

Budget & Finance Committee Meeting of 1 October 2026: Minutes / Report

The Budget & Finance Committee last met on 3 September 2026.

Attending Committee Members (Voting):

Eric Kondratieff, Chair (PCAL)
Sophia Arjana (PCAL, At-Large)
Greg Ellis-Griffith (CHHS)
Kerron Joseph (GFCB)
Anthony Paganelli (Libraries)
Rui Zhang (OCSE)

Attending Committee Members (Ex-Officio)

Shane Spiller (GFCB, Faculty Regent)
Isaiah Wilson (SGA)

Absent (Voting and Ex-Officio)

Daniel Boamah (CHHS, At-Large)
Said Ghezal (CEBS)
Gordon Baylis (At-Large, OCSE, Psych. Sci.)
Bud Fischer (Provost)

Key Outcomes

Shane Spiller shared some information from the recent statewide CPE conference in Owensboro (which included regents, trustees, university presidents, and state legislators). Matters discussed included the precarious state of higher education in Kentucky, the "demographic cliff", and the positive outcomes for WKU of having shifted to net tuition revenue to ensure institutional sustainability.

Other topics discussed included faculty work-life balance and compensation, institutional operations & AI, and other open questions (for which, see below).

Higher Education Risks & Strategic Positioning

- **Demographic Cliff:** Steep declines in KY high school seniors over the next 5-6 years pose a critical risk to enrollment. Institutions banking on higher enrolments instead of higher net tuition revenue are not doing well.
- **Financial Strategy:** WKU has prioritized **net tuition revenue** over raw enrollment numbers to better weather financial challenges and is, so far, well positioned to weather coming changes.
- **Housing:** Groundbreaking for the new dorm area is scheduled for October 20th; the new dorms are expected to help improve the university's future positioning in attracting students.
- **Consolidation:** Some discussion was floated about merging some KCTCS campuses.
- **90-Hour Degrees:** There is some serious pressure from CPE to develop 90-hour degrees which fall more in line with certification than education (as much of the Bachelor-level education would have to be stripped out to reduce the hours).
- **Value Proposition:** CPE notes that recruitment is becoming more difficult in the face of Meta and TikTok media that denigrate the value of higher ed and encourage young viewers to skip it and make money in other ways. Most of WKU's digital ads are targeted toward the same 17-19 year olds, thus facing stiff oppositional advertising. Committee members were uncertain whether WKU's current marketing is effectively attracting veterans and other returning adult learners as it had done in the past (B&F members noted a decline in older returning students and vets).

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Faculty Work-Life & Compensation

- **Salary Stagnation:** Faculty salaries have not even kept pace with inflation; the last significant raise pool (4%) was in 2019. Faculty concerns were communicated to the administration by a Senate resolution in 2025 (see [15 May 2025 Faculty Senate Meeting Agenda: G. New Business, 10. Senate Resolution - Faculty Compensation](#)).
- **Compensation Data:** WKU's current "benchmarks" for median salaries are based on 7-year-old data. A new compensation study is necessary to establish up-to-date benchmarks.
- **Resource Erosion:** Faculty report a loss of dedicated travel & research funds, administrative help.

Institutional Operations & AI

- **AI Integration:** A Board of Regents-level AI committee is forming to oversee cybersecurity and data usage, though it is not intended to duplicate or supplant the Provost's academic AI work. **Faculty AI Workload:** The committee discussed a need for "micro-awards" and actual training to support faculty in updating assessments to offset student tendencies to default to AI usage in courses where such usage is inappropriate.

Open Questions

- **R2 Status:** Concerns were raised regarding how WKU can realistically achieve R2 status without increased funding for libraries and research support.
- **Non-Traditional Students:** There is uncertainty regarding whether current marketing is effectively attracting veterans and other returning adult learners. Current adverts for and by "college-age" students live on TikTok and Instagram, whereas the campaigns to attract non-traditional students used to exist on WKYU's radio broadcasts.

Action Items

- **Identify and invite deans** who have not yet appeared before the committee to attend a future meeting to share budgeting practices, etc.; solicit suggestions from committee members.
- **Marketing WKU:** Each College and its relevant Marketing / Communications staff should work with Depts, Faculty, and Students to identify success stories around for TikTok and Instagram storytelling campaigns (some colleges, e.g., PCAL, already have a notable social media presence).
- **Faculty could consider writing op-eds or articles** for local publications to promote WKU's research and community impact (among other outreach efforts).

NOTE: The creation of this summary report was assisted by Zoom AI. It has been thoroughly reviewed, edited, and enhanced by the human submitting it (E.K.).