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UA3/9 Follow-Up to Forum Regarding FY2013-14 Budget

WKU President's Office

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From: Gary Ransdell
To: Faculty-All; Staff-All
Subject: Follow-up to Forum Regarding FY2013-14 Budget
Date: Tue. 3/26/2013 4:19PM

Fellow Faculty and Staff:

Thank you to those who attended one of the campus forums held last week to discuss the 2013-14 campus budget and the proposed five percent tuition increase. In addition to these open forums, which were broadcast by ITV to our regional campuses in Elizabethtown, Glasgow, and Owensboro, I met with the Student Government Association, Staff Council, and University Senate. The discussion was thoughtful and valuable, and I appreciate the time and attention of all who attended each session.

For those who were not able to participate, I outlined the economic conditions that have plagued our state in recent years, the impact on higher education as a whole and on WKU more specifically, and I presented detailed information about the difficult decisions we face as we develop next year's budget with no new state appropriation and significant fixed cost increases. In short, we are proposing a five percent tuition increase that will only allow us to cover the fixed cost increases, i.e., unavoidable costs associated with doing business, in next year's budget. A listing of these fixed costs and all of the information presented at the forums can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/YFW3NR>.

By statute, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education sets tuition parameters—specifically, CPE determines the cap on tuition increases at Kentucky's public colleges and universities. We must first gain approval from CPE, and I expect some action by the Council in April. Once parameters are approved, our Board of Regents will act on our tuition recommendation. Approval of a tuition increase less than five percent for us will necessitate reductions in our campus budget.

As I have reiterated on many occasions, I prefer that we protect jobs to the extent possible. WKU's budget largely supports personnel. Our campus operating budget as a whole is minimal, and following the unfunded growth of more than 5,000 students and multiple budget reductions over the last several years, I believe we are as efficient an institution as you will find in Kentucky or across the nation. That said, our decision this year is to forego a salary increase and protect people and jobs. Other universities are going through the very painful process of cutting jobs to reallocate funding. That will gain them some capacity to provide a compensation variable to their remaining employees, but I do not believe that such a strategy is in our best interest at WKU. I am committed to increasing salaries, and over the past 10 years we have managed to do something in that regard each year, albeit modest in some years. This year, however, we simply cannot generate the funding for salary increases without reallocating and, as a result, cutting campus positions.

My hope, going forward, is that we can retain more students and strategically grow enrollment to increase campus revenue. Certainly, I hope to see the state economy stabilize in a way that allows state funding for higher education to grow. Until that time, we will continue to manage as efficiently as possible while ensuring high quality for our students and a pleasant work environment for our employees. I welcome your thoughts and input on this very important matter.

Gary