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# Amid controversy, WKU regents approve J-school's name change

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) Aug 2, 2019

Mass Media and Technology Hall on Wednesday, July 31, 2019. (Austin Anthony/[photo@bgdailynews.com](mailto:photo@bgdailynews.com))

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Despite criticism from alumni, Western Kentucky University's Board of Regents unanimously approved Friday changing the name of the university's School of Journalism and Broadcasting to the School of Media.

The change sparked concerns among several WKU journalism alumni that the school is deemphasizing journalism in favor of other programs within the school, such as film. But during regents' third quarterly meeting Friday, WKU President Timothy Caboni sought to dispel the complaints and touted his "unwavering" commitment to the journalism program.

“Western Kentucky University’s journalism program is something we’re proud of, something we will continue to support and elevate at this institution,” Caboni said. “Just because we’re changing the name of a school doesn’t mean we’re changing our focus on the program.”

He added: “My commitment and our commitment to journalism and this program is unwavering, and it will continue to be unwavering.”

Several alumni, including some prominent journalists, personally petitioned campus leaders by writing letters in opposition to the name change.

Among them was WKU graduate Al Cross, a well-known Kentucky journalist and director of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues at the University of Kentucky.

In his letter, Cross raised concerns about faculty, administrators and regents viewing journalism as “a declining discipline.”

“When a university maintains a School of Journalism, it is saying that journalism is a public good,” Cross wrote. “When it removes the word from the name of a J-school, it is saying something else, something that can easily be inferred as a lack of confidence in journalism as an essential servant of democracy. So, if the name of the School is to be changed, let it be the School of Journalism and Media.”

A Board of Regents agenda item explaining the name change noted that faculty in the School of Journalism and Broadcasting unanimously agreed to the change. Robert Dietle, the school’s interim director, previously told the Daily News that the new name was the result of a faculty-led process and that “School of Media” is meant to more fully capture the scope of the school’s programs.

In defending the new name, journalism professor and program coordinator Mac McKerral said faculty remain steadfast in their commitment to teaching journalism but that change is needed.



When McKerral meets with parents of prospective students, he said he often pitches the program as a pathway for developing marketable job skills that will make them employable in several fields, not just in new media.

“They’re going to have a transferable skill set that any of you would want an employee of yours to have,” McKerral told the board. “They’re going to be great communicators. They’re going to understand the technology and how to use it effectively. They’re going to know how to find things. They’re going to know how to separate the essential from the non-essential. They’re going to know how to deal with people, and they’re going to know how to deal with people who are in positions of power and authority. We couldn’t ask for more in a skill set.”

McKerral said the faculty understand alumni concerns and asked for their continued support, vowing to improve communication with them going forward.

In other business, the board installed a new slate of officers, including naming Gillard Johnson as chair – replacing former chair Phillip Bale – and Frederick Higdon as vice chair. Will Harris, WKU’s student body president, was also sworn in as the board’s student regent.

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## Aaron Mudd

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