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## Financial gridlock leaves little room for campus-wide improvements

Posted on December 4, 2013 by Lanie Lee Cook in [News](#)

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and by Seth Dickerson.

As the Jindal administration continues slashing state funding for higher education — by more than half since 2008 — universities are scrambling to adjust to the changes. Departments are disappearing, facilities are falling into disrepair and university employees haven't received pay raises in six years.

More than ever, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette is relying on student fees and private donors to make up for the shortfall. But because these funds are allocated toward specific departments or projects, those departments relying solely on general fund moneys are suffering.

While the Quad undergoes a makeover, ceiling tiles slump upon the Office of International Affairs building on Brook Avenue. As Burke-Hawthorne Hall undergoes a second set of cosmetic renovations, McLaurin Gym's occupants avoid an unusable shower they call "Auschwitz."

Bill Crist, the university's facilities management director, said all building renovations are recommended per need and "prioritized as funds become available." But nearly all of the current renovation projects — from the athletic facilities upgrades to Fletcher Hall's construction — are paid for from outside of the university's general fund, which is seeing steady decline as the university struggles to increase revenue.

"There's not a lot of university money that we can put toward these projects," Crist said. "I don't see these as being funded during the university's current economic state."

Although students approved a \$7.50-per-credit-hour Master Plan Advancement Fee last year, those funds are allocated for recent and upcoming projects that include the Quad renovations, intramural improvements and bike lane additions. The \$36 million Student Union rebuild is funded by \$23 million in bonds paired with revenues from two student

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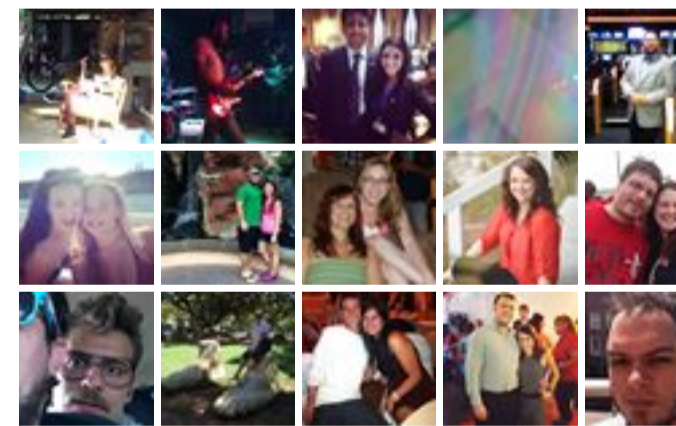
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fees approved in 2003 and 2005.

“Obviously, the students voted for those things, so we’re trying to get them out as soon as possible,” Crist said.

As the university undergoes its massive makeover, a survey of campus facilities reveals a mixture of new and shiny, old and dingy and seemingly endless construction.

Fletcher Hall’s \$3.8 million, state-funded renovations — which were approved as an “emergency” project five years ago, with no project earning state funding since — should be completed in a year. The project will correct leakages, repair water damage and add 20,000 square feet of educational space on the second floor.

Angelle Hall’s \$700,000 renovations, set for completion next winter, are university funded and include re-roofing, waterproofing and ceiling repairs where leaks caused water damage. The fixes to the building that houses the university’s music department came from an emergency project plan, much like Fletcher’s.

Burke-Hawthorne Hall’s latest construction work is the final phase of a state-funded project that’s been on the table since 1982, according to Crist, and will involve external improvements around its courtyard facing Cypress Lake, including some paving behind the theater and a decorative screen in front of the cooling tower. The first phase began in 2007 — 25 years after the university first presented the project.

“That’s what we deal with in trying to get funding from the state,” Crist said.

Performing Arts students in McLaurin Gym have been seeking renovational work for more than two decades, as well, but Crist said that building won’t see renovations until the Student Union is complete, as it’s in the fray of the construction site. The university had to pour a special sidewalk just to gain access to the building — hidden in plain sight at the corner of McKinley Street and Boucher Drive — once Union construction began.

The intentions for that building are to reroof and waterproof it so that it’s in proper condition for internal improvements, Crist said, although he noted “it’s never fast enough.”

Pons said that the building is receiving new showers to replace the broken ones.

Another overlooked building stands at 413 Brook Ave. and houses the Office of International Affairs and the Intensive English Program, which accommodates English as a Second Language students. Nestled discreetly between a drainage ditch and parking lot off St. Mary Boulevard, its exterior provides a canvas for spray-painting vandals, with its interior boasting crumbling ceiling tiles and water-stained carpets.

The building is structurally sound and passes the university’s safety inspections, said Environmental Safety and Health Director Joey Pons, and its occupants only recently filed one report that Pons can recall, which was about a pothole in the building’s parking lot.

Crist said the OIA’s administrative offices will transfer to the Student Union once it’s complete, but the building will continue housing classrooms. No renovations are yet in the pipeline, he said.

On the other end of campus, Griffin Hall has warranted reports of exposed wires and insufficient monitoring of air conditioning by UL Lafayette’s physical plant, which controls the air conditioning for most of the buildings on campus. One room in the building was

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tripping a breaker when more than four appliances were plugged in and used at the same time.

According to Pons, Griffin's safety coordinator notified him via email of the breaker situation. Pons sent Terry Jenkins, who oversees the electrical infrastructure on campus, to remedy the situation. He determined that some of those circuits had the potential to be overloaded, and reportedly corrected the problem.

Pons oversees safety issues around campus and manages a group of about 80 departmental safety coordinators. Every facet of campus has a safety coordinator, who volunteers time to report safety concerns and problems to Pons and his inspectors.

"If we get a report of something that's unsafe," Pons said, "we take action immediately."

"Granted," Pons said, "when you have the word 'safety' in your job title, that can be interpreted many ways. There's a difference between unsafe and inconvenient, and I try to use that responsibility properly."

"I told my kids, 'If you try hard enough, you can flush yourself down the toilet,'" Pons said. "But that doesn't mean you're at risk for doing it."

UL Lafayette's Student Government Association has been working to help improve building conditions while funding is gridlocked. Liberal Arts Sen. Leonard Hawkins and the rest of the delegation from the College of Liberal Arts are trying to purchase new desks to replace the current ones in Griffin and other liberal arts buildings that are covered in gum and graffiti.

"All students at UL have to go to Griffin at least once or twice in their college career," said Hawkins, a 22-year-old sociology student. "I feel like it should be a priority, but sometimes I feel like we're overlooked, because we have the most majors but we don't give back to the university as much."

Hawkins said there's only so much that SGA can do because of the inception of the Master Plan.

The Master Plan inks out overhauls to a lot of buildings on campus, which cuts off ideas that senators and presidents may have to fix their college's buildings.

"Most of the time whenever we have propositions for building fixes," Hawkins, who is a member of SGA's Housing Committee, said, "we get one of two answers: 'budget cuts,' or 'it's in the Master Plan.' A lot of infrastructure questions, we're told not to worry about it."

Hawkins said one of the things they set out to do was renovate the bathrooms in Mouton Hall.

"They're pretty bad," Hawkins said. "We were told that something might be getting done in the Master Plan, so we shouldn't have to worry about renovating bathrooms."

The College of Sciences is also looking into buying new desks for Billeaud and Broussard halls as well as repainting the two buildings. Broussard houses the physics department, and Billeaud is home to the university's biology labs.

Students have reported the the lab equipment in Billeaud is old and in need of replacement.

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“We have machines that measure the amount of light that passes through a liquid,” one biology student who wished to remain anonymous stated. “Anything suspended in that liquid blocks/absorbs light and changes the data.

“Typical things in that liquid that we expect are the dyed proteins from what we’re studying,” the student continued, “however, due to several labs without proper cleaning tools using the same test tubes and whatnot, we cannot account for all of the substances within the cuvettes that we use to pass light through. As such, dirty equipment and the lack of proper cleaning tools have directly skewed the data.”

Last semester, 22-year-old Biology student Madelyn Rivers took an oceanography and limnology class which included lab experiments dealing with water at different temperatures and salinities. Rivers said there was no hot water in the lab, so the students in the class had to walk to a building with hot water and take into account the change in temperature after getting back to Billeaud.

“The professors seemed frustrated but did their best to overcome it,” Rivers said.

While the university struggles to produce self-generated revenue, President E. Joseph Savoie, Ed.D., said at a recent donor recognition event that UL Lafayette “is benefitting from unprecedented private support from generous donors.”

On Nov. 14, the UL Lafayette Foundation celebrated \$4.6 million in gifts at a “distinguished donor” reception that recognized donations of \$50,000 or more in a calendar year. But Julie Bolton Falgout, CEO of the UL Lafayette Foundation, explained that nearly all of those funds are distributed as per the donor’s request.

“Over 99 percent of our funds are designated somehow,” she said.

For example, \$2.83 million of the celebrated endowments went directly to the College of Engineering, and the donor, Donald Mosing of Frank’s Casing Crew & Tool Rentals, Inc., agreed to donate another \$1 million to the department.

The Foundation received only \$48,000 in unrestricted funds this year, Falgout said, which are utilized toward the university’s “greatest needs.”

“We are about as tight as the university when it comes to unrestricted dollars,” said Falgout.

Ragin’ Cajuns fans field immense support for athletics through donations, as well. Most recently, Ragin’ Cajuns Athletics Celebration organizers presented a \$200,000 check to the Ragin’ Cajun Athletics Foundation after the second annual, fan-organized sponsorship event.

The group has raised more than \$350,000 in both private and business sponsorships since 2012.

Meanwhile, David Beard, director of Teacher Clinical Experiences (student teaching), has an office in the Soulier House on Johnston Street near University Avenue. When anything goes wrong with the building — from burnt light bulbs to buckling sidewalks — the university “responds to that immediately,” he said.

A tour of the historic house revealed an evident need for renovations. As water damage and peeling paint marked the ceilings, an old wooden porch out front showed its age. But Beard said the building’s cosmetic needs don’t pose safety concerns, and such

renovations aren't priority with the university's budget constraints.

"I understand. There's no money. We have no money. We're lucky to have jobs," Beard said, describing Louisiana's higher education climate as a "pendulum" that shifts based on leadership.

"When the times are good again, we're going to have things done and we'll start growing again," he said. "We'll have a new governor. We'll have someone who cares about education."

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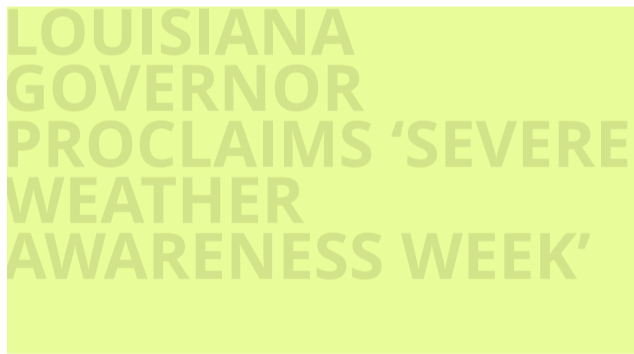
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