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WKU President's Office - Caboni

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to a new semester on the Hill. It is a fresh start for our Hilltoppers, and I want us to begin this spring by amplifying our focus on the success of every student studying with us.

I am pleased to share with you some preliminary data that provide a glimpse into the improvements we are creating with our student persistence interventions. Our first to second semester persistence rate for the fall 2018 first-time, first-year student cohort is up 4.0% to 86.5% from 82.5% when compared with 2017. We made even larger gains in our FTFY class among low income (up 5.0%, from 77.7% to 82.7%), first generation (up 5.2%, from 75.5% to 80.7%) and URM (up 7.8%, from 71.6% to 79.4%) student populations. This builds on the first to second year persistence gains we realized this past fall.

Additionally, we have two larger initiatives designed to help students make progress to graduation through a combination of support, engagement and mentorship. The Kelly M. Burch Institute has produced a preliminary 96% first to second semester persistence rate for its fall 2018 cohort, and the Intercultural Student Engagement Center (ISEC) has achieved a preliminary persistence rate of 98%. These are remarkable metrics and a testament that we can enable student success with the right mix of attention, energy and investment.

These are early numbers and will shift some in the following days and weeks, but they indicate we are heading in the right direction as an institution. These results are due to the work of our entire community. We have much more to do, but this is terrific progress. You should be proud of the positive results we are creating for students and WKU.

Our strategic plan, *Climbing to Greater Heights*, guides the implementation of our student success initiatives and sets our goal at an 80% first year persistence rate and a 60% graduation rate. The Division of Enrollment and Student Experience continues to work with its campus partners to implement national best practices designed to increase the progression and success of every student we admit to WKU. These efforts include rethinking our financial aid model and shifting to a net tuition revenue perspective from a headcount focus; creating first-year interventions for students of color and first-generation college students; and centralizing comprehensive advising so that it deals with more than just taking courses but also creates opportunities for conversations related to financial challenges, mental health, social integration, and other barriers to college persistence.

As we continue our strategic plan implementation, I am creating a steering committee to guide and systemically evaluate our efforts. The group will be comprised of individuals staggered in

one, two, and three-year terms and will participate in monthly meetings to guide our execution of the initiatives detailed in our plan. The committee will help select and refine the data we collect and the benchmarks we use to determine our progress and success. Finally, they will work to ensure we have a sustained effort across our campuses and administrative units and that together we are making significant institutional progress. To create this group, I'm asking WKU faculty and staff who are interested in serving to submit an interest form by February 5, 2019, using this link: https://www.wku.edu/strategicplan/committee_interest_form.

I look forward to another successful semester and continuing our progress elevating WKU.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy C. Caboni". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Timothy C. Caboni