Special Presidential Update
December 18, 2008

Campus Continues to Address State Budget Issues

The constant stream of bad economic news shows little sign of abating, which keeps our fiscal future at the forefront of my concerns. While much remains uncertain, including the Missouri Governor’s proposed budget for FY 2010, we can be certain that these are extraordinary times and will require an extraordinary response on our part. Here’s what we do know: the state is facing an estimated $340 million budget shortfall in the current fiscal year. Last week the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE) asked each state institution to look carefully at 15, 20, and 25 percent base budget cut scenarios in light of its impact on decisions for FY 2010. We were given a deadline of Dec. 18 for our response to this request.

The presidents and the CBHE agreed that these scenarios should not offer specific solutions given the time frame and lack of specific budget reductions, if any. For UCM, the cuts in these scenarios range from $8 million to $13.2 million, which clearly would affect every part of our university. With a tight deadline, we did not have time to get widespread input from the campus on our initial response. Please be assured that as we learn more and go forward with real targets, we will engage the entire campus community in addressing the challenges that lie before us. I will be working with my Cabinet, the Strategic Planning and Resource Council (SPRC) and shared governance units after the holiday break, once we get clearer direction from the state. We should be looking to the Governor’s address in late January for greater clarity.

In the interest of transparency, I am posting the response we provided to the CBHE in the hope you will join in the dialogue with us. To see the response, go to www.ucmo.edu/budgetresponse and log on with your UCM user name and password. While, in the words of the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE), our response to the scenarios is “an academic exercise,” we took the task seriously. As you review this document, keep in mind that no decisions have been reached and we are keeping the discussions at a general level until more specific details are known about next year’s budget.

As I concluded in my response to the CBHE, I am extremely concerned for the well-being of our community and region. As the university goes, so goes a considerable portion of our regional economy. As we consider our challenges, please keep in mind that these are challenging times for many in our great country. That being said, universities such as UCM are known as wellsprings of innovation and this is the time for creative thinking. In order to meet challenges of the magnitude we are facing, we must think big and avoid the trap of falling into a defensive posture or focusing on issues that don’t benefit the university as a whole.

There are specific steps you can take now; foremost among them is providing your constructive thoughts and suggestions as we develop the process and communications channels to tackle this challenging issue. We recently launched a web page called Questions & Suggestions @ UCM where you can submit your suggestions (www.ucmo.edu/questions). I ask that you spend serious time thinking about the assumptions we operate under
as a university, college, or department. Should the dire forecast become reality, we clearly will not be able to continue with business as usual. I challenge each of us to look beyond the traditional responses to budget reductions. Whatever steps we take, we must honor our operating principles of providing a quality education and providing access. I will continue to keep you informed as the process unfolds and ask that you join in dialogue. Thank you for your continued effort and support.