

Faculty Regent Report

University Senate Meeting

January 21, 2013

The Board of Regents will have its first quarterly meeting tomorrow at 9 a.m. and the major agenda item for the Board of Regents is the proposed contract for Coach Bobby Petrino to serve as the Head Coach of WKU's football program. You can find the agenda, including the proposed contract here:

http://www.wku.edu/regents/documents/bor_meeting-january_25_2013.pdf

I will make this short and sweet. This hire, and the hiring of the assistants and others who will complete his staff, represent a commitment to athletic spending without precedent at Western Kentucky University. Not surprisingly, I've received a steady stream of comments from my colleagues, not to mention links to every article in the country about this. The faculty concerns fall into three categories: 1) potential personnel issues, 2) possible damage to the academic reputation of WKU (this has been a huge cause for concern), and 3) the major long-term financial commitment to athletics that this hire represents, a clear shift towards ever-escalating athletic expenditures. These are all valid concerns, but I'd like to focus on the third point as it has the most troubling implications for the future of this institution. Athletic spending at WKU has increased by 38% between 2006 and 2011, from \$16.1 million to \$22.3 million annually:

<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/college/story/2012-05-14/ncaa-college-athletics-finances-database/54955804/1>

Our athletic department is not self-supporting; it is subsidized by student athletic fees. The majority of its revenue—63%—comes from student fees and institutional support. So their financial fortunes are not entirely revenue-dependent, but in fact are linked to enrollment. If we lose enrollment or growth, then that is revenue they don't get. Student athletic fees also represent money that could be available instead for academic endeavors—we all know that the CPE considers the price that students pay for the entirety of their WKU experience, not what percentage of it goes to fund academics versus athletics, or other projects. Every time the university assesses a student fee, those are dollars we cannot use for academics.

When this Board passed what was then the largest contract amount in WKU history in an attempt to retain Coach Taggart, I pointed out that it was the biggest merit raise in our history. And now we have this: a commitment of over 850K (and undoubtedly more when the salaries of the new assistant coaches are made public at our April meeting), a large buyout clause that would likely be put back into personnel costs if Mr. Petrino leaves before his contract expires, and we have an escalation in athletic expenditures that should cause alarm for anyone reading our balance sheet. Enrollment is at best flat, at worst in decline. Our expenditures for debt service remain long-term obligations. And none of the concerns which faculty raise have been answered—our small across-the-board raise does not even

cover cost of living and calls for merit pay have not produced it. So how did we find ourselves in this situation? And what does all of this mean? Simply stated, choices continue to be made, as they have over the past decade, to continually fund extra-curricular endeavors and other projects at the expense of the academic mission of the university. Prior to 2008, when the money was there to fund faculty growth and academic initiatives, it was spent elsewhere and now it is difficult to make up the difference given the budget climate. So the funding of entertainment over education is not a new trend, but it is one we must reverse immediately. Decisions like this hire demonstrate that WKU is still committed to funding entertainment at all costs, even as our enrollment flattens, our debt load expands, and our sources of new revenue dry up. 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, because 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. For these reasons, I cannot support the contract before the Board. Funding entertainment over education is the wrong thing to do, and it is the wrong time to do it. Let's instead focus on what we must in order to be a leading university with international reach. Thank you.