

http://www.bgdailynews.com/news/retiring-wku-provost-gives-last-lecture/article_9db838d7-b199-5849-8550-ee455da59611.html

Retiring WKU provost gives last lecture

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 58 min ago



Retiring Western Kentucky University Provost David Lee speaks during his last lecture before he retires June 30. Lee first came to WKU in 1975 to teach history. Before becoming provost, Lee was the dean of WKU's Potter College of Arts and Letters for more than 20 years.

AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com

When Claire Bellar remembers U.S. history professor David Lee, she sees him as an educator who changed her life.

“His main goal is his students,” Bellar said.

She said she’s carried Lee’s example into her work teaching social studies at Warren East High School.

Bellar attended Lee’s final lecture Tuesday as Western Kentucky University’s provost at Augenstein Alumni Center. Lee, who came to WKU in 1975, will retire effective June 30.

Before becoming provost and vice president of academic affairs in 2015, Lee was dean of WKU’s Potter College of Arts and Letters for 23 years.

When Lee came to WKU after completing his doctorate at Ohio State University, teaching was near the bottom of his priority list, falling behind gaining tenure and publishing a book.

That changed as Lee began to work more closely with students.

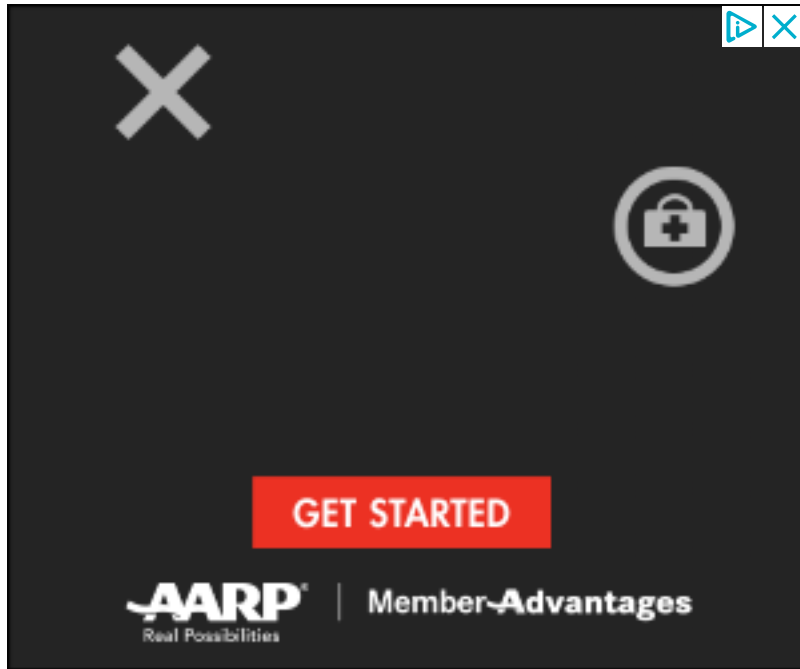
“It was pretty clear that the commonwealth needed more folks with a better education and for a great many of my students, a great many of our students, WKU offered the only possible ticket to a college degree,” Lee said.

As Lee tried to figure out what he wanted to do with his teaching career, he turned to Kentucky novelist and poet Wendell Berry, who’s described education as more than just job training.

“Its proper use is to enable citizens to live lives that are economically, politically, socially and culturally responsible,” Lee said, quoting Berry. “A proper education enables young people to put their lives in order.”

In an interview, Lee said a focus on practical fields such as science and math aren’t enough.

“A practical education by itself doesn’t really prepare folks for a rapidly changing world,” he said, adding that the humanities can help expand students’ perspectives and creativity.



Lee also shared concerns about the state of higher education and public education funding in Kentucky, calling public education one of democracy’s greatest achievements.

Looking ahead, he said he’s confident WKU can adapt to whatever challenges the higher education landscape might bring.

“Much of our history is the story of adapting to new circumstances and changing to meet the needs of our students,” he said.

When asked what he considers to be his greatest accomplishments, Lee said he was grateful to be involved in hiring talented scholars and teachers over the course of his career.

Bellar, who recently received a \$24,000 James Madison teaching fellowship, credits Lee for supporting her as a reference. The fellowship, which is only offered to one teacher per state, supports secondary teachers seeking to teach the U.S. Constitution.

“He has supported me in every step of the way,” she said. “I could not have done it without him.”

– *Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.*

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.