

Board of Regents Public Forum on the University Budget
Wednesday, June 17, 2009
Testimony of Mary Lou Middleton, Vice-President of AFSCME 3800

My name is Mary Lou Middleton. I am a 25-year U of M employee and the vice president of AFSCME Local 3800, representing clerical workers. I would like to make two points:

- 1) **Frontline clerical workers enhance the student experience by providing essential services to students.** We are often the first point of contact for students at the University. Clerical workers make it possible for students to navigate the complicated University system, from the admission process to graduation. We register students, explain U of MN policy and procedures to assist students in completing their degrees, make appointments for students to see their advisers and instructors, and process student appointments and timecards.

Clerical workers support faculty in the University's academic and research mission. Professors often rely on clerical staff who are here year after year, because new TAs have much to learn and may not be around when the professor is getting ready for class. We also support faculty with their research, by working on and getting proposals through the University system, by editing manuscripts, by producing camera-ready books. Last Friday, I was asked to work overtime to edit and format a proposal that an outside editor wasn't able to finish due to a family emergency and a recent University graduate didn't have the experience to complete.

So, what will happen when clerical workers aren't here to help students and faculty due to layoffs? The sad truth is that the student experience is diminished and students become dissatisfied. Faculty will have difficulty accomplishing their academic and research goals. Administration must make preserving clerical jobs a priority to protect the land grant educational mission of the University.

- 2) **Laying off clerical workers harms and has real impacts on the economy and the community.** As the third largest public employer in Minnesota, the U has an obligation to retain its employees. Our members live from paycheck to paycheck, so even a short layoff will force them into crisis, exacerbate the current economic downturn, and further strain already limited social services.

When our members are laid off, less money is spent in the community. The hardest hit will be out-state campus communities—Crookston & Morris—and where Minnesota Extension Service offices are located, where U jobs literally keep the economy going.

Recently two 40-year out-state AFSCME clerical workers hours were reduced by 25%, from 40 to 30, saving their departments \$13,000 each. Don't you think the U

could have found another way to make cost-saving reductions? Will the employees do less work? I doubt it. This reduction is a layoff and has real effects. Each of the two employees' future retirement will lose between \$250-280 a month due to reduced high-five salary. This impacts the economy in their community. For the good of the community and the state, stop laying off clerical workers!