

Clemson survey took place during 'perfect storm' of economic issues, official says

By John Staed
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CLEMSON UNIVERSITY — A Clemson University faculty survey came during “a perfect storm” of bad economic news, but it provides school leaders issues to work on, said Bryan Simmons, faculty senate president.

Simmons initiated the survey prior to the recession deepening and resulting in cuts that have totaled nearly \$38 million at Clemson this fiscal year. Those cuts resulted in unpaid five-day furloughs, hiring freezes, early retirement offers and funding reductions in a number of other areas.

But Simmons, who serves a one-year term as faculty senate president, said it would have been a mistake to delay the survey.

“We couldn’t hold off,” he said. “If we had, another academic year would have passed by. We plowed ahead with it knowing some components people were (concerned) about.”

Clemson President James Barker said at a faculty meeting Tuesday that he had read “all 357 pages” of the survey report and planned to work with the faculty and others to address some of the concerns.

Some of those include better transparency between the administration and faculty, especially on budget issues, Simmons said, and increasing the information flows between the two. Also, while faculty members trusted their department chairman or chairwoman, “the farther it got away from the department level, the less trusting they were of anybody,” he said.

Simmons said at the classroom level, the survey showed faculty members wanted updated technology such as smart boards and improved classroom and office space. The salary issues — administrative and faculty — drew a lot of attention and comments.

“I think faculty are encouraged that we are looking at the challenge of compensation,” said Windsor Sherrill, an associate professor in health science and next year’s faculty representative to the Clemson board of trustees.

The survey had “a lot of positives” because it showed faculty members “were very, very engaged,” Sherrill said.

It was the first campuswide survey in 10 years, and Barker said he would like to see them done more often.

Christine Wells, who analyzed the faculty survey “and the senate have done a great service to the administration and the faculty in pointing out a number of things we are doing that we need to do better

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at," Barker said. "We are anxious to take the next step in putting a working group together to make recommendations on how we can deal with those things."

Overall, the survey means the university "can start to make changes and recommendations for the future," Simmons said.



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