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WKU President's Office

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1997-2002
The Beginning of a Transformation

Western Kentucky University
1. Academic Reputation

WKU continues to receive high rankings in academic reputation among comprehensive universities in surveys of university presidents and chief academic officers. The University's push for national prominence is strengthened by numerous faculty who set the pace for their discipline in applied research, refereed publications, and national competitions. Most noteworthy is the manner in which the WKU School of Journalism and Broadcasting promptly responded to Governor Patton’s challenge for each university to identify a program which could earn the prestige of national recogni-
ation. Western is the only school in the Commonwealth to have an academic program which is judged by independent sources as the nation's best program in that field. Twice, (1999-2000 and 2000-2001), the WKU School of Journalism and Broadcasting was judged by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation as the nation's premier undergraduate program. The College Heights Herald, Western's twice-weekly campus newspaper, has been judged to be the nation's best campus news publication. The WKU Forensics Team has earned global recognition by winning three straight international forensics championships. Western's civil engineering students have promptly emerged on the national scene by finishing tenth, eighth, and fourth in the last three national concrete canoe competitions. Faculty in the Department of Geography and Geology and in the WKU Center for Cave and Karst Studies have earned international acclaim for their expertise in karst topography and ground water quality. Other national and international accolades can be documented throughout the campus.

2. Enrollment Growth

As part of Governor Patton's higher education reform movement, the universities in Kentucky were challenged to increase the number of students in postsecondary education. Western has led the way among Kentucky's eight universities in enrollment growth since 1997. WKU's enrollment has grown from 14,543 to 17,770 — a total increase of 22 percent. Perhaps most encouraging, however, has been the growth of the applicant pool which clearly illustrates the preference for a Western education among prospective students throughout Kentucky and surrounding states.
security through an 84 percent growth in the University’s endowment and, because of the campaign, annual cash deposits from gifts has grown from $3,045,724 to $12,324,882—an increase of more than 400 percent.

4. Sponsored Programs

Perhaps the point of progress which is beginning to distinguish Western from peer institutions the most is the dramatic growth in sponsored programs and applied research which WKU faculty have achieved over the last five years. External funding for faculty scholarship has grown from $11.5 million to $24.5 million, an increase of 113 percent. As impressive as the funding growth is the balance of sponsored projects across WKU’s undergraduate and graduate programs.

3. Private Support

The most precise challenge issued by the Board of Regents in the fall of 1997 was that of raising the University’s capacity for private support and launching the University’s first capital campaign. Simultaneous with the University’s strategic plan, Challenging the Spirit, the University launched on July 1, 1998, a five-year capital campaign with a goal to raise $78 million by June 30, 2003. The $78 million goal was reached a year ahead of schedule and has been extended to $90 million. Prior to this capital campaign, Western had never received a gift of $1 million. Since 1997, we have received 21 gifts of $1 million or more. As a result, we have endowed 19 faculty positions and raised $21.5 in new academic scholarship support for students. Through this campaign, the University is helping to ensure future financial
5. Budget Growth

A university's budget is an important measure of its capacity to achieve its mission of teaching, research, and service. Dollars alone cannot propel an institution toward national prominence, but a growing base of resources effectively managed and utilized by a talented faculty and staff can provide the capacity for progress. In the five years since FY 97-98, WKU's budget has grown by 49 percent. Most importantly, the dollars in that budget devoted to academic programs have grown by $33 million. Some of this growth has come from the Kentucky General Assembly which has followed Governor Patton's lead in placing a premium on funding for higher education. Most of the growth, however, has come from tuition from a larger pool of students, private support, sponsored research, and sound business practices throughout the University's auxiliary enterprises.

6. Physical Infrastructure

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing Western in the fall of 1997 was a dramatically deteriorating physical plant and an ominous deferred maintenance backlog.

Western has long treasured a campus rich with trees and landscaping. Years of neglect, however, had caused noticeable deterioration of campus green space. A concerted effort over the last five years has restored much of the park-like atmosphere which alumni and friends have enjoyed throughout Western's history. A tree replacement campaign, manicured lawns, and a vast array of plant materials have created a renewed source of pride in a beautiful campus.

No new academic facilities had been built on the Western campus since the mid-1970s, and the campus residence halls were in deplorable condition. In the fall of 2002, however, the campus is enjoying the most extensive construction program since the mid-1960s. Approximately $136 million in capital construction is currently in progress or planned for this coming year on the Western campus. Two new academic buildings are under construction. Media and Technology Hall ($18.5 million), which will house the School of Journalism and Broadcasting and Academic Computing, will be completed in the spring of '03. The Complex for Engineering and Biological Sciences ($20 million) is now under construction.
on the Ogden College section of the campus. It will house new programs in electrical, mechanical, and civil engineering, plus biology and biotechnology. It will open in 2004.

Several projects are aimed at improving the quality of campus life for students. A massive renovation of 17 residence halls is in progress. Five halls have been completely renovated; five others are in progress. The other seven are receiving cosmetic and safety enhancements and new furniture. This $40 million project is made possible through an off-balance sheet recapitalization through the Student Life Foundation — a financial concept unprecedented in public higher education. A $3.5 million renovation of campus dining halls is also in progress and a $10 million renovation of the Downing University Center will be financed through new contracts for dining services and soft drink rights. More than $3 million is being invested in campus parking improvements which, when related projects are complete, will bring a net increase of 1,330 parking spaces. The Guthrie Tower and Carillon ($1.5 million) provides a marvelous architectural amenity to the campus as it symbolizes a tribute to Western men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country. An additional $5 million is also being devoted over the next two years to deferred maintenance priorities.

On the athletic front, some $35 million is being invested in improvements to athletic facilities, including new facilities for soccer, softball, track, baseball, football, and a complete renovation of E.A. Diddle Arena, which will impact not only Western’s basketball and volleyball programs, but provide an important economic stimulus to southcentral Kentucky.

7. Extended Campus

Over the last five years, Western has partnered with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) to open the state’s first two regional postsecondary education centers. The first to open was the WKU-Glasgow Campus. Part of the South Regional Postsecondary Education Center dedicated in January 2002, this $10 million facility now serves 1,600 students from 11 counties. Western’s programs in Elizabethtown, KY which serve 650 students, are now enjoying new quarters in the Central Regional Postsecondary Education Center dedicated in April 2002.
8. Distance Learning

WKU faculty have responded admirably to the state’s challenge to create distance learning opportunities for students who might not otherwise be able to participate in on-campus class work. Our distance learning program has also proven to be a valuable alternative to students on campus who supplement their campus course load with web-based courses. A pace-setting participant in the Kentucky Virtual University, WKU has the largest number of distance learning courses and distance learning students among the eight public universities in Kentucky. Distance learning at WKU will not replace the premium our faculty place on the human exchange of ideas and ideals, but it will provide an important mechanism to help manage enrollment growth and provide access to courses and faculty for an important segment of the Western family.

9. Economic Development

In addition to the millions of dollars which WKU and its family of faculty, staff, and students spend in the Bowling Green region each year, the WKU faculty has responded impressively to the challenge of impacting economic development through their academic disciplines. A series of Applied Science Centers and health-related initiatives are allowing faculty and students to identify and solve significant problems from agriculture to biodiversity to applied physics to rural mobile health. New baccalaureate programs in electrical, mechanical, and civil engineering are poised to dramatically increase the number of licensed engineers in the workplace. Western faculty in Management Information Systems are actively engaged in assessing the Commonwealth’s network capacity and leading the way for Kentucky to become more technologically connected. Western is also engaged in helping emerging business and industry grow through the reclamation of a 27-acre Center for Research and Development which had formerly served for 35 years as a shopping mall. The Center is also the site for a partnership with the Economic Development Cabinet in the creation of an Innovation and Commercialization Center and with TVA in a business incubator.
10. Intercollegiate Athletics

Among the things that make Western distinctive in American higher education is the special spirit unique to the Western family. While the University's motto, the Spirit makes the Master, can be applied to all aspects of university life at Western, it is especially meaningful to Western's 20 intercollegiate athletic teams and the 350 student athletes who represent the University with distinction. The most compelling point of progress in our athletic program is the proliferation of academic achievement among WKU student athletes. Of WKU student athletes, 45 percent finished the spring '02 semester with a 3.0 GPA or better, and 38 percent of WKU student athletes have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better. Competitive success has also been restored to the WKU athletic program. The men's basketball team has returned to the Top 25, and, for the first time since 1987, WKU athletic teams won the 2001-2002 Vic Bubas Cup, symbolic of overall athletic superiority in the Sun Belt Conference. Of equal importance is the financial solvency of the athletic program which in FY 01-02 achieved a balanced budget for the first time in recent memory. Facilitating financial solvency is an ongoing investment by students and an impressive growth in men's basket-

ball attendance which improved from 3,943 per game in 00-01 to an average of 6,433 per game in 01-02, the third largest one-year increase in men's basketball attendance among all NCAA men's basketball programs. The renewed spirit among Hilltopper fans combined with dramatic improvement in athletic facilities is propelling the athletic program to do its part to achieve a university transformation, build a growing applicant pool, and help achieve the University's goal of national prominence.
Collective Impact

The impact of our progress can be measured in many ways — internally and externally. For example, in June 2002, WKU was one of six universities in the United States that had its bond rating improved. The reasons cited by Moody’s were: significant growth in enrollment; a consistently balanced budget; and a successful capital campaign. This improved debt rating from A3 to A2 will lower the cost of any money WKU may need to borrow in the foreseeable future.

The Next Five Years

All of these points of progress in some way are helping, and will continue to help, Western emerge as a nationally prominent comprehensive university. But the transformation is just beginning. The quest for national prominence must be ongoing and improvement throughout the university must be continuous. Just as we have summarized progress over the last five years into 10 categories, there are 10 areas where Western will focus its attention over the next five years.

1. Continue to enhance quality indicators in the undergraduate experience at WKU (GPA, rank in class, and ACT scores for incoming students, retention rates, and graduation rates). Focusing on quality will further strengthen WKU’s reputation as the university of choice for quality faculty and the best students while maintaining accessibility through its community college, distance learning and extended campus programs.

2. Complete the Investing in the Spirit capital campaign and make plans to launch the University’s next campaign within five years.

3. Fully institutionalize a new College of Health and Human Services.

4. Create a new structure of departments and programs to strengthen the University’s impact on economic development, community engagement and continuing education.

5. Complete the renovation of residence halls, auxiliary, and athletic facilities.

6. Complete construction of two new academic buildings, then focus the University’s capital project attention on renovation of existing facilities.

7. Achieve accreditation for new joint baccalaureate programs in electrical, mechanical, and civil engineering.

8. Complete a partnership with KCTCS in the creation of a regional postsecondary education center in Owensboro, KY. Collaborate with KCTCS on program offerings in Franklin, KY.

9. Complete a pending institutional self study and accreditation process through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Complete a pending NCAA certification self study.

The foundation has been laid by generations of faculty and students throughout Western's 97 years. The last five years, however, have sparked a renewed energy and commitment to strength and quality. There will be no resting on recent laurels; rather, this University family will peer deeply into the horizon of the coming decade and use our recent success as a springboard to the national prominence we so passionately seek.

The spirit of dedication, support, and loyalty at Western is extraordinary. Julie and I see it in the faces of the many students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends who visit the campus and the President's Home each year. These past five years I have been wonderfully blessed and fortunate to work with so many talented people. I am most confident that this magnificent University and a remarkable university family will continue to demonstrate excellence in every facet of university life. In the words of President Cherry, *behind the deed the doer, behind the doer, the dream.* The nation is taking notice of our deeds. We are a campus of doers. Our dreams are significant. Let's rise to the challenge!

Gary A. Ransdell
President