Ammons: FAMU must trim its workforce

BY DOUG BLACKBURN • DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER • PUBLISHED: JANUARY 11, 2011 2:00AM

Details are slowly starting to emerge as Florida A&M University prepares to go through a painful restructuring.

While President James Ammons doesn't expect to finalize the plans he will present to the university's Board of Trustees until March, he made it clear Monday during an open forum at Lee Hall Auditorium that there will be layoffs and other significant changes in the way FAMU operates.

"Restructuring is inevitable, and this will have lasting impacts. There will be human costs associated with what we do," Ammons told a gathering of about 300 faculty, staff and students. "It's going to be something we've never experienced before."

Like the other 10 schools in Florida's State University System, FAMU is coping with four straight years of reduced appropriations from the state — and it is bracing for another year of cutbacks in state revenue. It is also seeing an end to two years of federal stimulus money — $7.8 million each year — that kept scores of faculty on the payroll.

The university already has announced it is eliminating the School of General Studies, home to about 1,500 undergraduate students who have yet to declare a major.

Near the end of his hour-long slide-show presentation, Ammons revealed other options the university is considering to reduce its expenses. They include eliminating one of two summer school sessions, reducing the number of colleges and schools, and realigning some programs.

"We must reduce the workforce to meet our restructuring goals," he said. "We can't afford to continue to do everything that we do."

A core team, led by Chief Financial Officer Teresa Hardee, has been meeting for almost two years to look at all options for downsizing the university. It will make its recommendations to Ammons next month.
Gwendolyn Singleton, an associate professor in neuro-psychology, is a member of FAMU's Faculty Senate and one of the advisors to the core team. She acknowledged that her colleagues are worried about what programs may be targeted for elimination, and whose jobs are in jeopardy.

"We're also concerned about the quality of programs we're going to be providing to students," Singleton said.