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## UA3/10/2 Yield Season

WKU President's Office - Caboni

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Faculty, Staff and Alumni:

I am thankful for the broad interest from WKU faculty and staff wishing to help guide the implementation of our strategic plan. You can view the 30 committee members selected from across the University who comprise our Strategic Plan Steering Committee here: <https://www.wku.edu/strategicplan/>. There will be additional opportunities for those who expressed an interest in contributing as our work progresses. I appreciate the willingness of so many on our campus to participate in shaping the future of WKU.

I have spoken frequently about our increased institutional focus on recruitment, retention and graduation. As we enter the yield season of the admission process, the individual engagement of our faculty, staff and academic programs is the most persuasive way to inform students of the advantages of the WKU Experience. I want to thank each college and the faculty and staff members who participated in our admitted student days held during the past month. I know many of you are personally involved with outreach and recruitment. I am grateful for your commitment and the spirit in which you do this for our University and for our students.

During his visit to the Hill in February, Jeff Kallay confirmed the significance of our creating additional communication channels and increasing real, personal conversations directly with students and their families. In this critical period when our admitted students are making their final decisions about college attendance, we must continue to communicate aggressively the increased likelihood of students completing a bachelor's degree if they begin at a four-year university, the competitiveness of our net tuition compared to other Kentucky institutions, and the unique, student-centered experience offered at WKU.

As we accelerate our efforts to attract qualified and prepared students who will be successful, it is important to understand the challenges WKU, other post-secondary institutions in the Commonwealth, and universities across the nation face in this pursuit. These include affordability, demographic and labor market pressures.

College affordability is one of the most important challenges we face, especially with our marketplace and a mission of serving many students who are the first in their families to attend college. With a decrease in state funding that places a greater financial burden on students and their families, WKU continues to maintain a stable net cost – the total amount paid for tuition, housing and expenses by our students. We managed to do this, even as sticker prices for tuition increased.

We also have made progress in how we assist students financially. Proactively working with students and parents to address financial concerns, we counsel them continuously throughout the recruitment and matriculation process about how they can afford a WKU degree. We are approaching our financial aid award processes more strategically, helping us to close the affordability gap for middle class families. WKU is committed to ensuring anyone who wants to attend our University has the opportunity, regardless of their family's economic condition.

The number of students graduating from high schools in Kentucky is decreasing, with a 4% drop expected for AY 2019-20. Additionally, of those graduates, the number of students choosing to go to college is declining. Among the 40 high schools in our immediate service area, 40% reported a decline in the percentage of their graduating seniors going on to college. We are seeing evidence of this trend at WKU. Among the students who were admitted but did not enroll in the fall 2018 term, 52.4% (3,190) ended up not enrolling at any post-secondary institution – an increase of more than 12% (345) in just two years.

A tight labor market with a large number of vacant positions and wage growth creates significant competition for higher education. In this highly competitive environment, we must articulate even more clearly the life-long benefits of a college degree. Our students want to know how attending WKU will position them for success in the workplace, and we must convey the power of our degrees in that regard. Perhaps more importantly, we must convince parents and their students that a college degree not only creates an opportunity to make a good living, but it also prepares our graduates to make a good life, for themselves and those around them.

Prospective students who have been admitted to WKU, and perhaps to numerous other institutions, are making significant, life-changing decisions over the next few weeks – selecting the place they will call home for their higher education career. As we continue working to bring new Hilltoppers to our Hill this fall, thank you for your student-centered efforts and the work you do every day to shape the future of our institution. It is through your contributions that WKU continues to make a difference in the lives of the students we serve.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy C. Caboni', written in a cursive style.

Timothy C. Caboni