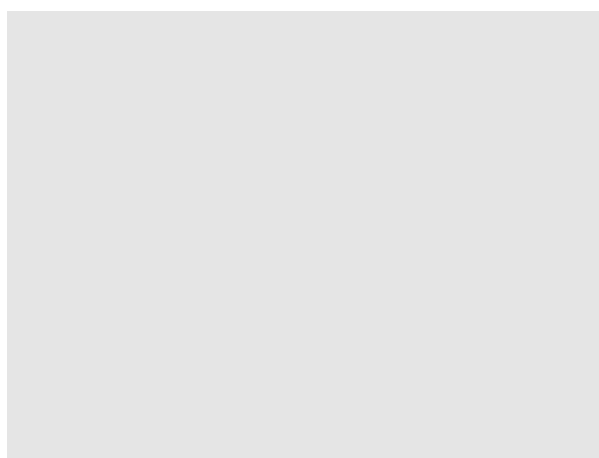


https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/wku-regents-ok-plan-to-suspend-programs-transform-others/article_0bf7abc0-6842-5479-9cf2-d38ed7447e45.html

WKU regents OK plan to suspend 101 programs, transform others

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com May 10, 2019



Timothy Caboni

Western Kentucky University will move ahead with plans to suspend 101 academic programs and transform another 55, among other changes approved Friday by the Board of Regents.

Reacting to the recommendations, WKU President Timothy Caboni discouraged thinking of the changes as a “one-and-done opportunity.”

“What we’re trying to create as an institution is a culture of innovation where every year we evaluate everything that we’re doing and see where there are opportunities for growth, for suspension, for transformation,” he said.

Official approval from the board marks the end of a nine-month review process of WKU’s 380 academic programs, which brought together stakeholders from across the university.

Final recommendations were presented to the board by the Comprehensive Academic Program Evaluation Committee, a 15-member group with faculty and staff representatives.

“I’ve had several folks come up to me and say, ‘I hope we never do this again,’ ” Caboni said of the review. “That’s the absolute wrong sentiment. I hope we do this every year because it means we’re being self-critical.”

On Friday, the board mostly accepted those recommendations – with the exception of three programs targeted for suspension which were pulled out for additional review by the provost. Those are minors in astronomy and religious studies and a master’s degree in education and behavioral science studies.

Among the programs targeted for suspension are majors in popular culture, French and art education. A full list of the program recommendations is available online at bgdailynews.com with this story.

According to board meeting materials, of the programs recommended for suspension, 11 are undergraduate degrees, four are graduate degrees and 86 are other credentials such as minors and certificates.

About 3 percent of WKU’s total students are currently enrolled in the suspended programs. The university will continue offering those programs for those students so they can finish their degrees.

Another 55 programs will be transformed and 15 are recommended for growth.

Asked what will happen next with the 15 programs targeted for growth, Provost Cheryl Stevens said she’s reviewing those programs and ways to move forward.

“I’m reviewing them myself to see which ones seem like we could launch quickly,” she said, adding that some could be grown with simple changes while others call for more complex strategies.

“I’m going to look at them and I’m going to have some other people look at them, and we’ll see how we can prioritize and then I’ll talk to the programs about whether they can even do that,” she said.

In other business, the board reviewed but took no action on an information item that offered a budget development update.

That update pertained to a budget cut target of \$10,177,000 to be met over the course of the next fiscal year.

As much as \$3,409,300 will come from WKU’s five academic colleges in the following proposed cuts: Gordon Ford College of Business, \$266,058; College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, \$391,109; Potter College of Arts and Letters, \$1,253,585; Ogden College of Science and Engineering, \$859,895; College of Health and Human Services, \$638,653.

Another \$6,767,700 will come from WKU’s auxiliary and support units, but those have not been determined.

The update cites declining enrollment as a driving factor, noting a 5 percent decline in next year’s budget in revenue from tuition and mandatory student fees.

Caboni said the budget reduction is meant to be a target units and divisions can work toward strategically.

“What this enables is our academic leadership and our division leadership to have a number to which they will manage over the next 12 months,” he said. “That gives opportunities for cost avoidance, for cost savings, for capturing vacant positions, for making strategic decisions that allows for a unit to shrink its budget without doing things that affect the health long term of the organization.”

Also during Friday’s meeting, the board accepted a six-year capital projects plan for the university that totals more than \$810 million in building projects and renovations.

Meeting materials describe the focus of the plan as “renovation of existing facilities and upgrading our campus infrastructure,” although the construction of a new business college is listed as priority No. 1.

During the meeting, Caboni described the plan as a “wish list” for the university, adding it will create flexibility for the university in raising money for projects. It is not an exhaustive list of everything the university will do in the next six years, Caboni said.

However, faculty regent Claus Ernst described what he called the irony of drafting a “Christmas list” while the university is weighing serious budget cutbacks.

Caboni said many universities across the state plan to request funding from the General Assembly in 2020 for projects to maintain campus infrastructure. In an interview, he said the state has an obligation to help maintain assets at public universities.

“We have a significant deferred maintenance challenge,” Caboni said. “We have buildings that are well past their useable life and we need to make sure we take care of those facilities. We’re doing some portion of that internally with our own budget, but these are state assets, and the state has some obligation to work together with us to protect them.”

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.



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Plans for program cuts move forward at WKU

Aaron Mudd

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