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WKU president champions pay raises, academic efforts

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Aug 24, 2018



President Timothy Caboni speaks during the WKU Faculty and Staff Convocation on Friday, August 24, 2018, at Van Meter Hall. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Austin Anthony

After rounds of budget and job cuts, Western Kentucky University employees will see more money in their paychecks starting early next year, and students will see several new academic initiatives, such as an online bachelor's degree program geared toward adult learners throughout Kentucky.

That was the message WKU President Timothy Caboni gave to faculty and staff Friday during his annual convocation address in Van Meter Hall.

"It certainly wasn't how I envisioned beginning my tenure at WKU," Caboni said of the cuts, describing them as tough but necessary. "I can't tell you how proud I am of the way our campus responded. And yes, we bent as a university, but we did not break."

During his speech, Caboni affirmed the university's commitment to a 4 percent salary increase pool.

All employees hired on or before July 1 this year will receive a 2 percent salary increase Jan. 1 and will be eligible for up to a 4 percent merit increase.

"It is important that we support all of our employees with a reasonable cost-of-living increase, but it is equally important to reward those employees who are performing at the highest levels," Caboni said, according to a copy of his speech.

Employee sick leave benefits will also be enhanced starting this year.

"This is a meaningful quality of work-life change that is important to our WKU family and we will implement it this fall," Caboni said.

WKU is also moving forward with its new budget model.

"The model used for the past 20 years no longer works in today's realities," Caboni said, adding the new model will be studied before it's fully implemented next year.

The model articulates and rewards the university's goals and "empowers our deans and academic leaders across the campus to be innovative, entrepreneurial and creative," Caboni said.

"Let me be clear – this new budget model is not a formula that eliminates decision-making," he said. "It is a way for us to make transparent for the entire university community how we invest and spend our scarce resources, the true costs of our support and auxiliary units and where we spend our dollars."

Caboni also encouraged the campus to begin implementing the university's new strategic plan, which has been in development by stakeholder groups for months and was recently approved by the board of regents. Although the plan can't reflect everything the campus wanted included, "I would like for you to identify the portions of the plan that resonate with you and connect to your daily work," Caboni said.

He urged faculty and staff to work toward the university's new "80-60 plan," which will push for 80 percent retention and a 60 percent graduation rate.





To help achieve that, WKU will offer students more resources. Caboni announced a \$450,000 gift from The James Graham Brown Foundation to the WKU Opportunity Fund.

The gift will create the WKU Center for Academic Resources and Success, or WKU CARES, which will provide sustained support for 200 first-generation, low-income and underrepresented minority students.

“It will serve as the primary resource for academic support with access to mentoring, tutoring, financial assistance, and other barriers that prevent these students from entering or from persisting once they get here,” Caboni said.

WKU also plans to target regional, adult learners with a new online Workforce Administration bachelor’s degree program. The program launches this fall and is designed for adults who’ve earned an associate of science degree.

“This 100 percent online program will allow individuals to complete a bachelor’s degree in 15 months,” Caboni said. “This degree is connected to four areas that are in tremendous demand, particularly in the regional markets we serve in Owensboro, Elizabethtown and Glasgow, and it aligns well with the governor’s expanded Work Ready Scholarship initiative.”

Caboni noted the program will be available for \$7,500, which he said was “the lowest per-credit-hour rate of any four-year institution in the state.”

All of this aligns with Caboni's vision for WKU.

“So, the story I want told about this year is that we focused like a laser on the things that will help our students succeed, that will help our campus community succeed and that will help our region succeed,” he said.

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