**FINAL DRAFT**

White Paper for Academic Excellence and Innovation

Western Kentucky University



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The Academic Innovation and Excellence Committee developed ourplan for improving teaching and learning at WKU in light of Dr. Caboni’s new mission statement for WKU:

*WKU’s mission as a student-centered applied research university is to better our region, the Commonwealth, our nation and the world by inspiring innovation, elevating communities and transforming lives.*

Early in our conversations, the group completed a SOAR analysis and identified a number of WKU’s Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and achievable Results. One of WKU’s strengths is our long history of focusing on quality teaching and learning experiences in all instructional modalities, from fully face-to-face, to fully online, and various hybrid models. WKU employs highly-qualified faculty at a student/faculty ratio of 18:1 (2017 WKU Fact Book). This dedication to teaching and learning has been recognized regionally and nationally through awards such as the Hearst Journalism Award and recognition by *U.S. News Report* as a top 15 school for our online programs. Our robust technology infrastructure and support network enable us to promote student engagement, interactivity, and learning. In addition, the Center for Innovative Teaching & Learning (CITL) assists faculty in improving pedagogy in all class formats, and our cutting-edge Colonnade general education program intentionally encourages higher-order thinking and integrated learning across courses.

WKU is well-positioned to increase our academic excellence further. We believe WKU relies too heavily on adjunct and part-time faculty to meet our needs. Reducing the number of part-time faculty and hiring more full-time faculty would lead to greater attention to students since full-time faculty have time to dedicate to individualized mentorship instead of taking on a non-academic job and/or teaching at other institutions to make a living. While WKU has an excellent technology infrastructure and good resources to improve teaching and learning, opportunities exist to provide professional development and training for more faculty to improve teaching and learning in all class formats. While the design of our Colonnade program is sound, more resources need to be directed toward implementing the program to leverage even more learning from it.

We believe WKU can be a national leader in student-centered academic and applied experiences and an academic first choice for students in our region, traditional students, transfers, and adult learners. Encouraging more innovative teaching techniques that fully engage students in learning, preparing students to become exemplary employees in their chosen field and lifelong learners. Strengthening faculty and students’ understanding of the relationship between their Colonnade courses and their disciplines will foster interdisciplinary learning and higher-level thinking. Making Colonnade a program of distinction and creating seven additional programs of national distinction will raise WKU’s national profile.

The AIE Committee determined that WKU should aim for significant results in the following areas: increased graduation rates across all categories, an increased ratio of full-time to part-time faculty, greater student satisfaction with academic programs, and a more prominent national profile.

After completing our SOAR analysis and devoting additional months to planning, conversation, and outreach, the working group synthesized an aspirational vision for WKU’s academic future:

*WKU will engage every student and excite them to learn, benchmarking against standards for providing quality in learning, with greater relevance to our world and external constituents. We will become a leader in innovative pedagogy, and other institutions will follow our lead. We will aspire to be the best teachers in the Commonwealth and set standards for excellence in teaching diverse student populations. WKU will become students’ academic first choice.*

To actualize this vision, we crafted two overarching goals emphasizing teaching and learning around which to organize our recommendations:

*Goal 1: Create an academically innovative environment that encourages excellence in faculty teaching and student learning.*

*Goal 2: Enhance and create institutional programs, curricula, and systems to facilitate teaching and improve learning.*

Goal 1 emphasizes the effectiveness of student-teacher interactions to improve and increase higher-order learning. To facilitate learning it is essential that WKU improve the admissions system to admit students who will succeed. Faculty need to engage in effective pedagogical training suitable for their disciplines and students need to engage in challenging, higher order activities such as High-Impact Practices (HIPs) to increase and improve learning. Departments need to plan and the university needs to fund learning spaces and educational technology to foster higher-order learning. Given the growth of the non-traditional student population, WKU should create pathways that appropriately place and support adult learners. Ultimately, departments should define academic excellence in their disciplines based on strategically determined outcomes.

Goal 2 emphasizes the importance of curricula and systems to improve student learning. Central to this endeavor is “doubling down” on WKU’s innovative Colonnade program to make it a Program of Distinction. To spur innovation, WKU should create a system to identify seven Programs of National Distinction and offer incentives for departments to achieve this designation. To increase collaboration and use scarce resources more efficiently, the university should reorganize academic and administrative units to eliminate duplication and increase efficiency. In addition, administrative practices should be reinvented with an eye towards removing barriers to student success and encouraging innovation. WKU should encourage departments to create certificate programs for graduate students that can be “stacked” across disciplines to encourage degree completion.

In the rest of this report, we flesh out our recommendations with specific objectives, metrics, and strategies. We believe this plan will enable WKU to engage all of our students in effective learning environments, to develop our faculty into the best teachers in the region, and to become prospective students’ academic first choice.

**Goal 1: Create an academically innovative environment that encourages excellence in faculty teaching and student learning.**

* **Objective 1: Prioritize student preparedness to ensure student success.** 
  + Strategies
    - Align WKU academic programs with P12 and community college programs; better communicate our learning outcomes to these constituencies so they better prepare students for success at WKU.
    - Identify high schools and community colleges producing students who are successful at WKU and emphasize student recruitment from those schools.
    - Determine a clear, measureable skillset and knowledge base appropriate for university success and correlate with standardized test scores to admit students who will be successful at WKU.
    - Determine a reasonable number of marginally-prepared students to admit, and strategically transition them through bridge programs, living and learning communities, and peer mentors.
    - Create more robust advising to steer marginal students away from majors where they will likely not be successful (e.g., nursing, pre-med).
  + Metric:
* Percent of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates who are underprepared in mathematics, who complete a credit-bearing course in mathematics.
* Four and six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time bachelor’s degree-seeking students entering in the fall semester (or entering in the summer and returning in the fall).
* Percent of first-time, full-time, baccalaureate degree-seeking students who return to WKU to continue their studies.
* Student progression (e.g., the percent of each year's first-time, full-time student cohort that earned 30 credit hours; earned 60 credit hours; 90 credit hours).
* **Objective 2: Help students learn how to learn, building growth mindsets, problem-solving skills, communication skills, and cognitive flexibility so they continue to learn and flourish after graduation.**
  + Strategies
    - Support the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning.
    - Hire faculty with demonstrated records of teaching excellence and publications on the scholarship of teaching and learning.
    - Make demonstration of higher order thinking part of the Academic Review Process and designation of Program of Distinction.
    - Provide incentives for programs that incorporate higher order thinking into curricula and support for programs that need assistance.
  + Metric:
  + Percent of baccalaureate students graduating in a given year who have completed an internship, co-op learning experience, practicum, apprenticeship, or similar/comparable experience.
  + Percent of graduate students graduating in a given year who have completed an internship, co-op, clinical practicum, apprenticeship, or similar/comparable experience.
  + Percent of baccalaureate students graduating in a given year that have participated in an institutional-level research or creative experience that has reached completion of the project before graduation.
  + Percent of graduate students graduating in a given year that have participated in an institutional-level research or creative experience that has reached completion of the project before graduation.
  + Percent of students admitted to graduate programs at graduation; 6 months after graduation; and 12 months after graduation.
* **Objective 3: Utilize High-Impact Practices to distinguish academic programs.**
  + Strategies
    - Resource CITL to provide training for integration of HIPs.
    - Provide internal grants for departments to create faculty development opportunities to integrate HIPs in discipline-specific ways.
    - Require departments to present a brief HIPs inventory demonstrating sites where HIPs are used.
    - Make integration of HIPs a criterion for Program of Distinction designation.
  + Metric:
  + Number of university-funded research grants involving students.
  + Percent of academic faculty completing at least one course/seminar/workshop provided by CITL each academic year.
  + Percent of the academic operating budget set aside to fund internal research grants.
  + Number of programs using HIPs.
  + Percent of student participating in HIPs each year.
* **Objective 4: Provide innovative pedagogical training to include engagement strategies and challenging experiences to educate current and future learners.**
  + Strategies
    - Support the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning.
    - Provide grants for departmental faculty development opportunities related to new pedagogies.
    - Seed faculty mentoring programs in colleges and departments.
    - Make pedagogical training a requirement for tenure and promotion.
    - Recast SITEs to emphasize evaluating pedagogies, identifying and encouraging effective pedagogies, and revising or eliminating ineffective teaching strategies. In other words, modify SITEs to validate strengths and provide formative support to diminish weaknesses of instructors.
    - Provide faculty development opportunities for part-time faculty.
  + Metric:
  + Percent of the academic operating budget set aside for internal research grants.
  + Percent of academic faculty completing at least one course/seminar/workshop provided by CITL each academic year.
  + Percent of full-time academic faculty completing at least one consultation, teaching at another institution, sabbatical, internship, study abroad, team-teaching, or external practice/applied professional development experience each academic year.
  + Percent of new faculty with specifically identifiable mentor.
  + SITE process reviewed by academic experts.
  + Percent of full-time faculty participating in pedagogical training prior to promotion.
  + Percent of part-time faculty participating in pedagogical training.
* **Objective 5: Apply new and innovative learning environments and methods to meet evolving student needs.**
  + Strategies
    - Ask departments to develop five-year learning environment plans (classrooms, labs, lecture halls, etc.) based on disciplinary needs.
    - Develop a routine space/technology refurbishment and replacement cycle.
    - Budget money to departments for classroom/lab refurbishment and development.
    - Ask departments to develop educational technology plans keyed to student learning outcomes.
    - Budget money to departments to enact technology plans.
    - Develop an innovative system that “stacks” graduate certificates, which can be used toward program degree acquisition.
    - Establish minimum standards for graduate certificates.
    - Create a mechanism to implement feasibility studies to determine attractive certificates and support departments’ efforts to create them.
    - Encourage creation of complementary certificates that could be stacked to create degrees.
  + Metric:
  + Number of departments completing five-year learning environment plans.
  + Number of departments completing five-year technology plans.
  + Percent of WKU budget allocated to departments for learning environments and technology.
  + Percent of WKU budget allocated to departments for technology.
  + Number of graduate degrees awarded using stacked graduate certificates.
  + Number of certificates awarded.
* **Objective 6: Provide pathways that support adult learners.** 
  + Strategies
    - Support prior learning assessment (PLA) with resources.
    - Encourage flexible delivery with alternative learning environments such as online learning, hybrid courses, and weekend classes.
    - Develop more robust orientation for transfer students.
    - Educate advisors about options for adult learners.
    - Evaluate colleges/universities from which students transfer in terms of student success at WKU. Streamline transfer from those institutions, create remediation plans for schools whose students are not successful. Remove ineffective courses with high drop-out rates from transfer database.
    - Develop regional campus portfolio of programs aligned with regional workforce needs.
  + Metric:
* Graduation rate for first-time, full-time bachelor’s degree-seeking adult learner-students entering in the fall semester (or entering in the summer and returning in the fall).
* Percent of degree-seeking, adult learner-students rating WKU’s instructors as effective through reinvented SITE process.
* Graduation rate for returning bachelor’s degree-seeking adult learner-students.
* Number of online, hybrid, and Saturday only degree programs.
* Percent of transfer students requiring remediation.
* Number of colleges/schools with high number of student requiring remediation.
* Number of programs created for regional campuses.
* **Objective 7: Allow faculty to define and achieve academic excellence in their programs based on strategically determined outcomes, rigorous academic reviews, and specific and unique performance-based metrics.**
  + Strategies
    - Have programs formulate outcomes for excellence based on disciplinary standards and develop metrics or narrative outcomes to measure success.
    - Make the five-year review process more meaningful by providing resources to underperforming departments to achieve outcomes.
    - Provide administrative support for data collection.
    - Reward programs who achieve and exceed outcomes with additional resources.
  + Metric:
  + Percent of faculty who strongly agree and agree with the statement “I understand how my college/department measures academic excellence.”
  + Number of departments and colleges with a clear definition of excellence.
  + Percent of faculty who strongly agree and agree with the statement “My college and department have specific and unique guidelines to measure my performance.”
  + Number of programs, departments, and colleges receiving rewards for achieving superior performance.
  + Number of programs successfully completing the reinvented Academic Review Process.

**Goal 2: Enhance and create institutional programs, curricula, and systems to facilitate teaching and improve learning**

* **Objective 1: Make Colonnade a Program of Distinction and align all academic programs with Colonnade.**
  + Strategies
    - Reintroduce faculty and staff to the Colonnade program.
    - Develop a grid showing how Colonnade learning outcomes support majors/programs.
    - Ask departments/programs to align departmental learning outcomes with Colonnade outcomes.
    - Provide faculty development opportunities to help faculty build bridges between Colonnade courses and major courses.
    - Make integration between Colonnade and majors/programs an essential criterion for Program of Distinction status.
    - Award students a certificate in *critical thinking and integrated learning* that foregrounds the skills they have acquired upon completion of Colonnade.
    - Reward programs that integrate Colonnade more deliberately and developmentally into their programs for all student populations.
    - Appoint a Colonnade Coordinator with sufficient time to manage, support, and improve the program.
    - Provide financial support (faculty lines) for programs offering Colonnade courses.
    - Train admissions counselors to use Colonnade as a recruitment tool.
  + Metric:
    - Colonnade becomes a Program on Distinction.
    - Number of programs mapped to Colonnade learning outcomes.
    - Colonnade program becomes a certificate-rendering program
    - Number of certificates awarded by Colonnade program.
    - Colonnade program coordinator hired.
    - Number (or percent) of FTE devoted to Colonnade.
    - Number of admission counselors trained to use Colonnade for recruitment.
* **Objective 2: Create, develop, and resource seven additional programs of national distinction.**
  + Strategies
    - Task deans with developing a system to identify programs poised for national prominence modeled on the 5-year Program Review process (in other words, develop a program review process with criteria tied to programs and opportunities WKU values, and provide resources to a) reward excellence and b) support programs that need help to improve).
    - Create an application with clear criteria for deans to review with five-year designation.
    - Make Colonnade and HIPs integration part of criteria for designation.
  + Metric:
  + Number of Programs of Distinction.
  + Number of colleges with at least one academic Program of Distinction.
  + Number of programs poised for national prominence.
  + Integration of Colonnade and HIPs.
* **Objective 3: Reorganize academic and administrative units to eliminate duplication, increase efficiency, facilitate opportunities for learning, and encourage collaboration across all programs.**
  + Strategies
    - Create task force to review academic programs to eliminate duplication and combine programs when and where feasible.
    - Develop incentives to encourage cross- and interdisciplinary cooperation.
    - Resource teaching triads across colleges to build cross- and inter-disciplinary relationships across campus.
  + Metric:
  + Number of academic programs eliminated or consolidated.
  + Number of incentives given to encourage collaborative teaching and research across programs.
  + Number of faculty teaching outside of home department or college.
  + Number of faculty participating in teaching triads.
* **Objective 4: Leverage bureaucracy (i.e., administrative policies, procedures, and processes) to facilitate student learning instead of being an obstacle to student learning.**
  + Strategies
    - Appoint a committee of faculty and staff to audit and streamline all polices with an emphasis on improving student success and learning.
    - Survey faculty and staff for ideas about how to reinvent procedures to improve student learning.
    - Pay special attention to reinventing policies/procedures on registration holds, late course enrollment, change of major, exception appeal, drop/add, late withdrawal, medical withdrawal, student placement, academic program review, and action planning.
    - Involve relevant staff on faculty committees to anticipate practicality and facilitate implementation of curricular changes, policies, etc.
    - Use predictive analytics to determine the appropriate number of sections of courses to meet student demand.
    - Encourage departments to offer courses at regular, predictable times to serve student scheduling needs.
    - Reinvent and simplify the curriculum review process to spur innovation and make learning central to the enterprise.
    - Reorganize faculty governance to increase efficiency, facilitate cooperation, and improve student learning.
  + Metric:
  + Number of administrative positions/functions reviewed for efficiency, duplication functions, and student-relatedness.
  + Number of administrative university-, college-, and department-level policies and procedures reviewed.
  + Time and dollars saved from reorganization and policy and procedure review (i.e., cost-benefit measures).
* **Objective 5: Explore alternative scheduling to maximize student learning opportunities and to meet new student demands.**
  + Strategies
    - Create a program to develop and certify appropriate hybrid courses.
    - Audit course schedule to determine appropriate number of evening courses, and weekend courses to facilitate learning.
    - Consider feasibility of M-W, T-R scheduling.
    - Create opportunities for accelerated learning (e.g., five-week courses).
  + Metric:
  + Number of approved online, hybrid, and weekend programs/courses.
  + Number of evening and weekend courses.
  + Number of students in evening and weekend classes.
  + Number of opportunities for accelerated learning.
* **Objective 6: Integrate programs across disciplines with shared, developmentally appropriate learning outcomes.**
  + Strategies
    - Sponsor working lunches to build relationships between departments with shared and complementary interests.
    - Encourage departments to formulate cooperation plans with specific outcomes and reward departments for achieving them.
  + Metric:
  + Number of collaborative cross-discipline research projects.
  + Number of cross-disciplinary teaching projects.

Appendix

The Academic Innovation and Excellence Committee believes that four additional issues should be considered as part of the Steering Committee’s deliberations. Since we were unsure of the best place to align them in the body of our report, we include them here:

* Consider low faculty turnover as a metric of excellence—if WKU has an innovative culture that fosters an excellent academic environment, few faculty and staff will want to seek employment elsewhere and many students will want to enroll at WKU.
* Consider the transformation of part-time positions into full-time faculty lines as a strategy for excellence—full-time faculty will have more time and likely a greater interest in mentoring students.
* Address quality concerns about dual credit courses—many dual credit courses make little financial sense for the institution or educational sense for the student; consider ways to discourage this practice or improve quality and accountability if we must offer dual credit courses to attract students to WKU.
* Consider developing and executing admissions and enrollment management plans that target and attract students, who have the desire and abilities to be successful.