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UA3/10/2 Kicking Off A New Academic Year

WKU President's Office - Caboni

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Fellow Faculty and Staff:

I hope you were able to enjoy yesterday’s eclipse. What an amazing and rare experience! I want to express appreciation to all those who were involved in the planning of the various events hosted on and off campus for students and guests. It was a magnificent day!

Speaking of rare, presidential transitions have been rather rare in the life of Western Kentucky University. Only ten individuals have been privileged enough to serve as president throughout its 111-year history. And while change can be daunting, transitions create a cycle of renewal, often bringing a new energy and a fresh focus. In the weeks I’ve been on the job, I’ve visited with hundreds of our stakeholders – employees, alumni, policy makers, business and industry leaders – and all have expressed their optimism, appreciation and love for this great university.

As we begin a new academic year, I want to reflect back on the main points I shared with the campus at the Faculty Staff Convocation. Our top priority for this year is to create a new strategic plan that will guide our decision-making process going forward. The plan should reflect our collective vision for WKU and should ensure that we are focusing on the core mission of a student-centered, applied research university, which is to inspire innovation, elevate communities and transform lives. The strategic planning process will be led by a steering committee with four to six working groups. It will be inclusive and will engage every stakeholder group in meaningful conversation about our shared aspirations for WKU. It will also ensure that we use data to make decisions, and the end result will be a practical and revisable roadmap for our future. Throughout the year we will provide opportunities for you to be involved, and we will update you regularly. We will soon launch a strategic planning website where you can give feedback and follow the progress as well.

Strategic planning is important, but it takes time. So as we are working on strategic planning, we will also be about the business of strategic doing. Four areas where we will focus our immediate attention are student recruitment; persistence and graduation; diversity, equity and inclusion; and international programming, which began with the consolidation of all our international efforts under a single umbrella. Work to improve student advising, re-focusing our freshman year programming to a living-learning concept to boost student success, and implementation of recommendations from our task force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are
underway as well. Intentional change and substantial progress in each of these areas are critical to our number one goal - student success.

Kacy and I greatly appreciate the warm welcome we’ve received since our arrival to WKU – thank you! It’s good to be back home. Thank you for all that you do to support WKU. I’m excited to begin this new journey with you and look forward to celebrating many successes together.

Timothy C. Caboni