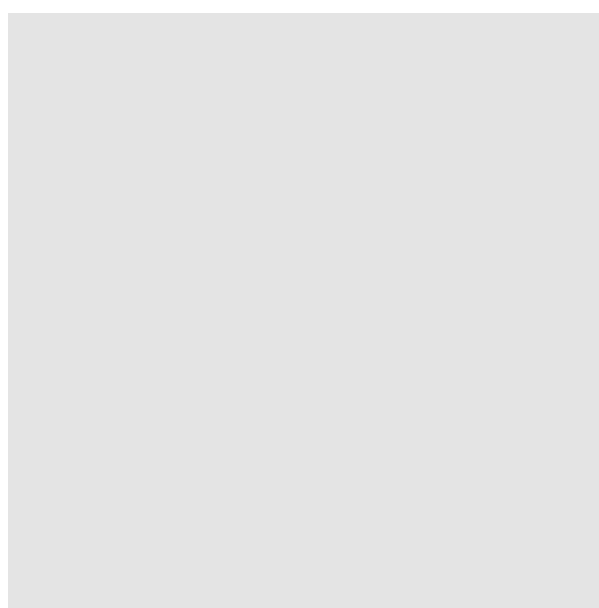


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WKU elects new faculty rep for Board of Regents

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 3 hrs ago



Claus Ernst

Submitted

Faculty at Western Kentucky University have elected mathematics professor Claus Ernst to represent them on the university's Board of Regents.

Ernst, a university distinguished professor, will replace outgoing Faculty Regent Barbara Burch. He said he is both "honored to have this job" and "just beginning to learn how much work this will be for me."

"I always have been concerned with the overall well-being of the university," said Ernst, who has been with WKU for 27 years.

During the election, Ernst ran against journalism professor Mac McKerral during a runoff election. However, the results of that runoff election had to be thrown out because of participation from ineligible voters. A follow-up election was held to determine a winner.

As Ernst prepares to step into his new role, he's working with Burch on the transition.

Burch described Ernst as an "excellent researcher and scholar" who will work hard to represent faculty perspectives.

As a regent, Ernst will be a voice for faculty on issues like salary and benefits on the Board of Regents and look out for WKU's academic and overall interests, he said.

In light of declining enrollment and state funding, Ernst said the university has some critical challenges ahead. As it stands, the university is facing a budget shortfall of roughly \$15 million.

"I think we have to make some hard decisions," he said, adding that balancing the university's budget is paramount. "That has to be addressed first before we can even think about any increases in compensation."

However, Ernst said he's committed to being a voice for WKU's faculty.

"My role there would be to protect employees as much as possible," he said.

Going forward, WKU President Timothy Caboni has called for only vital job vacancies to be filled and a pause on salary increases.



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Additionally, in light of a multi-billion dollar state pension crisis, Ernst said the university doesn't know how much more it will be asked to pay in employee pension contributions.

The cost of fully funding the state pension system based on actuarially required contributions could also rollover to Kentucky's universities in some way down the line, Ernst said.

Despite the challenges ahead, Burch said she sees Ernst as a smart choice.

"The challenges that we're facing, many of them are ones that are going to be a little new for anybody," she said, adding she's working closely with Ernst. "We're going to work side by side to effect that transition."

Ernst could be sworn in when the board is next scheduled to meet for committee meetings next year on Jan. 26.

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