

Faculty Regent's Report to Senate – February 26, 2016

As noted at the BOR meeting in January, a new building was approved for the Confucius Institute (CI). While the building was approved, I did not support this request. I could not understand why there was a need for this building. I am aware that the new building housing Honors College and International Programs, that is being built right next door to the proposed CI building, has more than adequate space to accommodate whatever needs the CI may have (e.g. housing of staff, meeting rooms for teachers, and other programming.) I am concerned that the tentatively proposed name for the building (not confirmed) is Institute for Chinese Teacher Training. This suggests that the facility has approval as an 'institute' and that teacher training is being done at WKU that is not under the responsibility of WKU faculty.

Funding for the building is also of concern for me. Through a competitive process, the President secured a 1.5 million grant from the CI central program in China. The award stipulates that the funds must be matched by the campus to build this building. I expressed my belief that any funds used should come from 'private sources' that are intended exclusively for this purpose. The funds will come from a Foundation account that is being re-purposed to support this match requirement. The President has indicated that those funds are considered private source, but I am not comfortable with that interpretation.

It is my understanding that the contract for receiving the funds requires a 50-year commitment to the CI building, which will be maintained and supported by WKU. This is a long-term commitment to a program (CI) that appears to include only minimal engagement of faculty and with added costs becoming an additional drain on institutional operating expenses for many years to come.

Since the CI was discussed at the BOR meeting, I have heard from a number of faculty expressing concerns related to this area of programming. It is important to note that President Ransdell stated that he was open to having faculty involved with the shaping and use of this CI building, but this conversation would need to occur 'after' the building was approved. Now that the building has been approved, it would seem appropriate for the Faculty Senate to initiate action to ensure appropriate faculty involvement in the planning and use of this CI building and related initiatives.

In an additional matter of concern, I have just recently been informed by the Provost that WKU will no longer continue its affiliation as an AASCU member institution (American Association of Schools Colleges, and Universities) in the future. AASCU is the presidential organization that represents more than 400 comprehensive colleges and universities across the country. WKU has been an AASCU member institution for decades. I recognize that there are budgetary challenges that we face, and the approximate \$22,000 in annual dues is not an insignificant amount. I do not

know how other WKU institutional membership affiliations are faring in the budget review process, but I do know that over the years, AASCU affiliation has provided value to a number of academic areas, research opportunities, and engagement opportunities for individual faculty and students. I also believe that this suggests a lessening of our institutional identity as a comprehensive state university, and the commitment that this represents. For those who may not be as familiar with AASCU, its mission is defined as follows:

These (AASCU) are institutions of access and opportunity, believing that the promise of access and success should be real for all Americans. AASCU members are student-focused, committed to programs and policies that place students at the heart of their institution. And they are “stewards of place,” engaging faculty, staff and students with the communities and regions they serve—helping to advance public education, economic development and quality of life. (AASCU mission statement)

Discontinuing institutional membership removes access to the benefits, affiliations, and opportunities that come to our students, faculty and institution as a part of this membership. Every other comprehensive institution in KY, and the KY Higher Education Commission, are active member of AASCU. I am hopeful that ways may be found to sustain this important affiliation that maintains our identity and commitment as a major comprehensive university.

If any faculty member wishes to have additional clarification or has questions, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

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Faculty Regent