

## The Situation Now

In the fall we were concerned about the governor's proposed 30% budget cuts. As you all know, the situation is much more dire now with eight months having passed without a state budget (and draconian budget cuts still likely in a funded budget). Although many state activities have been funded, higher education remains one of the largest unfunded segments of the state budget. And it's not just the general revenue support for state universities that is not being funded. The state has also not funded the MAP grants, which affects 125,000 students in Illinois at both public and private institutions and 8,000 at UIC alone. In our focus on doing our teaching and research it's easy to put the financial crunch facing UIC and the other state universities out of mind, but the problems caused by the state's inaction are serious and the potential consequences for public higher education in Illinois are devastating. We can read about what is already happening at Chicago State and that is the situation we will face at some point. We need to, once again, remind our legislators (and the governor) of the benefits that higher education brings to the state and, in particular, of the benefits that UIC brings to the Chicago area.

## What the Senate can do: Write letters again

We can organize a letter writing campaign to our state elected officials on behalf of UIC. We did this in the fall but the situation has gone from bad to worse and our legislators need to know this and that there are people who care. Letters not only make arguments to legislators but also show them that voters in their district care about the issue. There is substantial evidence from field experiments in political science that letter-writing campaigns work because they convey two things to legislators: 1) how many people oppose a policy; 2) how intense is this opposition. Legislators take this information into account as part of their electoral calculus. If each of us writes our legislators protesting the current lack of state funding for UIC, that is a powerful voice on behalf of UIC. If we can get our colleagues to do likewise that will have even more impact.

Why letters? According to TEDtalker Omar Ahmed in "Your Letter Writing Can Make a Difference," "So, when you start to think about politicians, you've got to realize these are strange creatures. Other than the fact that they can't tell directions, and they have very strange breeding habits, how do you actually work with these things? ... the answer is rather strange. It's a letter. We live in a digital world, but we're fairly analog creatures. Letters actually work. ... So, how are you going to write your letter? First of all, you're going to pick up an analog device: a pen. I know these are tough, and you may have a hard time getting your hand bent around it, but this is actually critical. And it is critical that you actually handwrite your letter. It is so novel to see this; that somebody actually picked up an analog device and has written to me."

([http://www.ted.com/talks/omar\\_ahmad\\_political\\_change\\_with\\_pen\\_and\\_paper?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/omar_ahmad_political_change_with_pen_and_paper?language=en)).

Once you get out that pen and paper, get ready to look up your senator and representative. You can find their names and contact information at: [www.elections.il.gov/Districtsearch.aspx](http://www.elections.il.gov/Districtsearch.aspx) or [http://www.core-illinois.org/find\\_my\\_legislator.html](http://www.core-illinois.org/find_my_legislator.html) (Of course, if pen and paper is too time-consuming then use a printer or even email.)

Now you're ready to write.

Your letter should state that you are a faculty member at UIC, your support for the mission of UIC and ask your legislator to work towards funding for higher education in the current fiscal year and against the draconian cuts contained in the governor's budget proposals.

Below is a list of possible points to make in your letter. Specific examples drawn from your department or program will make your letter more effective.

- The lack of funding for MAP grants affects 8,000 UIC students and 125,000 students state-wide. These students were promised this money by the state and UIC and other universities are, for now, bearing the cost of these grants on behalf of the state. Because of its large and economically diverse student body, UIC students receive more MAP funding than those at any other institution.
- The lack of MAP funding places at risk exactly those students who are most in need of state assistance in order to get the college education that they need to contribute to the educated workforce necessary for the state.
- The state has provided no funding for UIC or other state universities for the current fiscal year beginning in July.
- Although state universities have continued providing services to the students and to the public by relying on tuition money and spending down their reserves, all of the state universities are under serious financial stress. Without reserves UIC and other state universities will be much more vulnerable to financial shocks going forward.
- Some schools are already struggling to fulfill their commitment to provide classes and support to their students and all of the state universities, including UIC, will be in this position later this year.
- Students are making enrollment decisions for the fall right now and the inability of the state universities to guarantee that they will be able to provide a quality education in the fall will affect these decisions.
- Financial stability is one of the requirements for accreditation and the accreditation of all of Illinois's state colleges and universities is at risk.
- The bond ratings of UIC and other state universities are either on watch status or have been lowered which will result in increased future costs of borrowing.
- Benefits of State investment in the University:
  - In Illinois, one in three pharmacists, more than 40% of the dentists and one in six physicians graduated from UIC. UIC has the largest medical college enrollments in the nation, and a comprehensive set of health care colleges.
  - From 2010-2013, the University of Illinois was responsible for nearly ¼ of the startups created at Illinois universities, and is ranked 5th among public universities for producing venture capital-funded entrepreneurs. The majority of these companies remain in Illinois.
  - For each dollar in direct appropriations the University of Illinois leverages over four dollars in non-state funding.

## A sample letter

Dear Representative/Senator [lastname],

I have been a faculty member in the department of [department name] at UIC for [n] years. I live in [neighborhood or village] and vote in your district. The lack of state funding so far this fiscal year has already done serious damage to UIC and its 28,000 students and if continued will be catastrophic. The future of UIC and other state universities is at serious risk and the harm done by continued lack of funding will take years to recover from. Equally frightening is the harm this will do to the greater Chicago and Illinois communities. For every dollar the state provides us, we leverage at least four dollars from non-state funding; we lead the state in venture capital entrepreneurs; and our medical schools not only train new medical staff but also provide valuable services to our communities. The unprecedented situation of the state failing to fund higher education is already harming the educational mission of UIC and will also impair the ability of the faculty to conduct world-leading research that contributes to the economy of the region and the state. If funding is not forthcoming UIC will lose its ability to continue its substantial contributions to the people of the Chicago area and the state of Illinois.

[Put in specific examples of how the lack of funding will harm students in your department or in the services you provide the community. Stories about harm to specific individuals are especially effective.]

I urge you to work to secure funding for UIC and the University of Illinois.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]