

(July 1988)

A MESSAGE TO ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Western has a rich and valued tradition, one in which all alumni and friends can take great pride. While we are justifiably proud of our past, our energy and efforts must be directed toward the future. Western is on the threshold of becoming a most significant institution of higher education. Now is the time to plan, prepare, and, indeed, establish our position among the institutions of higher education in Kentucky. I would like to share with you some of my thoughts about Western's future.

Implicit in all our endeavors must be an appreciation for the value of education and the understanding that it is primarily through education that the economic fortunes of the Commonwealth will rise or fall. Therefore, one of the pillars on which Western has been built is a commitment to excellence in the expansion of learning. The record of Western's eighty years of service evidences the institution's success in providing high quality higher education programs. Western graduates have become leaders in the professions, government, education, and the business community; and many have been instrumental in shaping the nature and character of the Commonwealth and the nation. The other pillar on which Western is firmly grounded is its commitment to making higher education available to all who have the ability, desire and dedication to advance themselves through higher education.

It is on these two pillars, excellence and access, that the heritage of Western has been built and on which the institution's future will depend. With this in mind, the Board of Regents has fashioned a philosophical

framework on which to rely in establishing policy directions for the conduct of the University.

Foremost in our philosophy must be a rejection of complacency and an adoption of an expansive view of Western's role in the educational system of Kentucky. Narrowness of perspective, limitation of aspiration, and parochialism must be forthwith and forever rejected.

The history of education in Kentucky has taught only too well that advancement does not come easily nor without certain costs. As an institution, Western must be able to bear the brunt of adversity and overcome the inertia of the status quo if we are to materially contribute to the economic and social enhancement of the Commonwealth.

The policy initiatives emanating from this philosophy of education indicate a direction which will inevitably lead to expansion of opportunity and advancement of this region of the state through creation and application of new knowledge.

Western must squarely face the happy, but sometimes difficult, dilemma of dramatic increase in enrollment. It should be understood and accepted that such growth is in keeping with the nature of Western as a state university and that, while increased size for size's sake is not a defensible goal, growth in the expansion of educational opportunity is a most laudable objective. The realization of our goal to bring the benefits of higher education to more of our people could well entail Western's becoming a university of major proportions by the mid-to-late 1990s. Such growth will necessitate careful planning in anticipation of changing programmatic and financial needs.

Orderly processes for growth require that we must assess our current initiatives and priorities. Every academic program and every administrative unit must be reviewed in terms of its contributions to Western's future. Because our resources are limited, we must use our funds wisely and in the most productive manner possible. We must free resources from marginal programs in order to initiate new programs and strengthen those areas which truly make a difference. We must take advantage of planned program budgeting strategies to bring about the greatest possible efficiency for every dollar spent. The budget must be planned in such a way to ensure that expenditures are consistent with the new directions of the University.

Western must, too, make concerted effort to provide service to the community, region, and state. A university is a great storehouse of knowledge which, when effectively employed, can be the catalyst by which our economic welfare is advanced. It is our purpose that Western should assert its present initiatives to extend its campus to all corners of its assigned region of the state. Special accommodation should be provided for non-traditional students who desire to attend school in the evenings and on weekends in order to reduce the hardships encountered by those who are not able to leave their jobs and community to pursue full-time education on distant residential campuses.

Western must extend graduate programs for those who wish to pursue terminal degrees. Our College of Education enjoys a national reputation with a faculty surpassed by few in advancement of educational thought through research and teaching. We have an obligation to make advanced study available to professional educators in this region of the state so that it

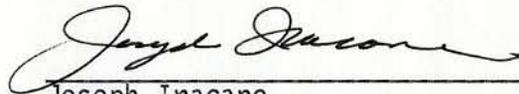
will no longer be necessary for them to attend other institutions at an extreme financial sacrifice. Kentucky cannot afford to continue to lose talented professional educators to neighboring states.

There is also a critical need to provide additional higher education opportunities in the sciences for young Kentuckians. In our advanced society the state which falls behind in the creation, application, and conveyance of scientific and technical knowledge will languish in the recesses of economic progress. Because Western is one of the primary institutions ideally located and suited to expand learning in the fields of the hard sciences, the institution should be prepared to expand degree programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Efficient deployment of such programs will yield substantial economic returns to Western's region of the state.

Western must recruit and retain quality faculty and students in order to augment its standing as an institution of excellence. In any organization it is people who make the difference. The Board of Regents is committed to securing the best possible leadership for the University. The Board will support the leadership of the institution in moving Western in a progressive and positive direction.

We are not motivated by, nor interested in, empire building at the expense of other institutions of higher learning. Experience tells us, however, that when an institution ceases to grow and progress, it begins to decay. The institution of education is no exception. Our mission is to bring higher education to those who need it and want it but cannot have it without the state taking the initiative of making it available to them.

Finally, I would say that Western is not merely a physical place of learning--it is much more by virtue of its unique heritage. It has become a symbol of educational opportunity, an institution that fosters the ideal of expansion of education for the common good. It is by this ideal that Western is known and revered, and it is by this ideal that Western will progress to the future.



Joseph Iracane
Chairman, Board of Regents
Western Kentucky University