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## WKU moving ahead on new budget approach

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) Oct 26, 2018

Western Kentucky University is revisiting its approach to budgeting in hopes of replacing it with a system that is less top-down and more transparent.

“The budget model needs to more closely reflect our strategy,” said Andrew Laws, managing director of the Chicago-based Huron Consulting Group, which WKU hired to help create a new budget model.

Laws spoke Thursday to faculty in WKU’s University Senate to update them on the development of a new model that will be in place by July 1.

“The model needs to be responsive to the market changes that we’re going through as opposed to the past model, which was more stagnant,” he said.

WKU President Timothy Caboni began the process in January when he announced the formation of a group to re-examine the university's approach to budgeting, which he said in an email was "constructed in a different era and is not sustainable."

At the latest step in the process, more details are emerging about how WKU would make budget decisions and the role faculty could play in the process.

A new Executive Budget Committee sits at the center of the model. Laws said the committee, made up of deans, faculty and other university stakeholders, would report directly to the president.

"That is seen as the broad-based committee that would provide advice, input and guidance," he said.

Under the process, college deans would work directly with the provost to plan their budgets, and then the provost would take those proposals to the Executive Budget Committee. Similarly, university vice presidents would work with their divisions to plan budgets and report to the Auxiliary/Support Unit Allocation Committee.

All the various committees involved would ultimately report to the Executive Budget Committee, according to a flow chart Laws used to illustrate the process.

Laws noted that several of the committees have faculty representatives, including two faculty on the Executive Budget Committee. He estimated that committee could have eight to 11 members.

While it's meant to be less top-down, Laws said the model is designed to avoid extremes, such as colleges competing against one another.

"We have elements of the model where colleges support one another, and it wouldn't work without that," he said.

Following his presentation, Laws took questions from faculty. Among them was journalism professor Mac McKerral, who questioned the university's ability to cut academic programs to fill budget deficits.

Ultimately, campus leaders need to make tough decisions when it comes to overspending.

“I don't think the state appropriations model is going to change,” he said, referring to years of state budget cuts to higher education. “When politicians learn that you can get along with less, they're not going to turn around and go back and give you more. It just doesn't work that way.”

Asked if WKU has the right process for developing a new budget model, McKerral said he's not sure.

“On paper it looks different. On paper it looks transparent,” McKerral said. “On paper it looks like there's all kinds of good representation, but that's all paper. When the paper turns to actual people and actual decision making, I don't know what's going to happen. I wouldn't even try to predict.”

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