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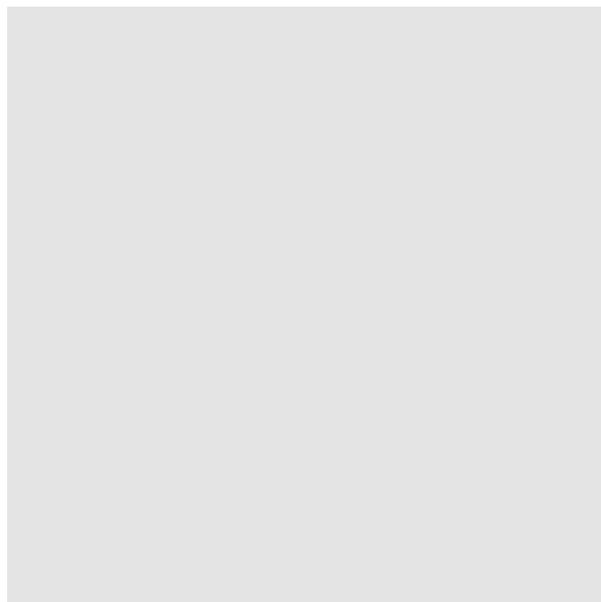
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WKU's regents approve 10-year strategic plan

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Aug 3, 2018



Timothy Caboni

Michael Reaves/Special to the Daily News

Western Kentucky University is moving forward with a 10-year strategic plan that aims to transform students' experience, improve diversity on campus, raise money for a \$50 million student financial aid fund, revisit employee compensation and introduce a new budget model.

WKU's Board of Regents approved the plan Friday during its quarterly meeting.

WKU President Timothy Caboni described the plan as a blueprint that “will help set the tone for how the university climbs to greater heights in the next decade.”

Under the wide-ranging plan, WKU will adopt a more centralized advising approach offering counseling on students’ “financial, mental, physical and social wellness.” Students will also create a Personal and Professional Development plan that will guide them in selecting a career pathway.

Much of the board’s discussion of the plan took place Thursday during its annual retreat. However, faculty regent and mathematics professor Claus Ernst raised faculty concerns Friday about having a diminished role in the advising process going forward.

“I received a couple emails from faculty last night,” he told the board. “There is a great deal of concern from faculty that this centralized advising might actually hurt academic advising.”

In his response, Caboni acknowledged the faculty’s concerns. He reiterated comments he made about the plan during the retreat Thursday.

“If what we had been doing was working, our persistence and retention rate would not be where it is today,” he said, noting that WKU will partner with its academic colleges in revisiting its advising approach.

“This is not just course-taking advice,” he said. “This is about helping make sure our students have access to, in a single location, all the services that a first- and second-year student need to be successful at WKU. That includes access to mental health advice, career counseling, financial aid counseling, course taking, but also social integration.”

He said the approach is informed by its success at other universities across the nation, and that students shouldn’t feel they’re getting a run-around when trying to access campus services.

Along with transforming advising, the plan also calls for many other priorities and initiatives to enhance students' experience on campus. Every freshman student will get to reside in living learning communities called a "First Year Village." Every student will also participate in experiences that add to their studies, including internships, study-abroad, service learning and undergraduate research.

A new WKU Commons will bring together dining, studying and social space within the university's libraries. The plan also calls for "generating private financial support for the WKU Opportunity Fund, a \$50 million fund dedicated to providing a wide array of experiences and opportunities for our students regardless of their economic background."

On the personnel end, the plan proposes a new, decentralized budget model that invests in strategic priorities and rewards performance from academic units.

WKU will also "implement a new system of performance evaluation that will appropriately determine and adjust compensation packages for new and continuing employees and fairly allocate merit increases."

Additionally, WKU will begin a review process "to ensure we have the most attractive, efficient and appropriate mix of program offerings," according to the plan.

Caboni described the budget model in an interview with the Daily News on Thursday.



Caboni said a new state model that ties university funding to performance “allows us to signal to the whole university community what our priorities are and increase transparency around, ‘If I do A and I get more students, more research, achieve better outcomes, I get in my college this amount of money.’

“It’s a mechanism by which we actually open the black box for the whole university. Where we have strategic conversations based upon how dollars are allocated, but that we reward performance that helps grow revenue.”

In other business Friday, the board swore in two new regents.

Linda Gamblin Ball of Lexington was appointed to a six-year term by Gov. Matt Bevin, according to a WKU news release. David Brinkley of Bowling Green, director of WKU Public Broadcasting, was also recently elected to a three-year term as staff regent.

Ball, an alumna, is a community volunteer and business owner, according to a news release from Bevin’s office. Her term expires June 30, 2024.

In an interview, Ball said she wants to ensure students have life-changing experiences and said she believes Caboni is going to do an excellent job as president.

“I care about our youth and education,” she said.

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