2006

UA77/1 A Century of Spirit - Campus Planning

Western Kentucky University

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A CENTURY OF SPIRIT
1906 ~ 2006
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Illustration by Lindsey Loof
Ever since Henry Hardin Cherry moved his fledgling normal school from downtown Bowling Green to Vinegar Hill, the growth of the campus has been guided by long-range master plans.

In the past 100 years, WKU has been shaped by its location on the Hill and by its spread southward down the Hill. The picturesque campus has experienced several building booms as the school’s enrollment grew and its academic programs evolved.

The campus master plans have provided direction for that growth and for the vision of the various Hill builders — such as Presidents Cherry, Kelly Thompson and Gary Ransdell; architects like Brinton B. Davis and Henry Wright; and physical plant/facilities administrators like Owen Lawson, Kemble Johnson, John Osborne and Doug Ault.

The master plan has always looked to the future as Western provides facilities for academic programs, student life, health and recreation, and athletics. The plans have changed through the years. New buildings have been constructed. Proposed buildings or facilities didn’t materialize. Other buildings have been razed to make way for progress.

One thing hasn’t changed since the first master plan was drawn in 1909 and that’s the goal of maintaining the Hill’s natural beauty and of providing educational opportunities for students. Even the plans that are guiding development today will be revamped and refined tomorrow, but they will maintain the spirit, the character and the vision of the Hill.

A 1912 publication of Normal Heights that showed a map of the hilltop campus noted: “The management of Western Normal Teachers College has tried to look ahead for a few hundred years and has earnestly attempted to make a beginning that will permit of future development.”

In 1966, President Kelly Thompson presented an updated master plan to regents and said: “The physical development of Western Kentucky State College was conceived, and has continued to be implemented within the framework of the basic purposes and long objectives of the College.”

In 2004, President Gary Ransdell described the physical transformation that began in 1998: “We will not forsake our primary
A CENTURY OF responsibility to support our faculty and students with Kentucky's best academic programs, but we will not further defer the necessary maintenance of our facilities and the new life which must be breathed into this place we call Western."

As the Centennial concludes, several projects are under way or in the planning stages – a renovated and redesigned Smith Stadium, a Student Publications building, a student health clinic, new buildings and facilities for the science, education and business colleges, and renovations of historic Van Meter Hall.

In the next several pages, you will view maps of various master plans and see how the plans and the campus changed over the past century. You will also see pictures from each era and read descriptions compiled from documents at University Archives.

Planning for the Future
A 1909 plan by landscape architect Henry Wright shows nine buildings at the top of the Hill - Van Meter, Manual Training Building, gymnasium, boys boarding house, Culinary Department, girls boarding house, Model Training School, Science Hall and Library. Other buildings are a residence for the superintendent of grounds, athletic field, Agricultural Experimental Station, and the lighting, heating and power plant.

In a proposed campus development map by architects D.X. Murphy and Brother, the facilities shown are Chapel and Administration Building (Van Meter), Potter Hall, gymnasium, health, social and religious buildings, science building, library, manual arts building, school hospital, boys boarding hall, the lighting, heating and power plant, athletic field, and a clock and water tower.

By the 1920s, the campus began to take shape as Western and Ogden College merged and as several new buildings were constructed, including what are now Gordon Wilson Hall, Florence Schneider Hall, Faculty House, Snell Hall and Industrial Education Building. The Great Depression ended the rapid building program in the 1930s with Cherry Hall and the Kentucky Building completed.

"Many state educational institutions in this country, after having expended thousands of dollars in the development of a plant, have been forced to purchase a new site and begin over in order to avoid a crowded and unsanitary condition and to have room for the growing needs of the institution.... The management of Western Normal Teachers College has tried to look ahead for a few hundred years and has earnestly attempted to make a beginning that will permit of future development. After securing one of the most beautiful sites in America for a great institution, expert building and landscape architects were employed to work with the school in laying out a plant for the future.... The Regents submit the completion of this patriotic enterprise to the people of the Commonwealth, fully realizing that it will take time to finish it, but, at the same time, entertaining the hope that the future will witness its completion." - State Normal Bulletin, February 1912.
When Dr. Meredith became Western’s eighth president, work began to update the master plan once again as the University faced a decision on where to locate three new residence halls and a student health and activities center. This new plan, anticipated to guide development for 25 years, also addressed traffic flow through and around campus and introduced the concept of a trolley system and shuttle service.

“I think what we propose will greatly enhance traffic patterns around campus,” Meredith said.

The revised plan called for a new library tower next to Cravens Graduate Center with Helm Library converted to classrooms and offices; Science and Technology Hall would be razed and a new building constructed; additions were planned for the Kentucky Building and Academic Complex.

In late 1972, President Dero Downing announced that it was time to review, refine, revise and update the master plan. Since the campus master plan was adopted in 1966, about $50 million in construction and renovation has been accomplished on campus and 19 buildings opened between 1966 and 1973. In October 1973, the Ivan Wilson Fine Arts Center opened. By December, work on the environmental sciences building was well under way.

In a Dec. 21 story in the Daily News, Owen Lawson, physical plant administrator, says the current emphasis on the development of the long-range land-use master plan is not in new buildings. Rather, the university is concentrating on the "refinement" stage, or beautification of the campus, according to Lawson.

The revised master plan envisioned 10 new buildings on campus with space for new classroom buildings, residence halls and athletic facilities. The university would maintain a buffer zone and purchase land along the outlying area of campus as it became available.

The master plan "calls for protection and preservation of these areas contiguous to the existing campus, selected acquisitions of adjacent parcels of land as they become available and the integration of these parcels into the Master Plan in a manner designed to enrich and strengthen the physical plan of the University." – President Dero Downing
Centennial Mall - Sculpture

Strong and continuous, this Gino Miles sculpture commemorates one hundred years of unwavering dedication to higher education at Western Kentucky University. The red steel form blends opposing shapes and an interior portal to commemorate past, present, and future commitments to the spirit which defines the WKU experience.
WKU Centennial Mosaic & Compass Clock

A rose placed between origins and horizons, wisdom and passion. The compass points to distant destinations and home. The sundial clock marks a place in time blending natural order with evolving technology. The imbedded star map mirrors constellations overhead one hundred years from now. Each star is a wish for bright futures for all students.