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Grad students join faculty in protesting CLAS plan

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More than 50 graduate students in UF's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences have denounced the college's budget plan as "irresponsible, impossible and unethical" in a letter to UF President Bernie Machen.

The letter came in response to the college's five-year spending plan designed to put CLAS back on track after its multimillion-dollar debt.

In the letter, dated Thursday and sent to state media and public officials, the students call for a public forum with UF administrators.

"I think it's disappointing that we haven't heard from President Machen, who made it his goal to be a Top 10 university," said Aaron Talbot, an English graduate student who signed the letter. "This completely contradicts that goal."

The letter states that CLAS' plan, which includes "a near college-wide freeze on hiring," would prevent UF from reaching its goal of becoming a Top 10 school because there would be fewer faculty, reduced resources and less diverse programs. These compromise the "intellectual core of the university," the letter states.

CLAS, the largest college at UF with one-third of the student population, teaches 48 percent of the credit hours at UF, the letter states.

"These budget numbers show that CLAS is not a priority for the university," the letter reads.

"It's not only something that just affects the English department," Talbot said. "If CLAS is perpetually underfunded, and it is the intellectual core of the university, then it is a university problem."

The letter also states that the budget plan does not include student input and contradicts the concept of shared governance - a decision-making process between faculty and administration - set forth in UF's mission statement.

Talbot said he hopes university administrators will hold a forum.

"I think the future of the university depends on it," he said.