When Hurricane Katrina whipped through New Orleans late last summer, Loyola University New Orleans escaped the bulk of nature's wrath. While many faculty and staff members suffered personal losses, the campus itself survived largely intact. Less than four months after the hurricane hit, the university was able to throw open its doors and start the new year on a hopeful note.

But that note has already begun to fade. In the fall, Loyola's president had announced the need for a strategic plan to help the university rebound from Katrina. Freshman enrollment, he said, was expected to plummet this August, down from the usual 850 students to 600 or 700. And without major changes, the university would face a $10-million shortfall.

The resulting plan, created by the provost's office and approved by the Board of Trustees in May, calls for the dismissal of 17 tenured or tenure-track faculty members, the elimination of 14 academic programs, and the suspension of 12 other programs. Many professors have responded to the plan with anger and disbelief, saying that if their administrators can use a crisis as their excuse, other colleges could be next.

Some professors complain they had no real say in a plan that they dismiss as misguided, ill-conceived, and even discriminatory. They accuse administrators of using faulty data about programs' expenses, revenues, and enrollment, and of pushing the plan through too fast. They warn that the cuts may...
compound some problems: Students will not be able to complete their majors, and student recruiting for next year will suffer.

Said one professor of the plan: "Now you're creating a second Katrina."

Administrators say change is hard, but necessary. The strategic plan had been in the works for several years, they say, but Katrina demanded decisive action. "This university will emerge from this much stronger," says the provost, Walter Harris Jr.

Some faculty members sympathize, saying administrators did the best they could under tough circumstances. "This is a difficult time, and the administration has to act, and act forthrightly," says Alfred Lawrence Lorenz, a journalism professor.

But the American Association of University Professors has warned Loyola officials they are making a big mistake. The group has created a special committee to look into post-Katrina restructuring plans at various New Orleans colleges. Of particular concern are administrative actions at Tulane University, the University of New Orleans, and Loyola, where committee members worry officials are using the hurricane as an excuse to flout the institutions' own policies.

Jordan E. Kurland, the AAUP's associate general secretary, has told Loyola's president that the organization objects to the cuts and dismissals there. He points out that the university's own policies require such actions to be sanctioned by an appropriate faculty body. That never happened, he notes. In fact, faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences recorded a 71-2 vote of no-confidence in the provost and his two deputies in May.

Mr. Kurland suspects that Loyola administrators are unfairly using Katrina as a justification for getting rid of professors and programs. "What's the phrase? A crisis is a terrible thing to waste?" says Mr. Kurland, who will visit the campus in August along with other committee members. "There's no crisis they're facing of which I'm aware."

Wrong Path?
Loyola's president, the Rev. Kevin W. Wildes, a Jesuit priest, is confident that he is doing the right thing. In an open letter dated April 10, the same day the university released the plan -- dubbed "Pathways Toward Our Second Century" -- he wrote: "I am of the firm belief that we are charting the proper course to serve students as we look forward to beginning our second century in 2012. The methodology used to formulate the plan was both comprehensive and deliberate."

Some faculty members say the only thing deliberate about the Pathways plan was the lack of inclusiveness and transparency surrounding its creation. Not so, says Mr. Harris, the provost. "We allowed more input than any other university," he says, referring to other institutions in the city that have restructured themselves in Katrina's wake.

Mr. Harris released a set of criteria in January by which his office would judge all university programs. He also asked the university's deans to rank the programs in their own colleges.

But the plan kept some programs the deans had ranked at the bottom of the pile, while it cut others that
had been ranked closer to the top. "There was no method to the madness," says Connie L. Rodriguez, an associate professor of classics, whose program was ranked poorly but was saved.

The programs that were cut include computer science, elementary and secondary education, and several concentrations within the communications major: broadcast journalism, broadcast production, communication studies, and film studies. The plan also split the College of Arts and Sciences into two new colleges, one focusing on the liberal arts and natural sciences, the other on behavioral and social sciences.

The plan's purpose, according to officials, is to refocus the university's resources on its strengths: In post-Katrina New Orleans, it cannot be everything to everybody. Mr. Harris says the president communicated regularly with the rest of the university about the effort, and solicited advice along the way, including through an internal president's advisory committee made up of nine administrators and staff members, two students, and three elected faculty members.

Mary I. Blue, an associate professor and head of broadcast production, was one of those faculty representatives. She says the advisory committee only met about four times, even though its members were originally told it would meet as often as once a week.

Ms. Blue, who is one of the 17 professors being dismissed, says the president handed out drafts of the plan and asked the group for comments, but never really incorporated their suggestions. And, she says, there was never any discussion of individual academic programs. "This was like a sucker punch," she says.

The program review should not have been done by the provost's office, Ms. Blue argues, but by an elected faculty body, in line with the AAUP's guidelines and Loyola's own policies. The university's faculty handbook reads: "A proposal to discontinue a program or department of instruction will be evaluated by the Standing Council for Academic Planning, which will apply the criteria established by the University Senate." The senate, she complains, did not develop the criteria. Instead, it was a top-down affair.

The AAUP's Mr. Kurland wrote to Father Wildes last month urging him not to go ahead with the Pathways plan because of the "strong faculty opposition." Father Wildes says he is confident that he has followed the AAUP's policies.

Mr. Kurland is incredulous. "Not only do the faculty not give it a green light," he says, "the senate declined 17 to 2 to support the Pathways plan." Instead, he notes, they wanted to table it until November. He said Loyola officials are "moving to significantly change the programs, the curriculum, and to terminate tenure on a basis that is just wrong on their own policies and their own standards."

The special committee sees a "flagrant denial" of policies that call for faculty approval when making fundamental educational changes, says Mr. Kurland. "We've never seen anything like this."

Neither has Stephen M. Scariano, a professor of mathematics and computer science and a member of the president's advisory committee. He says the advisory committee's time was "ill spent and there was nothing of substance brought before the committee" regarding academic programs or any restructuring.
He also calls the analysis of program data "pedestrian" and the plan "sloppily" and "hastily done." Others have called the data flat out wrong.

Administrators insist their data are correct. They say they relied on a variety of sources, including outside studies and internal figures from the registrar's office. Regardless of the accuracy of the data, professors say many of the cuts are not even supported by the provost's own numbers.

Take broadcast journalism and broadcast production. According to the provost's data tables, more students major in those concentrations -- 48 combined -- than in print journalism and photojournalism, which have only 22 combined. But the broadcast programs were cut, while print and photojournalism were retained. Professors do not understand the logic.

When asked about that data, Father Wildes says, "This is where I'm terrible at remembering the specifics of things." He did say that the decisions were based on factors besides just numbers. Mr. Harris says they kept the print programs because they have won awards and have a great reputation. John M. Cornwell, one of Mr. Harris's two assistant provosts, says it really came down to money: The broadcast programs, which rely on pricey equipment, cost the university $150,000 a year, he says, so they were too expensive to continue.

But the head of broadcast journalism takes issue with that figure. "Where this comes from I don't know," says Nancy M. Dupont, the associate professor who leads the program. She is another of the 17 professors being dismissed. Mr. Cornwell says the cost figures come from the dean's office and the programs' own records, but Ms. Dupont says the number is way overblown.

The broadcast programs are supported by grants, endowments, and student fees, she says. And the university spent $200,000 to upgrade equipment in 2003, but she says that kind of spending happens maybe once a decade. As for the program's national reputation, she says, it is "flawless." Recent graduates have landed jobs at CNN, CBS News, and NBC News, both nationally and locally.

Arguments about money, say some faculty members, are misplaced to begin with, since officials say they are basing the decisions foremost on educational considerations. Some professors don't understand why Loyola, which has a healthy $325-million endowment, cannot bump up the annual draw on the interest to 8 percent from its current 5 percent. Such a change could be for just a few years, easing the budget pressure.

Officials say this would be irresponsible. At that withdrawal rate, they might have to touch the principal, and not just the investment income, and they say that, besides, it would not be enough money.

Other faculty members point out that the university is due millions of dollars in business-interruption insurance. Father Wildes says that money, which he estimates at $5-million, is not coming anytime soon since the insurance company is fighting the claim.

In a May 22 letter, a few days after the Board of Trustees approved the Pathways plan, Father Wildes wrote another open letter to the university. He defended his decisions and expressed confidence in the provost, the process, and the plan. The closing paragraph has especially riled some faculty members. Father Wildes wrote, "The work of planning and moving the University forward … is a work, I believe,
that is part of God's hopes for the making of a better world."

"I'm so lucky to be around somebody who knows the mind of God," says Ms. Blue.

Ms. Dupont is likewise upset by the president's tone. "One of the things that has really killed me emotionally is that this has been put in the terms of 'This is God's will,'" she says. "It's always God, God, God. … This is not God's will. This is the will of a bunch of people. It's offensive." (Father Wildes says he has never said the plan is God's will.)

**More Time**

Professors say the university should have given everyone more time to digest the plan. In April officials released a revised version of program criteria. They gave a faculty body charged with reviewing the Pathways plan eight days to respond. Officials also told the group that if it wanted to recommend keeping a program slated for elimination, it would have to come up with equivalent cost savings.

Faculty committees complained that was not enough time to review the plan thoroughly and that the data was inadequate. The timetable, says María E. Calzada, a mathematics professor and member of the standing committee, was "ridiculous."

"We were not given a chance to do things by our own faculty handbook," she says. Still, the standing committee came up with several suggested revisions and cost-saving measures. But officials did not take most of those suggestions, and the plan was approved by trustees on May 19.

Father Wildes is not particularly bothered that the plan has upset so many professors. "They gave me few alternatives," he says. He also says that dozens of other professors have privately expressed their support for it.

"Change is hard," he says.

The provost stands with the president. Mr. Harris says officials followed university policies and the time allotted for faculty review was "adequate." He dismisses the vote of no confidence by the faculty of arts and sciences. "People got caught up in the heat of the moment," he says.

Some faculty members are giving administrators the benefit of the doubt. Katherine H. Adams, an English professor, says people outside New Orleans don't understand the impact the hurricane has had on the campus and the city. "These are very scary times," she says. "You've got to give administrators a right to make decisions a little more quickly and with a little less faculty input."

George E. Capowich, an assistant professor of sociology, thinks the plan is thoughtful. "It focuses our resources in areas that are strengths, in areas that are consistent with a liberal-arts university," he says.

Mr. Capowich, whose program will remain intact but will move to one of the newly created colleges, says splitting arts and sciences makes sense. Currently, he says, too many disparate programs are under one umbrella. It will be easier to manage professors and programs with two separate administrative structures.
Anthony Decuir, associate dean of the music school, says he is still ambivalent about some of the program cuts but that waiting a few more months will not change the situation. "I don't know if there ever is a good time" to make cuts, he says. "It's like recentering your investments. You have to do it every so often."

Professors who object to the plan understand that some program cuts are required; the process is their biggest problem. Ms. Rodriguez, the professor of classical studies, says, "If they had given us shared governance in this, if they had been transparent … this would not be an issue." She says that professors would have understood the need for serious action: "I think we could have made constructive decisions … to help the university through this."

By Piper Fogg