Generally, things are going rather well at Texas A&M University. Our new President, Dr. Robert M. Gates, has announced a policy of placing academics and the faculty first, and has acted according to that policy since he took office. He regularly consults with the leadership of the Faculty Senate on all important issues, and he makes sure there is faculty representation on all major committees. Thus TAMU has become a stellar example of shared governance.

Our senate is presently considering some changes to our constitution. The primary changes, if passed, will be to eliminate term limits, to change the time new Senators take office, and to institute the position of Speaker-Elect in place of our current Deputy Speaker. We have had the first reading of the proposed changes already.

Our Academic Affairs Committee has formed a subcommittee to address the continuing problem of student plagiarism, and particularly the role of off-campus tutoring services in encouraging such plagiarism. We would welcome any suggestions on how to deal with this problem.

PENDING WAR

So far there has been little effect on campus of the pending war with Iraq, although some student reservists have been called up. Whether the war will affect us in any major way will depend on how long it lasts and how widely it spreads.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

TAMU continues to have too few minority students. Although women make up over half of its student body, the same cannot be said of its professoriate, which is about 80% male and about 85% Caucasian. These facts continue to be a matter of serious concern to both the Senate and the administration of the university.

To address this cluster of problems, President Gates has created a Vice President for Diversity position. The person holding this office will report directly to President Gates, and will thus be one of the most influential vice presidents in the university. We are conducting a nation-wide search to fill this position. In the meantime, President Gates has appointed our Senate Speaker, Prof. Bob Strawser, as co-interim holder of the position (jointly with Rodney McClendon of our Multicultural Service Center).
We hope for considerable improvement in the area of diversity in the next few years.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We have nothing new to report.

BUDGET SHORTFALLS

This problem has hit us as hard as it has hit every other institution in Texas. Like everyone else, we don't keep unallocated pots of money. We do have some projects that can be deferred, and money intended for those projects can be drawn upon once to cover a shortfall.

The effects of the 7% return of funds are still developing, and we are likely to be unhappy with some of those effects. President Gates announced a policy of protecting faculty first, and of not interfering with current hiring of new faculty. He also announced that he would do all in his power to avoid laying off staff. He instituted a hiring freeze on all staff positions, which is resulting in significant inconveniences in some departments, and increasing workloads for the remaining staff members.

We have a freeze order on all state-funded travel.

President Gates has announced his intention to increase the total faculty by 100 positions by the fall of 2004, thus reversing the steady decline in our number of faculty during the past decade. Of course, actions of the Legislature this spring can affect this plan. We are searching for sources of funds to deal with a worst-case scenario of approximately 15% cuts during the next biennium.