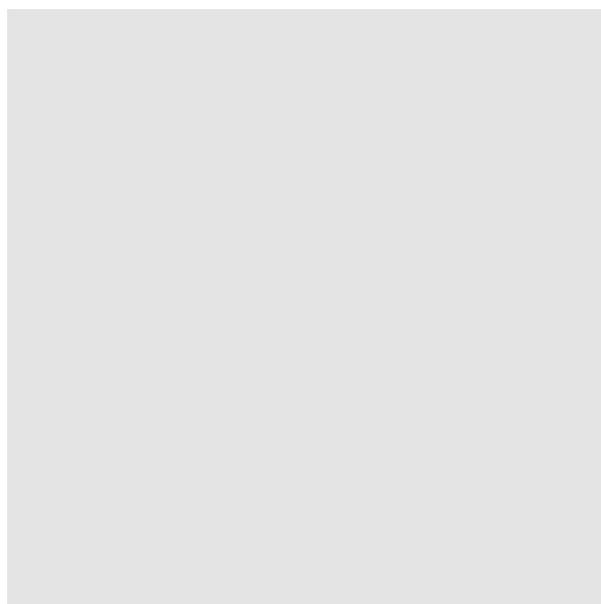


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## WKU sees declining enrollment, adding to budget concerns

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) Oct 27, 2017



Timothy Caboni

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Declining enrollment at Western Kentucky University is contributing to a roughly \$15 million budget shortfall that the university will have to address, WKU President Timothy Caboni said.

“We can fix some portion of this with retention and recruitment,” Caboni told reporters Friday after a Board of Regents meeting. “We may not have to cover the totality of that.”

While the university may not have to cover that full amount, Caboni said the shortfall could also grow.

Although universities are exempt from the current-year budget cuts Gov. Matt Bevin is preparing to lay out, Caboni said the university has to prepare for the worst.

“We won’t be part of those, but I do think given the conversation that’s happening in Frankfort, as a community, we should be talking about and preparing ourselves for the possibility of reductions,” he said. “Good planning means looking at all contingencies and certainly a reduction in the appropriation from the state is one of them that we’ll have to look at.”

WKU’s overall enrollment has stayed mostly flat compared to last year, according to enrollment data shared at the meeting. Compared to last fall, WKU is down by only 10 students, bringing its total enrollment figure to 20,267.

Not including dual-credit and Gatton Academy students, the decline is sharper, amounting to a drop from 17,755 students last fall to 17,215 this year. That’s a difference of about 540 students, or a 3 percent decline.

Overall enrollment data also show sharp declines for specific categories of students. The university is down 363 full-time students compared to fall of last year, but has 353 more part-time students.

Looking at total enrollment, there are 254 fewer freshman, 130 fewer sophomores and 103 fewer juniors compared to last year. Additionally, there are 107 fewer master’s degree students, with a drop of 88 first-time master’s students.

The university also saw a decline in international students, who pay more in tuition, and therefore bring in more money than in-state students. The university’s international student enrollment dropped from 1,168 students to 832 this year.

During the meeting, Regent John Ridley stressed the importance of promoting the value WKU offers students and improving enrollment.

“This is a serious thing that we’ve got to focus on,” he said. “We have the best value. We have the best delivery. I would put our faculty and our staff against anybody.”



Brian Meredith, WKU's chief enrollment and graduation officer, said the drop in international enrollment was expected.

Students from Saudi Arabia make up the biggest decline among WKU's international students, amounting to a drop from 501 last year to 353 this year. Students from China and India follow.

High school dual-credit students continue to make up a significant piece of the university's enrollment. The university saw an increase from 2,362 students last year to 2,861 students this year.

Speaking after the meeting, Caboni said WKU has to do a better job of connecting emotionally with potential students as well as improving retention.

"I think we do a terrific job articulating the rational drivers for why folks should come to Western Kentucky University," he said. "That emotional connection is a place where I think we can do some work."

In other business, regents approved a university-wide diversity, equity and inclusion plan spanning the next five years. The plan prioritizes enrolling more students of color, increasing student success and recruiting more diverse faculty and staff.



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## Aaron Mudd

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