



The Poverty Narrative Undercutting UD Education March 13, 2025

Each semester, faculty, staff, and students at the University of Delaware (UD) brace for the latest financial “crisis”—a narrative of scarcity used to justify cuts to academic departments, academic support and student services, and essential maintenance. As president of our faculty union, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP-UD), I am obliged to speak out about the continual chaos and damage to our educational mission.

In talking with faculty, students, and many administrators, I am struck by the common sense of frustration and the sincere desire for improvement. Things that used to work are broken. Yesterday, faculty heard [an assessment of the University’s financial condition from the AAUP-UD’s external consultant](#), and the message was clear:

- **UD cries poverty, yet its wealth has never been greater**
- The deficits we hear about are caused by the **diversion of academic resources** to new buildings, investments, and administrative spending.

COVID was of course the first crisis, resulting in hundreds of staff positions cut. [Faculty salary give-backs](#) will never be recovered. Academic support staff have been cut in half. **Temporary workers have replaced full-time employees** in student- and faculty-facing areas from maintenance to academic records.

The **Healthcare Crisis of February 2024** was the second. Facing a [\\$20-40-million](#) shortfall, we were directed to curtail [hiring, conference travel, use of research start-up funds](#), and more. [Two stealth policies](#) posted in June codified Institutional sweeping of department reserves. UD lost 59 bargaining-unit faculty between January 2024 and January 2025. Researchers without needed staff are doing their own grants paperwork. The effect on early-career researchers is yet to be seen.

The fall 2024 **Tuition Shortfall Crisis** required [“further cost mitigation of \\$10-\\$20M in partnership with the academic sector.”](#) New budget allocations put virtually every academic department in deficit, turning graduate student tuition remission into an unfunded expense. We were told that “financial aid packages to graduate students [...] [weren't necessarily mission aligned.](#)”

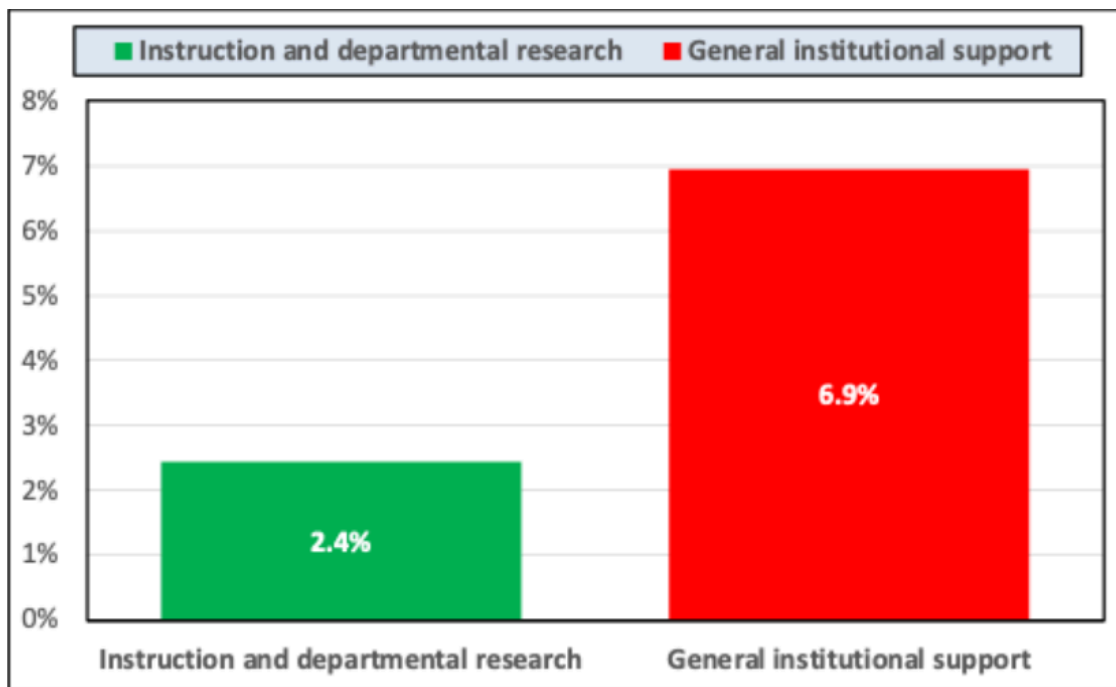
Amid continual uncertainty and churn, healthy, revenue-generating programs are strangled as chairs must choose between funding graduate students or course offerings. Without graduate assistants, meaningful research and foundational courses are at risk. Student organizations, graduate conference travel, and undergraduate teaching assistant budgets have been slashed, degrading the student experience.

In December we started hearing about the [Deferred Maintenance Crisis](#). According to the report, UD spent **\$923.1 million on new buildings and renovations from 2018-2024, much of which came from operating resources like tuition**. Yet buildings in our historic core are visibly deteriorating, some student dorms lack air conditioning, classrooms and labs are cramped and ill-equipped, and black mold and HVAC problems shutter offices and resource centers.

Students see what is happening. Faculty and staff see what is happening. Department chairs see what is happening. And, **believe it or not, this situation is entirely unnecessary**. Even as it becomes harder to meet our obligations to students, independent analysis shows us that despite lackluster fundraising and investment performance, **UD is wealthier than ever before, with accumulated** wealth at an all-time high of \$4.65 billion and spendable net assets of \$1.5 billion in 2024.

UD's president is consistently [among the top 5 most highly compensated public university presidents](#). Most other university presidents with this level of compensation lead institutions with a medical system. [Executive compensation at UD has risen 23% since 2017](#) (UD IRS Form-990, Schedule J). We have added almost 600 high-dollar management, finance, and other administrative positions since 2017 (IPEs). From the external report, faculty will learn that the University of Delaware is not poor—**it is choosing to starve its academic core**.

Average Annual Expense Increase Between 2018-2024

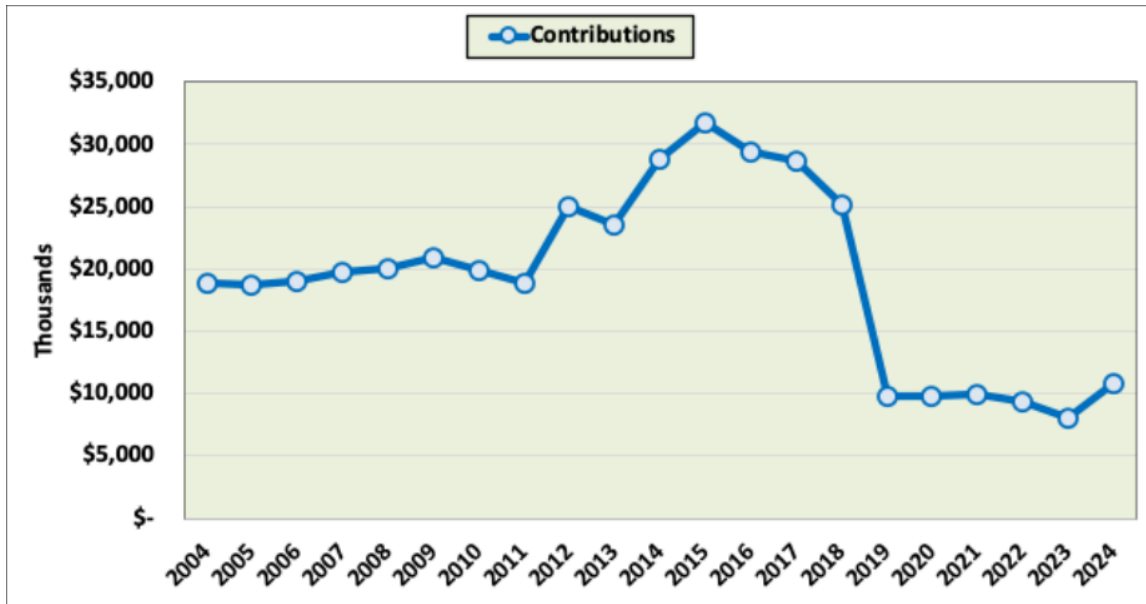


Source: UD Consolidated Financial Statements

We also heard yesterday about risky “alternative” investments, poor investment returns, and markedly poor fundraising. As the report states: “Although every campus has a chief development officer and a development staff, the most important person in soliciting

donations is the University's President. The buck stops here; and the fact that contributions are still **far below the level attained in 2015** is problematic.”

Fundraising, 2004–2024



Source: UD Consolidated Financial Statements

At the March 2025 Faculty Senate meeting, the **Research Funding Crisis** was declared. This is another opportunity to strip us of our scant remaining resources.

But the research funding crisis **could be a better kind of opportunity: a time to restore investment in academics and reinvest in our existing historic infrastructure.** We could take a hard look at the return on investment for new buildings, pricey consultants, and executive compensation.

The AAUP-UD is gaining members daily as frustrations mount. If you are not yet one of us, please consider this a great time to join.

It is time to reject UD's false poverty narrative. The AAUP-UD will continue to engage in constructive dialogue with partners across the University to protect the integrity of our academic mission and, in doing so, strengthen our institution.

Sincerely,

Persephone Braham, President
[AAUP-UD](#) | [Join now](#)