The Committee on Budget and University Priorities met seven times during the 2007–2008 academic year. In addition, the chair had several communications with members of the administration.

Somewhat distinct from past years, the committee this year focused on its mandate to examine the “strategic plan for Arts, Sciences and Engineering” and, specifically, to indicate “the priorities on which budgets are expected to be based,” with a view to pursuing these issues individually and in greater depth in subsequent years. In this regard, the committee identified three specific issues that have clear budgetary importance and that it believes warrant a detailed review by the administration working with the relevant faculty committees. The primary issues so identified are: 1) the “hidden” funds within the departmental budget process, including the allocation of unspent department funds, the penalties (if any) for departmental overspending, and in particular, the allocation of Summer School costs and revenues across department; 2) graduate students’ financial aid with particular attention given to determining the appropriate level of support for MA/MS students; and 3) the varied practice across departments of awarding specific faculty reductions in teaching obligations with a view to standardizing such awards. The committee has elaborated on each of these issues in an extensive report to the deans. It recommends that each of these three issues be the focus of a detailed examination in the near future undertaken by the administration in conjunction with the relevant faculty committees.

The committee also devoted considerable attention to discussions of infrastructure on the Medford campus, especially the intellectual infrastructure provided by the library and the support provided for informational technology. It is clear that the continued competitive health of the library requires that its recent record of annual budget increases be maintained. It is even more evident that support for informational technology and, most specifically, a wireless network across the campus is: 1) critical to the continued competitiveness of the university; and 2) an expensive effort that will only be cost-effective if considerable care is exercised.

As always, it remains the case that faculty salaries and undergraduate financial aid claim the bulk of the annual budget. With respect to each of these issues, the committee has made less specific recommendations. It has however noted that only limited progress has been made on the goal of moving Tufts faculty salaries into the 80th percentile of all institutions across all ranks, and that the goal of achieving true “need-blind” admissions has become more compelling than ever given the decision by many peer institutions to expand greatly their financial aid expenditures. It is equally clear that reaching Tufts’ salary and financial aid goals will exert a considerable claim on any funds raised by the current capital campaign, and that the primacy of their achievement highlights the importance of any reforms elsewhere in the budget that could release net funds for this purpose.

The committee wishes to thank Catherine Doheney for her continued role in assisting the committee with its meetings.

For the committee,

Dan Richards
Professor of Economics

2007–2008
Chair, Budget and Priorities Committee, 2007–2008