



Ron Leadbetter and Ilsa Schwarz discuss the UT Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology at Long's last week. Leadbetter, running for District 18 state representative, pledged to help the Department if he's elected.



Carl Asp and Ilsa Schwarz represent the Department at Long's. Asp, a professor emeritus, taught for 40 years at UT. Schwarz is the Department's current head.

Making a case for ASP

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By Nick Frantz

Several supporters of the UT Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology (ASP) came to Long's (Drug Store, in Knoxville) last week. Head of Department Ilsa Schwarz, professor emeritus Carl Asp, former UT general counsel Ron Leadbetter and City Council representative Barbara Pelot each put up a strong defense for the Department, slated to be eliminated in budget cuts.

"I think this was a decision that was made and then they tried to find facts to support the decision," Schwarz said. "The whole budget falls apart if they have to have a clinic (which a contract requires UT to keep running) without the students working it for free.

"The numbers they've been presenting are accurate but they misrepresent. We don't run at a deficit. We don't subsidize health care. We contribute about \$800,000 back to the university, including tuition and fees and that doesn't include how much we save the state in TennCare costs."

Asp noted that the [Department](#) grew from five master's students to 225 doctoral students in his tenure.

"All the UT presidents have talked about Knoxville being their flagship campus," he said. "It's more diverse and better than the others. Well, if you start cutting programs like this, it's just another university. Not a flagship."

The most frustrating thing, from his standpoint, is the lack of communication from top UT leadership.

"They didn't meet with the [Faculty Senate](#). They didn't meet with Ilsa or anyone in the Department," he said. "The President, the Chancellor, the Dean, they don't seem to be interested in listening to people."

Schwarz said that the news came as a shock to the Department.

“Why wouldn’t they talk to the Department heads in Arts and Sciences?” she asked. “They are some of the brightest, most talented problem solvers in the country. I would think they could come up with some ideas on how to cut costs without eliminating programs.”

The Department was also listed at the top of the new capital plan six months ago, slated for a new building near the Lake Avenue parking garage in order to make room for athletics in their current offices in South Stadium Hall.

“How does a program go from the top priority for any new construction to so unimportant that it can be eliminated?” she asked.

[Leadbetter](#), also running for State Representative in District 18, said that he saw first-hand how efficient the Department is.

“We don’t need to be eliminating government departments that do a good job, especially those that help serve the community and teach our students,” he said. “There are lots of areas of inefficiency in government, this isn’t one of them.”

[Pelot](#), who actually was a client at the clinic in the 1970s, said that City Council was considering passing a resolution supporting the Department.

“The people at UT need to know how serious the city and the community is about keeping these programs,” she said.

In the end, the picture Schwarz paints of Knoxville without the Department and its fully-staffed clinic is pretty bleak.

“The immediate effect would be that people wouldn’t be able to get the services they need here in Knoxville,” she said. “They would have to find some place in Atlanta or Nashville or who knows where to get help.

“Then, further down the line, schools and health care here in Knoxville wouldn’t have the caliber or the number of audiologists and speech pathologists they have now.”

That would further hamper service in a field that is already short-handed.

“At [Patricia Neal](#), 90 percent of their ASP staff graduated from our Department. All of the ones at [UT Medical Center](#) did,” Schwarz said. “Where are they going to come from if we’re not around anymore?”

The [Board of Trustees](#) voted to move the elimination decision to October in order to study the issue more and solicit input from the Faculty Senate and, hopefully, the Department and community.

“I think the solution has to be a financial one,” Schwarz said. “And if the university as a whole has to take a hit, we’re more than willing to take more than our fair share. We just want to make a case for our Department.”

For more info on the Department and efforts to save it, visit www.saveutasp.org.

[Click here for the full July 7 Shopper-News](#). Thank you for writing this article, Nick!

All content and photos courtesy of the Shopper-News.