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## Caboni makes the case for WKU

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) 34 min ago



Western Kentucky University is bouncing back after last spring's budget cuts, the elimination of its University College and the tough decision to eliminate nearly 150 positions – 72 of which were filled.

That was the message WKU President Timothy Caboni delivered to the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education during an annual performance review Thursday.

“This is an opportunity for us to talk about successes and where we have work to do,” Caboni said, speaking in an interview after the meeting at Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College.

Along with the state's other universities, WKU presented a report outlining its progress and goals for its graduation rate, degree production and other metrics. No formal action was taken during the meeting, which was geared toward sharing information.

“I was really proud to point out that we have the highest graduation rate in the history of the institution, that we've made great progress on first- to second-year persistence, particularly for low-income students,” Caboni said.

However, Caboni said WKU has work to do, such as moving students out of developmental courses.

“It’s a great opportunity for us to talk about the work that we’ve done in the past year and what that means for the years to come,” he said.

During the meeting, Caboni touted WKU’s efforts to overhaul academic advising, competitively recruit outside Kentucky and build a new business Innovation Campus at the Center for Research and Development along Nashville Road.

Caboni has previously described the Innovation Campus as a way to attract brilliant thinkers who can build a new generation of companies that will grow here.

The project will involve bringing WKU’s Research Foundation, Office for Research and Creative Activity and the Center for Research and Development to one location. However, Caboni said it will have to wait until next fall after the university has implemented a new budget model, reviewed its academic programs and dealt with other current priorities.

Going forward, WKU also plans to step up efforts to recruit more students from Nashville and Tennessee by edging out Middle Tennessee State University and similar competitors.

“We’re going to go heavy into Nashville,” Caboni told the council. “We’ve got to open that marketplace up.”

He described efforts to offer tuition discounts and work with high school guidance counselors in the state, along with sending a “Big Red Bus” to Nashville.

Caboni argued WKU is freer now to invest in new strategic priorities after revisiting how it managed resources. A prime example of that is the elimination of the University College, which Caboni described as a hodgepodge of miscellaneous programs and “the island of misfit toys.”

He told the council it wasn't serving students well and that it was duplicative of what competitors, like SKYCTC, were already doing. When Caboni started as president, he asked what purpose the University College filled, he said.

"Somebody said to me 'revenue.' I said, 'Do not ever say that to me again,'" Caboni said, adding the focus should be on success.

For Caboni, the meeting was also a chance to make an impression on new CPE President Aaron Thompson.

Thompson said he sympathizes with the tough choices WKU had to make. He appreciates WKU's efforts to improve student support services, retain the students it currently has and, ultimately, be realistic.

"What I like about what President Caboni said was that they're willing to look at and do the necessary things that it takes in order to advance their campus, with the thought there will probably be no more money coming in to them from state allocations," Thompson said.

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