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2016 Spring Semester Welcome Message

Fellow Faculty and Staff:

Well, it has been an interesting start to the spring 2016 semester. The weather created significant challenges as we wrapped up the winter term at the end of last week and welcomed thousands of students back into our residence halls and campus community over the last few days. I want to particularly compliment and thank the number of campus personnel who worked way above and beyond the call of duty over the last few days. First and foremost, our Grounds Crew has performed brilliantly. The incredible amount of volume of work, and the energy, effort, and sheer determination which they have exhibited to help us overcome this massive snow storm has been remarkable. It is one thing to remove snow from streets, walks, steps, and parking lots, it is yet another to fight through the ice which was buried under the snow. Let's also thank our Building Service Attendants for keeping our buildings safe and clean when slush and salt is tracked in. I know the entire campus joins me in expressing our collective gratitude to these hard-working men and women. I also want to compliment our Residence Life staff coming in early and adjusting on the fly to accommodate the weather to welcome our students back. I also want to thank our colleagues with our campus Restaurant and Dining Group for keeping the Fresh Food Company and other key dining facilities open for the students who were already here, and those who were arriving through the weekend. And thank you also for feeding and fueling our Grounds Crew! I have also learned about several faculty and staff in some of our key academic units, who considered their services essential and came to work even though the university was closed, to meet the needs of incoming undergraduate and graduate students, particularly international students, who are arriving at WKU for the first time. Finally, I want to compliment those faculty who were teaching Winter Term courses who had to deal with two cancelled days last week, but found a way to ensure that our Winter Term students met the required contact hours and were able to complete final exams. Change and adapt has certainly been the theme across most of our campus in recent days!

Chief Diversity Officer and Black Cultural Center

One administrative change took place last week as part of Dr. Lynne Holland's new position as Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students. I have taken the appropriate step of also naming her as WKU's Chief Diversity Officer. By transferring the Chief Diversity Officer duties from Academic Affairs to Student Affairs, we, in my opinion, properly align these important services with other student-related services in the Division of Student Affairs. Therefore, effective immediately, the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion will report to Dr. Holland, who will in turn report to the Vice President for Student Affairs. One of the first actions in this new configuration is the creation of a Black Cultural Center, which will be housed in the Zuheir Sofia/Dero Downing Center located at 1536 State Street. The Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion will be moving into the Black Cultural Center and will be working with our new Chief Diversity Officer in utilizing this space and creating programming to help meet the needs of our minority populations.

Student Success Summit

I want to thank the significant number of faculty and staff who attended the Student Success Summit conducted last Thursday in the Downing Student Union. This broad range of WKU employees spent most of the day focusing on how we can all best work together to ensure that our students persist and finish their WKU degree programs. Our students are making a significant investment in their WKU higher education. We—our faculty and staff—represent their return on investment. They trust us to do the things necessary to put them in the best possible position to persist and graduate. All WKU faculty and

staff must make student retention and graduation a top priority. These are also critical actions on our part as the Higher Education funding model now measures retention, credit hours completed, and degrees earned as the primary drivers for any new state funding which might be forthcoming now or in the future. Last Thursday afternoon, I met privately with Governor Bevin to discuss higher education and WKU funding. It is clear to me that he intends to pursue an outcomes-based distribution of the money currently distributed through the Higher Education budget. Therefore, both new funds and the redistribution of existing funds will likely be based on our performance in retention, credit hours completed, and degrees earned going forward. For these two reasons—it is the right thing to do for our students and it is the critical thing to do for institutional funding—we must all be focused on doing whatever we possibly can do to help our students persist and graduate.

Governor's Budget Address

I will be in Frankfort tonight for the Governor's first Budget Address. Having spent considerable time in Frankfort last week, I have grave concerns about the near-term funding dynamics. We will know more as the Governor reveals his budget plans, but we all need to understand that this is the first step in the budget process. The Governor's proposed budget first goes to the State Senate. A Senate version of the budget then goes to the House of Representatives. Then finally, House and Senate leadership come together in Conference to hammer out a final state budget. Typically, this is followed by the Governor's opportunity to veto particular items in the General Assembly proposed budget. This process will unfold between now and the first of April. I will keep you posted!

Best wishes to all faculty and staff for a productive spring semester. Let's hope that we have seen the worst of the winter of 2016!

Gary A. Ransdell



Dr. Gary A. Ransdell | President