

I found both the editorial you sent (and some other letters and such I found on the web) remarkably similar to the press reaction when we took downsizing actions such as closing down Michigan Media and later the undergraduate Journalism program. (Here, I might also note that we came very close to shutting down the University Press in 1986, but after I became provost, I met with a number of senior faculty and became persuaded that we should keep it alive with a \$500 K/year annual subsidy.) The newspapers would immediately jump on us with ad hominem attacks on individuals, planted by those most affected.

Other presidents of public universities have run into the same reaction when they attempted to focus resources—a particularly interesting case being Ken Keller at the University of Minnesota. Here they chose to focus on the renovations to the president's house and his office rather than the substance of his efforts to focus to build the quality of the institution.

Let me suggest both a near term and longer term strategy designed to transform what may appear like a crisis into a "strategic opportunity".

**Near Term Strategy:** Use this as a "teachable moment"—rather a 2x4 to get the mule's attention—through a series of carefully written op-ed pieces explaining what the University of Arkansas needs to do to become the quality of institution necessary for the state's future. Here, one can use the university press decision as a case study, noting difficulty of the decision to shut down the university press as an example of just how difficult yet important it is to set priorities. Although these op-ed pieces should be focused on providing a strategic framework, they also provide an opportunity to address the particular issue, noting that many distinguished universities have no inhouse press. It might also allow one to fire a warning shot across the bow of the media by suggesting that such cheap shots taken by the newspapers are not particularly constructive to a rational dialog, and that the public expects a more responsible consideration of the issues. Most of the focus, however, should be to explain why tough decisions will be necessary if Arkansas is to have a world-class university. (Although the local papers might not publish the series, it can be distributed to other papers around the state and put on the web.)

**Longer Term Strategy:** Clearly John needs to set up a structure that will enable difficult decisions to be made without drawing the president each time into the fray. Let me suggest the following approach:

First, he needs a tough provost, one willing to make tough decisions (after consultation with the president) and to take the heat. There is an old saying that the job of the provost is to say "no" so that the president can say "yes", on occasion, thereby preserving his political capital. If he cannot find a bright young turk, then perhaps finding an old salt, highly regarded and widely respected, but tough as nails and totally loyal to the president, is the best near term strategy.

Next, John needs a group that will help him weigh the pros and cons of difficult decisions, provide credibility for these decisions, and take some of the heat. At Michigan, during the 1980s we used the Budget Priorities Committee, a group of faculty, staff, and administrators (including two deans) appointed by the president and provost. This was the group that took on difficult assignments such as managing the program discontinuance review process. Although the executive officers (and, when necessary, the Regents) made the final decisions, this the Budget Priorities Committee provided both the credibility and the buffer.

Finally, John needs a strategic communications plan, one that provides the framework, the political umbrella, necessary for the difficult decisions and actions. Here, our Michigan experience is not so good, since we never had much capability to do this. But I still believe it is critical.

Hope this is helpful.