

Faculty Regent Report to the University Senate
Dr. Patti Minter
February 15, 2012

The Board of Regents met for committee meetings on Friday, December 16, 2011 and on Friday, January 20, 2012 as a full board. This report covers three topics: 1) the actions passed at the January Board of Regents meeting, 2) the budget challenges WKU faces and implications for academic quality, and 3) an analysis of some previous budgetary decisions.

First, at the January 20 Board of Regents meeting, the full Board approved the revised and far more lucrative contract for Coach Willie Taggart by a vote of 8-2. The dissenting votes were myself and Regent Cynthia Harris. What follows are the comments I delivered at the Board meeting on the contract agenda item [You may read the contract here, starting on page 45:

http://www.wku.edu/regents/documents/bor_meeting_agenda_01-20-12.pdf]

My comments at the January 20, 2012 Board of Regents meeting:

“At last month's committee meetings, the Executive Committee sent forward a revised (and far more lucrative) contract for Coach Taggart which increased his base compensation by 100 percent. At the time, I shared with you that I had received many emails from faculty, a number that reached 77 (which is a large number given that faculty were off-campus between committees and the full board meeting). To a person, everyone who wrote me criticized the contract extension. Not one faculty member wrote, called, or spoke to me in support of it.

I shared 25 of the longer emails with my fellow board members, with all identifiers removed, because it was important that you all know what my colleagues are saying in their own voices and from their own philosophical perspectives. To summarize briefly their responses, the overwhelming concerns were about fundamental fairness, and feelings of demoralization. So in the hopes of rectifying this, and salvaging a potentially devastating morale situation, I present the following argument. This contract is, in essence, the biggest “merit” raise in WKU history, and it revises a contract that already includes merit and incentive clauses (many of which were executing for Mr. Taggart this year because of his success). In contrast, faculty and staff have not had a merit raise or merit pool since 2007 (there was a compression pool in 2008 which I negotiated with the president), and only small bonuses and small across-the-board raises. If the BOR passes this, then there is no alternative other than to designate monies for merit pay for the faculty who do the work upon which our state funding is based. If our funding formula (for now) is retention and graduation based, then WKU must make the academic mission and the faculty who execute it our priority. Sadly, what this current situation shows clearly is that the academic mission is not only less important than the extracurricular

athletic program, but that the academic mission is really not important, or a talking point at best. So I ask my board colleagues to ponder the following: if faculty are not rewarded for their merit-based performance, which is our equivalent of a good season, then WKU cannot claim to be a leading American university, for THAT is a distinction created ONLY by a commitment to compensate the faculty whose work has for too long been underappreciated and underfunded. So the president and the Board now have an opportunity to show their commitment to the academic mission by funding faculty excellence, and I ask you to bear in mind the terrible message the this board sends if they approve this contract without making the same commitment to faculty excellence. Because if we don't fund our great performers, we can't have a winning season, right?

I hope that this Board will look at this as a chance to reward the WKU team for their excellent efforts to teach, research, and serve the commonwealth, and remember if my team decides they no longer want to play, then with them goes our state funding, our external funding, and all the things that keep this game going. Faculty salaries at all ranks are below benchmark, our faculty/student ratio is higher than it should be at 19/1 (and it is 35/1 if you look at the tenure-line faculty/student ratio which is frankly shocking), and right now we need to keep our team from leaving or just giving up. We have an opportunity today to begin a fruitful discussion over the course of the next few months as we move through the budgeting process, and let's do what we need to do to fund faculty salaries competitively and (to end on a final athletic metaphor) turn our season around."

Although the argument is always made that these raises come from athletic revenues, this obscures the fact that the Athletic Department is not self-supporting. They receive university funds in the budgeting process, and you can find the 2011-2012 budget here: http://www.wku.edu/Dept/Support/FinAdmin/11_12BudgetPage.htm.

When combined with the Student Athletic Fees (which are indexed to the HEPI and increases annually at approximately 8%, far outpacing the tuition increases of 5%), WKU has one of the most-subsidized athletic departments in the country, as the following chart shows, receiving 67% of its revenues in 2010 from direct and indirect state funds:

http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/2011-06-23-2011-athletic-department-subsidy-table_n.htm

While I remain frustrated that this contract passed, I am pleased that at least one other regent voted against it. Rest assured that I will continue to push for increased faculty compensation and recognition of merit at every opportunity.

Secondly, many of you have expressed your concerns to me about the budget cuts that loom large. At this point, I have nothing to report except that President Ransdell stated at the Board of Regents meeting (in response to my concerns about the Taggart contract) that all faculty and academic staff searches (77 of them) would continue to go forward and would be protected. Obviously, that is good news and we thank him for making that

public commitment. I want to emphasize, however, that simply doing the right thing and protecting academics is only a start. The declining number of full-time tenure-track faculty did not start when budget woes struck the state in 2007. Instead, it has been an ongoing trend since 2001 that reflects a series of decisions about where WKU allocates its money and how it designates its priorities. Below you will see the trend for tenure-track and tenured faculty positions has not increased even as student enrollment has grown between 2001 and 2012. The following information comes from the 2010 WKU Fact Book (links provided below), from Provost Gordon Emslie's December report to the University Senate, and from Dr. Brian Meredith's report on January 20 to the Board of Regents:

2001

Total Enrollment = 16,579 (14,135 undergrad)

Avg. ACT score: 20.5

Tenure-track faculty = 486 (2002)

Student : Faculty ratio = 18 : 1

Student : Tenure-track faculty ratio = 34.1 : 1

2005

Total enrollment = 18,645

Avg. ACT score : 21

Tenure-track faculty = 548

Student : Tenure-track faculty ratio = 34.0 : 1

2010

Total Enrollment = 20,903

Tenure-track faculty = 559 (2009)

Avg. ACT score: 21.4

Student : Faculty ratio = 19 : 1

Student : Tenure-track faculty ratio = 37.4 : 1

https://sasweb1.wku.edu/2001_Quick_Facts.pdf

https://sasweb1.wku.edu/2010_Quick_Facts.pdf

https://sasweb1.wku.edu/2007_Fact_Book.pdf

https://sasweb1.wku.edu/Factbook_2010.pdf

2012 (as of 1/20/2012)

Total Enrollment= projected 21,925

Tenure-track faculty= 600 (2011)

Avg. ACT score: n/a

Student: Faculty ratio=19:1

Student: Tenure-track faculty ratio=36.5

As WKU has become more dependent on part-time and adjunct faculty to teach the growing number of students, however, there has been dramatic growth in the number of professional staff and administrators. This is apparently the trend statewide. The following chart from the CPE website shows that the number of staff has increased by

50% over the past ten years, with growth mostly in the category of professional staff and administration:

http://www.cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/A67A2235-D1A5-4490-8F3A-DB5D11FE88A5/0/ft_FS2010Web.pdf

Another disturbing development is the use of carry-forward money within the division of Academic Affairs for brick-and-mortar capital projects. You can see here that DELO money, funds that exist only because of the hard work of faculty who teach distance learning courses, is being used for “capital projects.”

http://www.wku.edu/regents/documents/bor_meeting_agenda_01-20-12.pdf

When I asked about this at the Board meeting, I was told that 2.5 million dollars of DELO carry-forward money was being used for various capital projects, which includes DELO monies previously designated for the Colonial Courts international center project (now revised to be a proposed Honors College/International Center structure in that spot). While this is a worthy goal that serves as academic purpose, using Academic Affairs funds of any kind for construction projects is a dangerous and unacceptable trend that raises more questions about our institutional priorities. It seems particularly inappropriate during a budget cut.

To summarize, what does all of this mean? Simply stated, a decade of choices to promote extra-curricular endeavors and agency bond-funded brick-and-mortar projects when the money was there to fund faculty growth and academic initiatives have created a situation in which it is now difficult to make up the difference in this unfortunate budget climate. The funding of entertainment over education is not a new trend, but it is one we must reverse immediately. As faculty, we must continue to ask President Ransdell to allocate funding for more resources for our academics instead of entertainment. Academics are the mission of this institution, and must come first in the struggle for resources in a difficult budget climate. Certainly other entities do important work, but as the statistics above clearly show, others have received funding while faculty funding has remained flat when compared to growth. As faculty face increasing pressure to retain students (and you can see from this message how our future is literally mortgaged to growth), we must have the resources and personnel to actually do it. To state the obvious, WKU must put the money into the academic mission and recognize the faculty and staff who fulfill it are as important as brick-and-mortar and extra-curricular concerns, and when funding is scarce, non-academic projects and extra-curriculars do not teach students, engage in research or public service, or retain the students which is obviously the key to our financial future. I will stay on this message for as long as it takes.

As always, thank you for allowing me to represent you on the Board of Regents, and I welcome your comments as I prepare for future Board meetings.