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A Final Word

On April 21, President Koch delivered his long-awaited and feared Reduction/Retrenchment program, outlining major cuts in many of the University's programs. Because of the continual series of fiscal crises at the state level, Koch states that the University is no longer able to support all the programs it now offers. Rather than maintaining the current programs and risk lowering academic standards, the President, along with acting Provost Donald Spencer, has decided to "carefully and judiciously reduce its offerings of academic programs," in his recommendation to the State Board of Regents.

Koch's dilemma is not a new one. Former University presidents were forever burdened by a lack of financial support from the state. Oscar Craig, the first president, noted that the small population in Montana guaranteed faculty salaries far below the national norm. President Ernest O. Melby was appalled at the low salaries and general disrepair of the campus when he arrived in 1941. Despite his pleas to Montanans, he was roundly criticized for his efforts to upgrade the University. Likewise, President Carl McFarland experienced similar frustrations in the 1950's, again as a result of the state's inadequate support for the University system. Our thinly sparsed population together with a familiar pattern of criticism toward the University has left Koch with hard choices.

The present proposal, calling for the termination of the departments of Religious Studies, Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Physics, and reduction of the schools of Education and Fine Arts and the department of Anthropology, is nonetheless a sad commentary on the state of higher education in Montana. With fewer programs to offer, the University will undoubtedly attract fewer out-of-state students, a major source of the University's income. Though these cuts seem necessary, they may well contribute to a downward spiral until the market "bottoms out." In the meantime, more and more University programs, such as the *Sentinel*, will disappear. Although we had hoped to be continuing a long, though sporadic, campus tradition, the *Sentinel* staff is dismayed when looking at our own future, as well as that of so many other University programs, large and small, academic and extra-curricular.

Traditionally, Montana has focused on a natural resource economy, such as mining, agriculture, ranching and logging, while relegating few state funds for education. Eventually, natural resources either evaporate or become obsolete, yet the people remain, and many wish to be educated in our own University system. The economic realities mentioned by President Koch must be addressed, yet we all hope that the majority of Montanans don't underestimate the importance — both economically and culturally — of maintaining a strong University system for our future.



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Tom Bensen, Editor



