

Report for the Budget & Finance Committee Meeting of March 7, 2024

The Budget & Finance Committee last met on February 8, 2024.

1. Meeting called to order: E. Kondratieff (3:45 pm).

Attendees:

Eric Kondratieff, Chair (PCAL)

Kurt Neelly (At-Large)

Sean Kinder (Libraries)

Jeremy Maddox (OCSE)

Julie Shadoan (PCAL)

John Erickson (GFCB)

Joel Hornback (SGA)

Provost Bud Fischer (non-voting)

Faculty Regent Shane Spiller (non-voting)

Absent:

Daniel Boamah (CHHS)

Ben Dinan (At-Large)

Martha Day (CEBS)

Positions currently unfilled:

Alternates for CEBS, GFCB, PCAL, SGA

2. Chair Report – E. Kondratieff:

- A. Minutes from 02/08/2024 meeting – approved.

3. New Business

a) Ron Rhoades Memo:

- i) **Kondratieff and Spiller:** Opened by discussing background associated with Assist. Prof. Rhoades' memo and 'call to action' entailing numerous significant changes to salary, faculty and staff numbers, class size, and teacher: student ratios (among others).
- ii) **Committee members** believe that many such suggestions reflect an incomplete understanding of the functions of the university (admin) and faculty senate, their spheres of responsibility, and how they interact. Some actions are not possible given the constitution of said bodies; others will not find support among faculty and/or staff.
- iii) **Committee members** recalled that, RE: capital expenditures and building projects that increase university bonds and debt service the Senate has historically expressed its concern on such topics and made recommendations by resolution to administration, but with negligible impact on such spending.
- iv) **(On the plus side:** the 2-year state budget now pending approval dedicates sizeable asset preservation funds to WKU with no matching requirements).
- v) **Committee members** appreciated Rhoades' call to increase Living-Learning Communities, which have demonstrably improved retention and success rates of student participants.
- vi) **Provost Fischer** noted, however, that money to build more dorms / fund more L-LCs – especially at the rate Rhoades' suggests — is currently unavailable. This led to a broader discussion of WKU's funding...

b) Performance Funding and the KY State "Rainy Day Fund":

- i) **Provost Fischer** noted that the current performance funding program tends to benefit flagship universities the most, while regional comprehensive universities receive a diminishing share of the pie. The current model will never benefit regional comprehensive universities as it rewards increases in general enrollment rather than giving additional weight to recruitment and retention of, e.g., URM students (at which comprehensives like WKU excel). UK lowered the bar to allow 94% of all applicants to attend, has dramatically increased its new enrollments—beyond its capacity to properly feed and house them, by some accounts—and thereby acquired the lion's share of performance funding. Nor, suggested Provost Fischer, will state-based funding increase dramatically to support higher education or show that the state truly values of it. He concluded that, with CPE keeping a hard limit on annual tuition increases, there are few options to increase WKU's funding except for student recruitment.

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- ii) **Committee members:** discussed options to appeal to state Legislators regarding their disinvestment of higher education and the relationship between the state budget rainy day fund and how it is automatically linked to state income tax levels.
 - iii) **Additional comments** stemming from UK's recent increase to 94% acceptance included further inquiry and follow-up re: UK's retention rate, graduation rate, and transfer rates to, e.g., WKU by students dissatisfied with overcrowded, difficult living conditions at UK.
 - iv) **Kondratieff** noted that the state's focus on building up a rainy day fund and lowering state income tax (to zero, eventually?) and its failure to fund higher education at previous levels — adjusting for inflation, the levels drop consistently year-by-year — will strain WKU's and other regional universities' ability to meet employer demands for qualified younger employees. The state legislature seems unwilling to aggressively invest now in a better educated, more capable future workforce/citizen body.
- c) Concluding thoughts and comments regarding Rhoades' Letter and Memo:**
- i) **Committee members** discussed whether it should ask Rhoades for follow up discussion. It was reiterated that some of the recommendations are simply not possible and/or not appropriate given the current structure/spheres of responsibility of our university institutions. The suggestions least likely to be supported by faculty include increasing class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios and reducing teaching lines and staffing — especially as VSIP has already reduced both (staff is at bare-bones levels in some colleges/depts), while funding levels require that some lines go unreplaced.
- d) Provost Fischer on WKU and potential R2 designation:**
- i) Discussed current exploration and discussion re: WKU being designated an R2 Carnegie institution (R2 supports applied research which is already occurring at WKU). Carnegie will update their R2 classifications in February 2025; Fischer believes WKU may already be placed at the R2 level.
- e) Big Red Backpack Program:**
- i) **Kondratieff:** Initiated discussion of how the BRBP is NOT working for many of his students, who report their own problems and those of friends/fellow students across campus. K. asked committee members to provide additional comments – or to inquire with their own students — regarding this textbook program and its success or not.
 - ii) **SGA Rep Joel Hornback:** Reported that he also had significant delays with textbooks through the Big Red Backpack program and had likewise heard from other students about similar issues and their dislike of the generalized chaos of the program, e.g., at the time of book distribution.
 - iii) **Provost Fischer:** Suggested that since SGA was the driving force behind BRBP's implementation, SGA should take their collective concerns directly to Jennifer Tougas (who runs the program).
 - iv) **Sean Kinder:** Noted that there has been a record of some lack of cooperation with the bookstore.

5. Faculty Regent – Shane Spiller:

Board of Regents met last Friday for Quarterly meeting, and the NCAA compliance report was presented at this meeting. WKU's Athletic Director reported that he would attend another committee meeting if invited.

6. Faculty Regent – Bud Fischer:

FY 2025 currently beginning development, continue to keep track of current budget and expenditures.

7. BEC Rep – Neelly:

No Report

8. Closing remarks:

Kondratieff reiterated that committee members should consider and share thoughts and comments regarding appropriate response and/or invitation to Rhoades and collect info on BRBP from students.

9. Meeting adjourned (5:03 pm).