October 4, 2010

Dear Colleague,

As the media and University information sources have been reporting for months, LSU is fighting an intense but strategic battle to maintain reasonable funding levels and otherwise to deal with a major funding crisis. To date, much of the effort has gone into analysis of the budget and strategic discussions with legislators and other decision makers in the state government and throughout higher education management. The consensus among those working day-to-day on the budget and its political foundation is that it is now time to mobilize faculty. In a grassroots effort to protect our University, the Faculty Senate has developed a plan for a faculty letter-writing program. The goal: Demonstration to the legislature that the faculty is a powerful political force that can lead the cadre of voters and that can voice informed opinions in an effective, large-scale fashion.

The Faculty Senate leadership asks you to write at least two letters (or one letter sent to two persons): one to the Louisiana legislator, whether Representative or Senator, from your district and one to the chair of either the Louisiana House or Louisiana Senate Education Committees. If you can write more letters, either to additional legislators from your district or to both committee chairs or even to legislators statewide, that effort would be both welcome and appreciated; in the first instance, however, please write at least these two.

The Faculty Senate has prepared an exemplary letter to provide colleagues with a sense for the themes that will be effective in addressing state officials. That letter is appended to this one and is also available on the Faculty Senate website via a link in the big ‘budget update” box on the home page (http://www.lsu.edu/senate). The Faculty Senate has also prepared a list of “talking points” that might be included in a letter of your own devising. A letter that you compose is the most effective way to persuade a legislator, but if you lack time for that task, please feel free to use the ready-made letter, which will only require a few seconds for printing and posting.

The names and addresses of legislators may be found at the Louisiana Legislature web site: http://www.legis.state.la.us. The Chair of the Senate Education Committee is Senator Ben Nevers; the Chair of the House Education Committee is Representative Austin Badon.

Thank you very much for your efforts to save LSU.

With best wishes,

Kevin L. Cope

Faculty Senate President
SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATORS REGARDING PROPOSED DEEP BUDGET CUTS

Dear [insert name of Representative or Senator],

I am a voter, taxpayer, LSU faculty member, and professional workforce member who asks you to commit yourself, your staff, and your legislative resources to the urgently important tasks of strengthening LSU and of fortifying higher education throughout Louisiana. The largest and most comprehensive university in our state and a cultural and economic beacon to both the southeastern region and the nation, LSU faces devastating budget cuts that threaten its ability to serve our people. I ask you, as [insert either “my representative” or “my Senator” or “a member of the Education Committee” or other appropriate role designator], to work toward a secure and prosperous future by seeking support for Louisiana’s Flagship institution. As a teacher who helps to shape the careers of Louisiana’s capable and committed young people, I am deeply distressed at the damage that grave budget cuts will inflict on tomorrow’s leaders.

Despite nearly two years of repeated budget cuts, LSU has shown a unique and laudable ability to deliver knowledge, service, and hope in an efficient and economical way. Although less than fifty percent of LSU’s funding derives from state sources and although 376 jobs have already been lost, a record number of new students have entered LSU this year in pursuit of what they correctly perceive as a quality education. Additional funding cuts, however, would shrink LSU to a point where it would have to break its covenant with promising students. Whether $42 million, $62 million, or some other large number, deep gashes in funding would first and foremost hurt Louisiana students, sending these students packing to institutions far from their homes and families. Such severe reductions would cork the flow of presidents, CEOs, owners, and founders as well as Rhodes, Truman, Marshall, Fulbright, Udall, and Goldwater scholars that call LSU their alma mater.

Supporting LSU is supporting Louisiana’s electorate. Dismantling the economic engine of the Flagship University would devastate local economies not only in Baton Rouge, but statewide. LSU does research—and business—in every Parish. The reduction of LSU’s $1.2 billion impact on the Baton Rouge economy would send dozens of industrious merchants to the soup line and would hack down tax collections. Placing LSU on the equivalent of its 1974 budget would plunge Louisiana into the past and rob our children of a prosperous future.

Educators such as the professionals in the LSU community bear the burden of knowing what awaits Louisiana’s youth. Professors, instructors, and staff members like
myself fear that the cuts presently under discussion will close off opportunities not only for Louisiana’s best and brightest, but for everyone. Those students who cannot enter graduate school owing to inadequate preparation or who take too long to finish degrees owing to class-section shortages or who must choose a career other than the one that suits them owing to the closure of colleges will neither forgive their government nor will they open the businesses or embark on the careers that create employment and choices for every citizen.

The difficulties that the state faces are formidable, but I ask you to search for innovative solutions and to dedicate yourself to the protection of a treasure not only for the Louisiana of 2010 but the Louisiana of future generations.

With best wishes,