high-quality higher education. We owe them better.

Vision

Ultimately, the concrete components of any vision that would emerge from a reframing of the university as a public good would have to come from the collaborative work of faculty and administrators using a very robust shared governance. They cannot come from one person writing an analysis. However, an analysis of our situation from a changed point of view does suggest that we ought to favor some options over others. For example, faculty cuts of any kind – including the firing of instructional faculty, should be an absolute last resort. Faculty are at the heart of teaching and research, and it could be mentioned, also of revenue production. Likewise, there should probably be no change in faculty teaching loads since teaching loads should be commensurate with the expectations of an institution with a research active faculty. If we take teaching seriously, instructional faculty should be paid a wage that is consistent with their status as highly skilled professionals. They ought to be offered the opportunity for teaching intensive tenure track jobs because their academic freedom is as crucial as that of tenured faculty. We should end the fiction that faculty spend 20% of their time on service, since the devolution of clerical tasks onto faculty, rising service obligations and so on, require increasing levels of

faculty time. Extra service should either be compensated with extra pay or service expectations broadly understood should be realigned to acknowledge that faculty time is not infinitely expandable.

Any necessary cuts should begin from the places that are least central to the primary missions of teaching and research. They should first come from executive salaries, executive bonuses, the hiring of assistants and expensive outside consultants, and from right-sizing the most expensive parts of athletics. Perhaps we do not need to have OU on television with teams playing to nearly empty stadiums. Perhaps an improved library is more important than a study center for athletes. Perhaps improving current classroom technology and scientist's lab facilities is more important than paying Pearson. We should pay more attention to high quality academics, and not only for the sake of "efficiencies" or "revenue generation" or "marketing." Initiatives such as Ohio Honors, Certificates, Themes should be guided by curricular standards, workload concerns and academic integrity. Fundraising priorities should be brought into line with transparent goals that are driven by the needs of students' academic work and faculty needs to do their jobs well. We could evaluate fundraising on its value to the mission, not merely on how many dollars it brings in. In general, we ought to stop empowering finance to dictate rules that inhibit faculty research. We should freeze regional campus budgets until we figure out how to use those campuses to fully engage the important role that they have in the creation of leaders in Appalachia. We should budget on realistic enrollment projections, and respect limits to growth using measures of quality education and quality students. We should play to OU's historic strength as a residential campus with a strong commitment to the liberal arts, and excellence in its professional schools.

No one is going to give this to us. We must demand it.