

The Sliding Economy and the Impact on UMR-ACUHO Member Schools Short Report 2009

Survey Conducted By:

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The United States is currently facing a potentially long term economic recession. Colleges and Universities across the nation have not been immune to these tough economic times, and have had an impact on many university budgets. In the winter of 2009, UMR-ACUHO wanted to conduct a survey to find out what the effect of the economic recession was having on the working budgets of residence life departments within the region.

The survey was developed consisting of three sections: Demographics, Economic Impact on Budgets, and Economic Impact Responding University Has on the Surrounding Community. The survey consisted of a total of 33 questions between the three sections. The survey was distributed to Senior Housing Officers, or UMR-ACUHO contact persons from their respective universities. 72 universities began the survey, 66 completing it, yielding a 91.67% completion rate.

In the first section, 60% (43 institutions) were public institutions. 94% of the institutions surveyed were 4 year institutions. 25% of the institutions designated capacity in their residence halls was between 500-1,000 residents. 21% of the responding institutions have a total designated capacity between 3,001 and 5,000 residents. Most of the persons completing the survey were Senior Housing Officers or Directors (57%).

The second section of questions looked at the impact the economic recession has had on the responding institutions. It should be noted that only 66 of the 72 schools, answered the last two sections of the survey. The first question in this section focused on the change in the number of donor gifts and scholarships at the respondent's institution within the last fiscal year. 36% of the responding institutions noted that there has been a decrease in donor gifts and scholarships. 32% of the schools responded that numbers have been similar to previous years. When asked about the prospective enrollment numbers, 42% of institutions responded that their enrollment numbers were projected to increase for the 2009-2010 school year. 30% of the responding schools noted that enrollment numbers were similar to previous years.

The next group of questions focused on trends in on-campus living. 35% of responding universities answered that housing contracts for the incoming class are similar to previous years. With regards to retention, 39% of respondents answered that there was an increase in the number of students choosing live on campus as opposed to moving off. 38% of schools remarked that numbers are similar to previous years and only 21% noted a decrease in the number of students choosing to stay on campus. The next set of questions covered live on requirements that member institutions currently have. 73% of responding universities have some sort of residency requirement.

The final set of questions in this section focused on the university and departmental budgets and the effect there has been on employment, programs, and other activities like travel because of the economy. On the campus level, 39% of university auxiliary departments had been asked to transfer funds to or offer some similar assistance to other departments on their campus to help with budget cuts. 77% of schools said that they were not going to lose any programs because of budget cuts. Programs being cut included: Training, Professional Development, Recognition, and Travel. 59% of universities are currently not under a hiring freeze. There was a trend to not eliminate position, but positions have been left unfilled. When asked about travel, 71% of schools answered that their institution was not currently under a travel freeze. 47% of universities noted that money for professional development opportunities has not been affected in their department. However, 46% said that professional development money has decreased because of the current state of the economy.

The final section of the survey focused on the economic recession within the university's surrounding community as well as the economic impact that the university has on surrounding communities. The last set of questions in this section talked about the economic impact that the respondent's institution had on the surrounding community. 56% of universities said that their institution has a major economic impact. 26% noted a marginal impact. 82% of respondents noted that their institution employs a significant amount of residents in the immediate surrounding community.

When looking at the results of the survey, it is clear that many of the UMR-ACUHO schools have been affected by the current economic conditions. Many schools have seen a decrease in the number of scholarships and donations within the last year. Many universities are not seeing budget cuts, and if they are, many of them are small. However, the universities that are facing larger budget cuts seem to be more drastic. Several universities have been required to set up a "reserve" fund that can be tapped into if needed. In general, the current economic conditions have taken their toll on many of the universities within the region in some form or another. However, it is encouraging that many universities are seeing an increase in enrollment, and not seeing large budget cuts.