



ALTERNATIVE COST SAVINGS PROPOSAL

*In accordance with Article V, Section C
of the 2023-2026 Collective Bargaining
Agreement between the Lakeland Faculty
Association and Lakeland Community College*

February 21, 2025

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OVERVIEW

SUMMARY OF KEY COST SAVINGS PROPOSAL ELEMENTS

As proposed, this alternative cost savings proposal provides:

- 2025-26 **savings of \$1,878,143** as a result of declared retirements, program eliminations, and departure of faculty members not participating in the alternative proposal submission process (for example, Physics did not submit an alternative proposal).
- 2025-26 **potential savings of \$977,021** from proposed “reduced load” arrangement.
- 2025-26 **savings of \$68,644** from Dental Hygiene faculty replacement.
- 2026-27 **savings of \$698,741** from declared retirements for (budget year) BY 2026-27
- Total proposal 2025-26 **bottom line assured savings of \$1,946,787**
- Total proposal 2025-26 **bottom line possible savings of \$2,923,809**
- Total proposal **two years assured savings of \$2,645,529**
- Total proposal **two years possible savings of \$3,662,550**

MITIGATION OF SHORT AND LONG TERM RISKS

As proposed, this alternative cost savings proposal:

- Minimizes loss of lower paid junior faculty due to senior faculty retirements which increases long term savings due to lower pay scales.
- Eliminates more positions than the stated Performance Audit #1 Staffing Scenario of 11 positions.
- Provides for a measured and strategic continuous improvement approach that retains key positions which significantly contribute to HLC, curriculum, assessment, administrative functions, student success, and engagement initiatives.
- Ensures faculty, rather than deans, are able to serve as chairs
- Responds directly and appropriately to recommendations in the recent HLC Mid-Cycle Review Report and the 2024 Performance Audit Report.
- Recognizes that faculty are necessary participants in the program review process.
- Presents the opportunity for a positive faculty and administration “partnership narrative” rather than yet another negative news story about the continued failures and internal discord at Lakeland.

Risk Assessment

While we understand the pressure that has been placed on the Board of Trustees and President Ahuja to improve Lakeland Community College's (LCC) financial situation, the Lakeland Faculty Association (LFA) firmly believes that the proposed cuts to full-time faculty are rushed and short-sighted, sacrificing the long-term reputation and viability of the college for the sake of quick gains.

Below is a summary of the risks inherent to the proposal to eliminate 30 full-time faculty members (25% of all full-time faculty) at the end of this academic year.

Critical Failures in Premises, Data, Process, and Timeline

- *Baseline of full-time faculty required to maintain institutional objectives.*
- *Programs/departments were not "right sized" in 2015.*
- *Decisions being made based on faulty data.*
- *Program closures lack transparency and inclusion of key stakeholders.*

The cuts proposed by Dr. Crooks are potentially disastrous for Lakeland's future not only for their size and timing but because of the significant errors in logic, data, and procedure that they are based on.

The basis of the proposed cuts is a measurement in student credit hour decline from 2015 to 2024 and an expectation that full-time faculty numbers should move in direct proportion. While we acknowledge that faculty numbers should decline with such a significant and sustained enrollment drop, we know that full-time faculty are only one piece of the student/faculty ratio and that there is a minimum number of faculty required to complete the instructional and non-instructional work its programming demands. Lakeland, quite literally, could not function if full-time faculty numbers declined at the rates that the college's proposal states are appropriate.

Additionally, the assumption that the full-time faculty was "right sized" in 2015 or that the distribution of full-time faculty was proportional to student credit hours in each program/department is invalid, resulting in proposed cuts that appear arbitrary and that fail to account for important factors, such as program duplication in the area (or lack thereof) and the number of sections (or student credit hours) currently taught by adjuncts. To compound this issue, the college has twice provided faculty with faulty data—proposing the initial cuts based on incomplete course listings for programs, incorrect faculty counts in departments, etc.

We support a thoughtful and inclusive examination of what makes sense for Lakeland's future—even if the results of that examination are difficult decisions—but the proposal offered by the college is rushed and fails to include significant stakeholders in the conversation. For example: page 32 of the state performance audit states, "It is possible that through a focused review of particularly low enrolled programs, the College may identify program offerings that no longer meet the needs of the community. In this instance, LKCC may determine it is appropriate to discontinue or pause the program. However, the goal of a comprehensive program review should not be for an isolated group to identify programs for elimination. Instead, it should involve multiple stakeholder groups including faculty, administrators, students, and the public and it should seek out ways to improve the overall impact of the College's programs. In instances

where fiscal stability is a concern, rather than cutting programs, an institution may be able to identify creative cost sharing solutions through the program review process.” There are multiple programs fully targeted by the proposed cuts, leading to their closure in a manner that does not follow the auditor’s recommendations.

It is the LFA's position, based on years of institutional knowledge, that the claim that the proposed cuts are a data-based decision is invalid, since the data was incomplete and in many cases incorrect.

Necessity of Full-Time Faculty

- *LCC full-time faculty represent top teaching talents from around the country and world.*
- *Adjunct hours and status are not sufficient to support students adequately.*
- *Replacing full-time faculty with part-time faculty does not help student/faculty ratio.*
- *Areas have specialty curriculum for which adjunct faculty cannot be reasonably located.*
- *Quality of instruction and/or the number of healthy sections offered will decline.*

The full-time faculty at Lakeland are outstanding. Many possess terminal degrees in their field and/or invaluable professional experience that uniquely equip them to prepare students for their continued education and careers. Full-time faculty at Lakeland are hired through a nationwide search process that has attracted faculty members from all over the country and world, ensuring that Lakeland students receive high-quality instruction that is not limited to the candidates already in Northeast Ohio.

Many of the proposed full-time faculty cuts are to departments and programs with multiple sections being taught by part-time faculty because student enrollment in those courses exceeds what full-time faculty can cover in their course loads (and overload). Laying off full-time faculty from these areas will result either in offering fewer sections of successful courses with high enrollments or in staffing those sections taught by eliminated full-time faculty with part-time faculty, who by the nature of their part-time status, lack the institutional knowledge, service obligations, and availability (i.e., office hours) to students that full-time faculty status provides. Additionally, replacing full-time faculty teaching loads with part-time faculty fails to address the student/faculty ratio used by Dr. Crooks to justify the proposed cuts.

In some departments and programs, full-time faculty possess specific areas of expertise and credentials that qualify them to teach certain curriculum—expertise and credentials that few others in Northeast Ohio possess. The credentials necessary for qualified instructors of advanced classes in Accounting, Business, Math, Biology, IT & CS, etc. are uncommon, and those who hold them typically have full-time jobs, making them unavailable during the times that work best for our students and/or unwilling to work at the part-time rate. If qualified instructors cannot be located as a result of full-time layoffs, courses that are vital to graduates in various health, technical, and business degree programs would be compromised, negatively impacting Lakeland’s student enrollment, completions, and, subsequently, state funding.

Loss of Non-Teaching Labor

- *Service full-time faculty provide outside of the classroom is immense and irreplaceable.*
- *Continuous improvement initiatives for accreditation will lack vital academic personnel.*

Full-time faculty do more than teach. They work as department chairs, serve on committees, perform administrative duties necessary for accreditation, advise student clubs, represent the college on state-wide committees and initiatives, and—in many cases—are available to students for office hours, tutoring, and mentorship well beyond posted office hours. Those who would be laid off as a result of the proposed cuts are department chairs, committee chairs, student club and honor society advisors, curriculum coordinators, assessment leaders, and more—all of which are vital to the success of the college and its students. For areas in which adjuncts are especially challenging to locate, there is a risk of full-time faculty not having the time or load capacity to serve as chairs while covering the department's necessary sections. We know that having faculty chairs (as opposed to deans) is important to the administration and the HLC and wish to avoid overcorrections to faculty numbers that would pose this foreseeable and unavoidable problem.

Lakeland is required to make immediate progress on a number of initiatives, including state transfer initiatives for curriculum across the college as well as course-level and co-curricular assessment. Without the leaders in the areas of curriculum and assessment—both institution-wide and within individual programs and departments—the institutional knowledge necessary to make reasonable progress on these initiatives will be lost, compromising the transferability of Lakeland courses and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation.

Loss of Institutional Knowledge

- *With retirements in the next few years, proposed cuts will wipe out some departments.*
- *Replacing faculty when this happens will be much more difficult than re-hiring staff was.*
- *Cuts to programs will impact enrollment in general studies feeder courses; vice versa.*

Many of the proposed cuts to full-time faculty will result in insufficient faculty in that program or department within one or two years. There are a number of faculty members on the verge of retirement but who are unable to do so this year. Cutting full-time faculty when significant retirements are on the horizon will decimate the resources and institutional knowledge and business intelligence that keep those areas functioning.

In some cases, the departments most threatened by the double impact of cuts and retirements are those with feeder courses for applied programs that Lakeland is continuing to offer. Conversely, many of the students who take general studies courses do so as part of their applied degree program curriculum. Cutting entire programs is likely to negatively affect overall enrollment numbers, just as compromising the availability or effectiveness of general studies courses will harm students in specialty degree programs.

When the large cut to staff and administration occurred this summer, offices vital to the functioning of the college were gutted, requiring the college to re-hire or re-fill some of the positions after letting people go. This is not a practice that can or should be repeated with the faculty. We cannot count on full-time faculty to be available for re-hire once released, and the appropriate process for hiring qualified full-time faculty requires a much longer timeline than the one for staff and administrative positions. It is also worth considering the Society for Human Resource Management estimates the average turnover cost of a new employee to be 6-9 months

of an employee's salary. Maintaining our existing, qualified full-time faculty benefits Lakeland in the long run, operationally and financially.

Negative Community Perception

- *After staff cuts and audit press, there is no good way to spin gutting the faculty.*
- *Community support is vital due to regular operating levies on Lake County ballots.*
- *Faculty, especially full-time, have the most direct impact on students and their success.*
- *U of Akron's huge faculty cuts in 2020 perpetuated the narrative of UA failing.*
- *Additional negative press and severed relationships compromises our reputation.*

Unfortunately, the community already has the impression that Lakeland is failing as a result of recent negative press regarding budget cuts and last year's performance audit. A substantial cut to full-time faculty will only further the existing narrative that the college and faculty have been working to combat, endangering Lakeland's future enrollment and the likelihood of Lake County supporting future operational levies. Students are hesitant to enroll when they fear the college is not going to remain open or when the faculty members they've developed meaningful connections with are suddenly absent, and the reality is that they have other options, whether Tri-C, Lorain, Cleveland State, or online programs.

We only have to look as far as the University of Akron (UA) for an example of the negative impact faculty cuts had on enrollment and the institution overall. In 2020, Akron eliminated 178 positions, including 96 full-time faculty members. While various reasons were given for the cuts, enrollment trends were the motivating factor.

Akron hoped that the cuts would bring the college out of a financial hole and restore confidence for prospective students that the university would still be able to deliver a quality education. But students and parents recognize that eliminating full-time faculty means relying more and more on part-time instructors, reducing course offerings, and eliminating programs. Almost five years later, UA is still facing a \$27 million deficit and has announced plans to lay off another 30 full-time faculty members in 2025. More faculty cuts will inevitably lead to more loss of enrollment and prestige in the community, creating a downward spiral that Lakeland would be wise to avoid.

In addition to Lakeland's reputation with taxpayers and students, we must also worry about our reputation within the local business and healthcare industries, whose partnerships with Lakeland and employment of our graduates are integral to the college and the community. Cutting programs, severing established relationships between faculty and their contacts in the community, and diluting the quality of the education that Lakeland can provide students can only result in a weakening of community partnerships when they need to be strengthened now more than ever.

Loss of Time and Money

- *Collective Bargaining Agreement: Article V, Section D, Item 1*
- *Collective Bargaining Agreement: Article III, Section B, Item 5*
- *Collective Bargaining Agreement Article V, Section D, Item 7*

The LFA's legal consultants believe that the proposed cuts to full-time faculty violate Article V, Section D, item 1 of the 2023-2026 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between LCC and the LFA, which states that full-time faculty already employed by the college have priority over part-time faculty except in "special and unusual circumstances.. Since "a general pattern of declining enrollment in the College...which has or will affect the College's ability to fulfill its academic goals and responsibilities" is listed on page 25 of the CBA as one of the justifications for a reduction in force, declining enrollment cannot be considered "special and unusual circumstances" in this case, and cuts to full-time faculty cannot be made in departments and programs where part-time faculty are already teaching sections or would have to staff sections vacated by full-time faculty layoffs.

Additionally, Article III, Section B, item 5 states that the college agrees that the ratio of student credit hours taught by full-time faculty to that taught by part-time faculty should not be below sixty percent to forty percent. If the number of part-time faculty holds steady or increases as a result of full-time layoffs, it would represent a concerted effort on the part of the college to move away from a contractually acknowledged and industry standard ratio.

Finally, Article V, Section D, item 7 of the CBA states that a discontinuation of a full-time faculty member's employment occurs when "the possibilities of reduction through normal attrition, leaves, and transfers have been exhausted." The LFA expects the college to give this contractual provision the full consideration it deserves and will be prepared to respond should it feel that such possibilities have not, in fact, been exhausted.

If necessary, the LFA will utilize the grievance process outlined in the CBA, resulting in an intense investment of time and money—money that we would rather see benefit students and the community by remaining in Lakeland coffers.

Risk-Mitigating Alternative Proposals

The LFA acknowledges the necessity of building a feasible path forward amid the pattern of low enrollment at Lakeland and at many other higher education institutions. We understand the emphasis that the 2024 state performance audit and the recent HLC mid-cycle review report placed on both college finances and student/faculty ratios.

That said, it took many years to put Lakeland in this situation, and it is unreasonable to expect to rectify it all at once or to think that such drastic measures won't cripple the college in other, potentially irreversible ways. The HLC and the state auditor know this and suggest plans for continuous improvement to be carried out over several years. To use their reports as justification for sudden and extreme cuts is disingenuous, and this document will show that it is possible to recover more than the \$2.5 million deficit without involuntary separations for faculty.

For all these reasons listed in the risks section, including and most especially the faulty logic and data underlying the proposed faculty cuts, must insist that extreme measures are inappropriate at this time. To avoid consequences that must almost certainly result from bad data and rushed decisions, we request that the administration commit to more measured, though still significant, progress toward short-term and long-term financial and staffing goals that allows Lakeland to deliver the education and engagement that the community expects.

With a mind toward continuous improvement, succession planning, and the long-term sustainability of Lakeland's academic offerings, the LFA offers the following alternative proposals, synthesized from those submitted by faculty members on behalf of individual programs and departments (attached).

Faculty Retirements

The HLC mid-cycle review states that Lakeland had 120 full-time faculty members in Spring 2024, and Dr. Ahuja's February 17, 2025 statement to the press noted 117. As of January 1, 2025, Lakeland has exactly 113 full-time faculty members. Of those, 15 have already announced their intent to leave Lakeland by the end of the 2024-2025 contract year or are not offering alternative proposals to the layoffs affecting their area.¹ This decrease from 117 in Fall 2024 to 98 for Fall 2025 represents 16% decline in just one year, making the largest single-year decline in full-time faculty numbers since at least 2001 (the last year that Lakeland's IPEDs data goes back to). And of the 98 full-time faculty members who would remain, another 6 have already submitted notices to human resources announcing their retirement during AY2025-2026² (with several more retirements highly anticipated but not yet official), creating at least a 21% decrease in full-time faculty over two years.

These departures alone represent a massive loss of institutional labor and knowledge, the burden of which falls to remaining faculty to ensure continuous quality instruction for students and service for the college. We understand that full-time faculty numbers need to decrease in response to a sustained period of low enrollment, but it has never been the practice at Lakeland

¹ See the "Spring & Summer 2025 Savings via Faculty Departures" spreadsheet in the following pages, just before the inventory of the department and program proposals.

² See the 2025-2026 Savings via Confirmed Retirements" spreadsheet.

(nor is it a standard practice in higher education at large) for full-time faculty numbers to fluctuate in direct relation to student ones. The number of full-time faculty at Lakeland has been decreasing since 2020 and will continue to do so at an even faster rate in the next few years due to a hiring burst that occurred in the mid 1990s.

This kind of progression of retirements benefits the college because senior faculty members earn more than their junior counterparts who would be laid off by the reduction in force. If the purpose of reducing the number of full-time faculty is to save money and improve Lakeland's finances, then fewer faculty departures should be necessary (leaving more faculty members to carry out vital teaching, administrative, and service duties) when those departures are retirements.

We know the pressure is on to right the ship at Lakeland. We know that both the HLC and state auditor indicated that 120 full-time faculty was not advisable/sustainable in the current climate. But neither the HLC nor the auditor expect overnight results in this regard. The auditor, in fact, provided multiple scenarios that the college might pursue related to faculty and cost savings, including an option that required a reduction of only 11 faculty members. That would leave 109 faculty according to Mr. Faber's calculations; we'll be well below that number in a matter of months through natural attrition.

Potential Savings via Reduced Loads

In an effort to accommodate Lakeland's immediate budget needs without resorting to cuts that jeopardize the long-term viability and continuity of their departments, several faculty members have expressed willingness to enter a temporary (up to one year) reduced load arrangement with the college.

This option addresses both the financial and enrollment challenges motivating the proposed faculty reduction. At reduced load (no lower than 50%), these faculty members would cost the college significantly less while also reducing the number of full-time faculty equivalent (FTE) loads.

As you will see in the individual proposals from departments, this option was developed and offered by a handful of faculty members, but we believe there are others who would be willing to work a reduced load until one of three criteria is met: 1) the next retirement in their department, 2) the department reaches an agreed upon number of student credit hours or number of adjuncts that warrants moving a reduced load faculty member back to their regular load, or 3) the end of the 2025-2026 contract. Potential savings resulting from this option are calculated on the attached "Potential Savings via Load Reduction" spreadsheet.

Additionally, there are faculty members with more seniority who are willing to enter into a similar reduced load/salary arrangement for the next academic year for the sake of their colleagues, department, and students. These figures have not been calculated but could be explored by the administration for even more potential savings that do not jeopardize the long-term success and sustainability of academic departments and programs.

These arrangements would save the college substantial space in the budget for next year, buying the college time for a more natural and institutionally healthy attrition via retirements the next year.³

Additional Considerations

In addition to the two significant proposals offered above, the LFA is more than willing to work with deans and other administrators to continue to identify and implement cost savings opportunities.

For example, the CBA does not specify a date by which faculty members must notify HR of their intent to retire. An MOU could be negotiated for 2025-2026 requiring faculty planning to retire by the end of the contract year to notify HR by a certain date, as early as mid-February. We anticipate several retirements beyond those already committed and suspect that early notice would be helpful to the college in realizing savings and planning for a balanced budget the next year.

Several faculty members possess skills and experience that would make them valuable assets to the college in staff or administrative roles if maintaining them as faculty is not possible. While we cannot confirm any individual’s willingness to accept such a transfer—temporary or otherwise—Article V, Section D, item 7 of the CBA specifically mentions transfers to other areas of the college as an appropriate avenue to be explored and “exhausted” to avoid the necessity of a RIF. Transfers are advisable and preferable to the alternative of losing the institutional knowledge and competence these faculty represent.

Conclusion

On behalf of the LFA, we appreciate that changes are needed at Lakeland. However, we are concerned with the lack of strategic vision that has led our college to this place. We are all aware of the cuts to staff and administrators that did not carefully involve a consideration of the impact on our institution, including the significant loss of institutional knowledge, processes, and support for our students and academic goals. We are hopeful that careful future changes will enable Lakeland to adjust and grow as we meet the needs of our students and community while embracing a collaborative spirit by harnessing the wealth of experience, dedication, and drive we need to thrive as a community college.

Continuing to have knowledgeable, highly credentialed full-time faculty across the college whose primary focus is teaching Lakeland students will continue to promote student retention and success, which benefit the College in many ways, including funding metrics at the state level. Gutting the faculty means taking away those existing relationships and support systems for students. Please, work with us to find a measured approach that protects Lakeland’s reputation and its ability to fulfill its mandate from the people of Lake County to provide students and the community with a high-quality education.

³ In highlighting the savings represented by faculty resignations and retirements, the LFA is not suggesting that positions do/will not need to be replaced.