



WKU PRESIDENT **TIMOTHY C. CABONI**

Timothy C. Caboni, a 1994 Western Kentucky University graduate, returned to the Hill on July 1, 2017, as WKU's 10th president. Shortly after assuming the president role, Caboni launched a comprehensive strategic planning process aimed at developing a roadmap for the University's next decade of growth. Thus, WKU's 2018-2028 strategic plan, *Climbing to Greater Heights*, was finalized in summer 2018, and its implementation is well underway.

President Caboni quickly generated a renewed institutional focus on student-centeredness, applied research, recruitment, retention and growing partnerships within WKU's 27-county service region and beyond. Of particular importance to President Caboni is WKU's responsibility to advance the City of Bowling Green, the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the world by inspiring innovation, elevating communities and transforming lives.

A number of key initiatives were launched during President Caboni's first five years at WKU, including the Summer Scholars program; the Intercultural Student Engagement Center Academy; the Burch Institute; the First Year Village; The Commons at Helm Library; the Opportunity Fund; The Innovation Campus; centralized advising; revised admissions standards; and a comprehensive academic program review. The intentional groundwork laid through the strategic plan and these initiatives, supported by collective University-wide efforts under President Caboni's leadership, has generated significant positive momentum and record-breaking successes at WKU.

Since his arrival in 2017, President Caboni has overseen campus improvement projects totaling \$392 million. In early 2018, he dedicated Ogden College Hall, which houses many of WKU's science disciplines, and opened Hilltopper Hall later that fall. President Caboni also championed the construction of WKU's First Year Village, which opened in fall 2021 and is home to many of the University's Living Learning Communities (LLCs). Additionally, The Commons at Helm Library opened its doors to the campus community in the spring 2022 semester. This unique, modern, multipurpose facility transformed a traditional campus library into an intellectual hub where students, faculty and staff gather to share ideas and engage in active learning. In 2022, work will begin to construct a state-of-the-art home for the Gordon Ford College of Business. Additionally, during the summer of 2022, President Caboni announced a significant investment in Cherry Hall to facilitate needed preservation work as well as a reimagining of one of campus's most iconic structures. Other projects of note include improvements to existing athletics facilities, as well as the construction of new facilities, to benefit WKU's football, men's and women's golf, soccer, softball, baseball and men's and women's basketball programs.

In the area of recruitment, the fall 2021 incoming class boasted the highest GPA in the institution's history, and in fall 2020 the University celebrated the largest one-year increase in the number of incoming students during the past three decades. At the start of his third year on the Hill, President Caboni announced bold changes to the University's scholarship program, increasing institutional aid by \$5.2 million. The newly revamped freshman scholarship model, coupled with aggressive affordability marketing and outreach, led to nearly 85% of the incoming class receiving merit awards to help fund their education (rising from 39% in 2019). Since President Caboni's arrival on campus, scholarships awarded to students have risen \$18.5 million, a 36% increase.

In just four years (AY 2016-17 to AY 2020-21), WKU's first-to-second-year student retention increased 2.9 percentage points, and underrepresented minority (URM) retention jumped 8.1 percentage points - both representing the largest four-year increases in WKU's history. First-to-second-year retention among low-income students has also experienced significant increases, jumping 5.6 percentage points in four years.

Western Kentucky University's fall 2021 first-time, first-year class returned the following spring in record fashion. Overall, 90.9% of first-time, first-year students who were enrolled at WKU for the fall 2021 semester returned in spring 2022, a 4.6 percentage point increase in just over four years. Retention (fall 2021 to spring 2022) among underrepresented minority students rose to 90.3%, representing a nearly 10 percentage point increase during the previous four years. Fall 2021 first-year students who participated in WKU's Living Learning Communities, housed primarily in the First Year Village at WKU, were retained at a rate of 95.2%, which is 5.9 percentage points higher than non-LLC participants.

Beyond these remarkable recruitment and retention successes, WKU's six-year graduation rate rose to 57.4% in the 2020-2021 academic year - the highest six-year graduation rate ever at the University. During the same time, WKU achieved the highest URM and low-income six-year graduation rates since tracking began 10 years ago. URM six-year graduation rates have increased 10 percentage points since the 2016-2017 academic year, and low-income six-year graduation rates have increased 5.3 percentage points.

With President Caboni at the helm, more students are choosing WKU because it's been made more attractive and more accessible than ever before; more students stay and complete their degrees because of the growth and enhancement of its targeted student-support structure; and more graduates are choosing to remain in Kentucky because of the growing partnerships in the University's 27-county service region and beyond.

Additionally, in fall 2019, President Caboni restructured the University's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) team. In 2022, WKU tied for the highest score among Kentucky's public, four-year institutions on the Council on Postsecondary Education's (CPE) diversity, equity and inclusion report. WKU increased its Campus Pride Index star rating, receiving a 4.5 out of 5 in the fall of 2021, a three star increase in just two years. Additionally, in summer 2022, the University won an American Association of State Colleges and Universities Excellence and Innovation award for its ONE WKU Campaign, launched in 2020, which comprehensively drives DEI efforts across campus.

Under President Caboni's leadership, the University has also experienced significant fundraising success. Shortly after arriving at WKU in 2017, President Caboni announced the creation of the WKU Opportunity Fund, an effort to support WKU students experiencing financial difficulties. In just four years, the fund surpassed its initial goal of \$50 million, and in 2021, President Caboni announced an even more ambitious \$100 million goal. The Opportunity Fund has already grown to \$70.5 million, resulting in the creation of 184 endowed scholarships. During President Caboni's first five years at WKU, the University raised nearly \$164 million, capping the most successful decade of fundraising in WKU's history in June 2022, totaling almost \$295.6 million.

President Caboni, who holds a PhD in higher education leadership and policy from Vanderbilt University, served as the vice chancellor for Public Affairs at the University of Kansas for six years. Prior to that he was associate dean of the Peabody College of Education & Human Development at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

As the vice chancellor at KU, Dr. Caboni led public affairs for KU's four campuses and the KU Medical Center. He served as the principal spokesman and coordinated the communication activities of the University with those of the KU Alumni Association, KU Endowment and Kansas Athletics, Inc. Dr. Caboni oversaw the communications, marketing and advocacy efforts of the University and coordinated KU's legislative agenda at all government levels, championing issues that include research funding, higher education policy and health care. He also was responsible for the operations of Kansas Public Radio and was associate professor of educational leadership and policy in the School of Education.

Dr. Caboni was an active member of the Lawrence, Kansas, community, serving on the board of the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce and the Joint Economic Development Commission of Lawrence and Douglas County as well as the boards of the Lawrence Art Center and the Lied Center for the Performing Arts.

As associate dean at Vanderbilt, Dr. Caboni oversaw the Peabody College's 21 professional graduate degree programs and graduate and professional financial aid for the college, and he led outreach, partnership and program development efforts for the college as well as communications and admissions. His leadership contributed to the school's rise to No. 1 in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of graduate schools of education for three consecutive years.

President Caboni is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana, and received a bachelor's degree in speech communication and rhetoric from Louisiana State University. He earned a master's degree in corporate and organizational communication from WKU. His higher education professional experience includes alumni relations, fundraising, prospect research, teaching, academic administration, communications, marketing and government relations. He has published nearly 30 articles and one book. His current research is focused on use of data-based decision-making in higher education fundraising.

President Caboni is married to Kacy Schmidt Caboni, who was director of development and team leader for the School of Business with the Kansas University Endowment. She was instrumental in the construction of Capitol Federal Hall, the new home of the KU business school, funded entirely through private philanthropy. In addition to serving as WKU's First Lady, Kacy is director of principal gifts and special initiatives in the WKU Division of Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement. She currently oversees the WKU Opportunity Fund.