

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Senate Chair Response to March 1, 2019 Board of Regent's Salary Actions

Two financial actions taken by the Board of Regents at its March 1, 2019 meeting have caused a great deal of concern among faculty and staff at WKU. The \$40k bonus for President Caboni approved unanimously by the WKU Board of Regents and the \$68k annual salary adjustment for the Athletic Director sent a clear, even if unintended, message to the campus community. The message to faculty, staff, and students alike is that academics is not a priority at WKU. This message is reinforced by the on-going CAPE process, for which many deans and department heads were asked to suspend programs, reduce offerings, and find ways of being more cost efficient, a process that, in some cases, may also result in job loss. This arduous process comes after the already painfully deep cuts made last year which included the laying off of many staff members and the loss of many unfilled faculty lines, not to mention the constant dire warnings of reduced enrollments both now and in the coming years.

It is for these reasons that I must speak out in my capacity as University Senate Chair regarding these increases and the Board's apparent lack of forethought. While I do not begrudge President Caboni pay increases or a one-time bonus, I question the timing of the recent announcement about it. President Caboni, as I understand it, has recently received a salary increase as part of the now infamous merit pool process. I was also informed by a Regent that the \$40k bonus is part of his contract and based upon the Board of Regent's assessment of his performance. Wasn't this the purpose of the merit pool?

The Athletic Director's salary increase is said to be a "market adjustment" funded through foundation sources. It seems excessive considering athletics continues to receive subventions from the university's general budget, when athletics is supposed to be self-sustaining; also, because we faculty have been told that the university has no say in how various foundations choose to spend their funds. We also have been told, by way of justification for the raise, that the A.D.'s salary was well under the median for like positions in our conference. There are many faculty members whose salaries are also well under the median for like positions in benchmark / comparable universities; will they be receiving like adjustments?

Faculty and staff have communicated to me directly on this issue; I have also listened to many other community voices on social media. The upshot is that the Board's recent actions seem counter-intuitive given WKU's current financial state! We have been warned again and again that the financial situation is imminently disastrous and getting worse, and that reductions in enrollments and state funding are creating a financial emergency of critical proportions. One question must then be, are we as an institution — indeed, is the Board of Regents — behaving as if WKU is in financially dire times? I would suggest that to many of us internally and, just as important, to many outside observers in the Commonwealth, the Regents are *not* behaving as though they are concerned.

Respectfully,

Dr. Kirk Atkinson, Chair

University Senate