

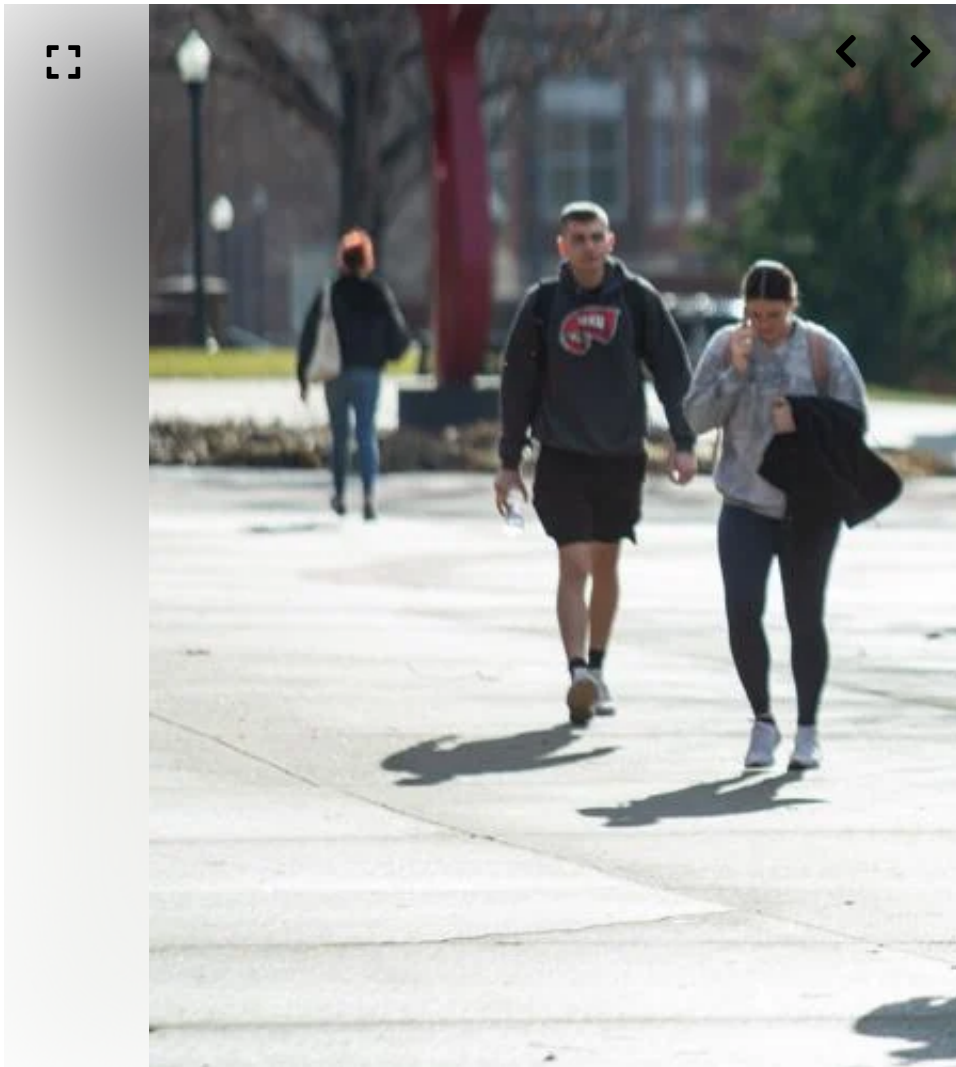
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# WKU Regents discuss first enrollment increase in 7 years

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Western Kentucky University students walked to and from classes as the unusually warm temperatures in February.

PHOTOS BY Grace Ramey/grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com

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Western Kentucky University saw total enrollment increase for the first time since 2016, growing by 5.8% this fall.

Regent Wilton Milliken began Friday's Board of Regents committee meeting with preliminary enrollment numbers, stating WKU's freshman class grew 3.3% while graduate enrollment increased 5.6%.

Milliken said overall degree-seeking enrollment, which excludes students seeking certificates and dual credit, increased by 1.5%, the first rise since 2010. Underrepresented minority retention jumped 15%, the largest increase since 2018.

"These are significant increases, and to me, it demonstrates that there's a lot of good work going on here at this university, and we can all be proud of that," Milliken said.

Ethan Logan, vice president of Enrollment and Student Experience, largely attributed the increase to efforts like WKU's Border State Scholarship Program, which offers

in-state tuition to students from adjacent states, and continuous “grassroots recruitment” through high school involvement.

“I feel very good about where WKU is today and where we’re going to be with our enrollment this year,” Logan said. “I hope we continue to do so.”

Logan said universities nationwide are preparing for an “enrollment cliff” in 2025 by seeking new ways to ensure a steady supply of students. Institutions expect a significant drop in the college-aged population, caused by declining birthrates during the Great Recession around 2008.

Logan added Kentucky’s “college-going” rate, which measures how many high school students choose to attend a university, is also a focus for WKU.

Just over 51% of high school graduates in 2021 enrolled in college, a 2.3-point drop from the previous year, the Council for Post-Secondary Education reported.

“If we can bring up that rate, we will mitigate any depression in terms of total population potential participation,” Logan said.

Regents also discussed \$11 million in overspending across the university, roughly 3% of its budget. Fiscal year 2023 saw expenditures of \$400.6 million and revenues of \$389.6 million, initially budgeting \$383.4 million for each.

Assistant Vice President for Budget, Finance and Analytics Renaldo Domoney said the gap is “no cause for concern” as the university was in a position to absorb the costs.

“If you look at where we were in fiscal year 2018, how we performed each of those years up until 2023, this is the only year that our expenses exceeded revenue,” Domoney said. “If we look at it over a five-year period, we’re in better financial shape than we were five years ago on all of our key metrics.”

Domoney said the largest of the overspending is attributed to technological upgrades and

maintenance, comprising \$2.2 million of that \$11 million.

Athletics overspent the second highest at \$1.7 million, which Domoney said was largely due to a “football game during the 2022 season that was played in Hawaii.”

Utilities and \$950 one-time payments to some employees made up the third and fourth largest overspends at \$1.2 million and \$1.1 million, respectively.

The rest of the overspending came from Enrollment and Student Experience, lease payments for a restaurant in First Year Village, transit bus-related expenses and unbudgeted inflationary costs.

Domoney said units will not see any changes as a result of the overspending, but added that his department will be meeting with vice presidents and deans more frequently to better monitor spending.

“We’re in the early stages of our planning for 2025, that’s the next year, but all the indicators that we’re

looking at (show) we do expect our budget to be higher than it is this year,” Domoney said.

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