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UA35 Fall Update from Academic Affairs

WKU Provost

Gordon Emslie

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From: Gordon Emslie
To: Faculty-All
Subject: Fall Update from Academic Affairs
Date: Tue. 10/9/2012 1:47PM

Dear Colleagues:

I hope that you all had a relaxing Fall Break, and have returned both refreshed and with renewed vigor. This communication is to update you on several matters within the Division of Academic Affairs.

Following discussions at department and college levels, we have recently authorized some 40 searches to fill the highest-priority faculty vacancies, through Phase I of the Staffing Plan. I am also pleased to note that, in association with the Chief Diversity Officer, we have secured additional recurring funds to support the minority faculty hiring initiative. By initiating faculty searches as early as feasible in the year, we will be able, as in past years, to recruit the very best candidates to fill these positions. Overall, WKU has increased its number of tenure-eligible faculty by over twenty during the last two years, and, as our 2012-18 Action Plan (which can be found [here](#)) stresses, continued growth of the number of faculty in tenure-eligible lines is a high priority for the years ahead.

[\[http://www.wku.edu/convocation/documents/challenging_the_spirit_action_plan_12_18.pdf\]](http://www.wku.edu/convocation/documents/challenging_the_spirit_action_plan_12_18.pdf)

Of course, the ever-declining state support for higher education means that funds with which to budget these faculty positions are more and more dependent on tuition revenue. Therefore, the timing and extent of Phase II, in which we examine remaining vacancies and possible areas for strategic growth from a university-level perspective, will depend on details of the evolving enrollment picture for Fall 2012, on which we base the budget for AY 2013-14. And, while our enrollment number last week was higher than the census number we reported last year, enrollment tends to fall between now and the census date (toward the end of October), since we are required to report only those students who have met their tuition obligations to the University. We remain mindful of the Senate's recommendation to synchronize any enrollment actions with student access to pertinent educational resources, such as Blackboard and computer laboratories. And, as we approach the final drop for non-payment date of October 23rd, the Office of Enrollment Management is working diligently with our students to determine the best option(s) to help them meet their financial obligations to the university and stay enrolled. Faculty are a crucial link here: if you are aware of students experiencing financial difficulty, and particularly if you receive notice that students have been dropped for non-payment, please refer them to Dr. Brian Meredith in the Office of Enrollment Management (enrollment.management@wku.edu ; (270) 745-6169) .

Over 50 students received Faculty Undergraduate Student Engagement (FUSE) awards for Summer and Fall 2012, and [a new round of applications](#) for Spring 2013 funding is underway, with applications due on October 29. These awards provide funds to support both students and their faculty mentors in semester-long projects in research and creative activity, culminating in the presentation of the work at an appropriate venue. They serve several purposes – to promote a greater engagement between faculty and undergraduate students in research and creative activity, to highlight to external constituents the breadth, depth and quality of such creative activities at WKU, and, in association with the Office of Scholar Development, to better prepare students to compete for prestigious national scholarships (of which WKU students earned an impressive 27 last year). I would like to acknowledge the contribution of so many of our faculty to these worthwhile projects.

[\[http://www.wku.edu/research/student_research.php\]](http://www.wku.edu/research/student_research.php)

We will shortly commence on-campus interviews for two important leadership positions within the Division of Academic Affairs – Associate Provost & Dean of Graduate Studies, and Dean of the University Libraries. Each candidate will, of course, engage in an open forum, and I encourage everyone not only to attend these events, but also to be involved in the evaluation process through submission of feedback reports to the respective Search Committees. Further information on the candidates and their interview schedules will be available [here](#) shortly. [\[http://wku.edu/academicaffairs/openings/adminopenings.php\]](http://wku.edu/academicaffairs/openings/adminopenings.php)

Speaking of the Libraries, the 4th Floor Cravens area of the Libraries will be closed for the remainder of the Fall semester in order to renovate it into a state-of-the-art Information Commons, an area for students to gather and share resources. The Commons area has been modeled on similar highly-successful facilities at other institutions; it will open in the Spring and we are confident that it will suitably impress prospective students (and their parents!) during recruitment activities for Fall 2013.

Another initiative aimed at recruiting the strongest possible pool of students to WKU involves the addition of [several new features](#) to our institutional scholarship program effective for Fall 2013 and beyond. We have expanded the competition for the two top-tier scholarships (the Presidential Scholarship and the Award of Excellence scholarship, now renamed the Cherry Presidential Scholarship and the 1906 Founders Scholarship, respectively) to allow students with GPAs of 3.8 and above, and ACT scores of 31 and higher, to compete for them. This change will extend eligibility for these prestigious scholarships to students who have chosen to take demanding high-school courses, such as Advanced Placement courses, with their associated challenges to their straight-A averages. Another element of the new scholarship program is aimed at students with very respectable GPAs and ACT scores (3.3 and 26, respectively), for whom institutional scholarship dollars have not hitherto been available, and who therefore may have chosen to go elsewhere. The recruitment of these students should improve substantially our retention and six-year graduation rates, which are not only valuable goals in their own right, but also key elements in performance-based funding formulas proposed by the Council on Postsecondary Education. And, in the graduate studies area, we will again be making over a million dollars in supplemental funding for graduate assistants available to academic units in order that they may aggressively pursue top-tier graduate students during the upcoming recruitment season.
[\[http://www.wku.edu/scholarship/incoming.php\]](http://www.wku.edu/scholarship/incoming.php)

We will also, of course, be sure to make prospective students aware of the strengths of WKU's Colonnade Program, with its three-tiered approach to the all-important introductory courses in the college experience. The Colonnade Implementation Committee is hard at work to ensure that we have as strong a program as possible in place by Fall 2014, and I encourage all faculty to consider the development of pertinent courses, particularly those for the innovative Connections level.

Preparations for our decennial renewal of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) are well underway. Renewal of accreditation requires that we show compliance with about a hundred Principles of Accreditation, which may be found [here](#). However, some of the most important elements of accreditation can be summarized rather succinctly: (1) we must have on record appropriate credentials for all faculty of instructional record, (2) we must publish and regularly assess student learning outcomes, both for programs and for individual courses, and (3) we must constantly improve our curricular offerings in light of the results of such assessment. Our compliance report is due to be submitted in Fall 2014, and numerous committees are at work to ensure that we produce a compliance record that is as thorough and transparent as possible. We have also narrowed down the list of topics for the SACS-required Quality Enhancement Plan and, through campus-wide discussions over the next few months, we will further narrow these to a single topic that will form the basis for this important element of our accreditation renewal. Finally, SACS makes it very clear that renewal of accreditation is an activity not only of which the entire campus should be aware, but also one in which everyone should be actively involved. Accordingly, I ask you to please cooperate as much as possible with the work of the various committees, and I encourage you to become familiar with the material that has been placed on the WKU SACS accreditation website at <http://wku.edu/sacs/index.php> .
[\[http://sacscoc.org/pdf/2012PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf\]](http://sacscoc.org/pdf/2012PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf)

Many of you are aware of the rapid growth of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as a method of delivery of higher education content. Our Division of Extended Learning and Outreach continues to monitor this environment, and we remain confident that WKU, through the dedicated efforts of our faculty and staff, will continue to lead the way in the delivery of quality online course experiences to our students, both near and far. In a related venture, the Council on Postsecondary Education has proposed an Adult Learner Initiative aimed at making a college education available to an appreciable fraction of the half-million or so adult learners in the Commonwealth who started college and have earned in excess of 45 credit hours, but who have yet to earn a formal academic credential. While the details of this initiative

are still under development, both online learning and WKU will doubtless play major roles. And, in association with the Council of Academic Deans and the Senate, we will be reviewing the recommendations of a 2008 Task Force regarding Prior Learning Assessment and the extent to which awarding credit for experiential learning can play a role in our future endeavors, particularly those related to adult learners.

Following a recommendation from the Academic Quality Committee, subsequently endorsed by the University Senate, WKU has moved to online student-instructor evaluations this Fall. At this point the questions are identical to those on the paper SITE forms, allowing us to evaluate solely the effect of the move to online format. During the current academic year, we will evaluate other online instruments, with the goal of replacing the current SITE instrument with an online instrument of greater validity. We are cognizant of concerns that student participation levels tend to decline during such a change and hence we have provided incentives for students to participate. Students who complete all their course evaluations for Fall 2012 will be entered into a drawing for prizes, and early access (December 3 – 18) to grades will be available only to students who have completed all their course evaluations. We will, of course, advertise this message heavily to students. However, often the most effective communications are those delivered by the instructor, and so please encourage your students to fully participate in the new online evaluation process.

The [proposal](#) for an increased emphasis on bi-term instruction, circulated at Opening Convocation, has been submitted to the Senate Executive Committee which, in turn, has charged the Academic Quality Committee, the Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities Committee, and the University Curriculum Committee with reviewing it. In parallel with this activity, and in accordance with the “Next Steps” section of the proposal, we will be engaging in a series of college meetings to further discuss this initiative and solicit your views and your feedback.

[\[http://www.wku.edu/convocation/documents/increased_emphasis_on_biterms.pdf\]](http://www.wku.edu/convocation/documents/increased_emphasis_on_biterms.pdf)

Once again, welcome back, and thank you for your continued contributions to academic excellence at WKU.

Gordon Emslie
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs