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WKU spending returning to pre-COVID levels

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Western Kentucky University's budget is showing signs things are returning to pre-pandemic levels for the institution.

WKU's Board of Regents received a fiscal update at its first committee meeting of the year Friday morning, revealing that operations and travel costs are returning to where they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Actual travel expenditures sit at about \$4.8 million, or 73%, of the \$6.57 million travel budget. At this time last year, travel expenses were at just 51% of the \$5.67 million allotted for travel.

Maintenance and utilities expenditures are up \$1.5 million and \$658k, respectively, over where they were at this time last year. Supplies and operating expenditures are \$2.67 million above where WKU was in 2022.

“What we're seeing is, we are returning to pre-COVID spending levels,” Susan Haworth, executive vice president for strategy, operations and finance, said. “And it's just going to be ever so important that we monitor that really, really closely over the next six months.”

WKU President Timothy Caboni said there should be reasons to celebrate when the institution's retention data is released.

"Our entire campus community is focused like a laser on student success and retention," Caboni said. "I'm not going to make any news today, but in the coming weeks when we report out the fall-to-spring retention numbers, we're going to have a lot to celebrate in terms of where we are."

The board voted to suspend the university's strategic sports communications graduate certificate, citing low enrollment. According to WKU's 2021 fact book, the program had just nine members in 2021, down from 16 in 2020.

"One of the important things for us to be able to do new things, is to stop doing some old things," Caboni said. "I think that it is an indicator of an institution that is dynamic and forward-thinking when it stops doing some things."

Caboni provided a few design and timeline details about the university's future home for the Gordon Ford College of Business.



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WKU received \$74 million from the Kentucky General Assembly in the spring of 2022 to fund the new business building, which will be built on the former site of Tate Page Hall.

“Every project that we do is going to be in the collegiate Georgian style of design and architecture,” the president said. “You’ll see ionic columns and you’ll see other references to the Georgian style, but with a very modern twist.”

Caboni said building designs are in the draft stage right now, but his hope is to have a formal unveiling sometime toward the end of April.

“Progress continues, faculty are working very hard to have a space that does what it needs to do for them, and I continue to work to ensure that whatever facility we create for them matches the campus master plan and the feel of our beautiful hilltop,” he said.

The president had no new information to share on behalf of Conference USA regarding future expansion, but the league is excited to welcome new programs in 2023 – New Mexico State, Liberty, Jacksonville State and Sam Houston State – and Kennesaw State in 2024.

“Conference USA continues to look at every opportunity for expansion that’s available, no news on that front today, but we continue to work to ensure that we have a stable and vibrant conference going forward,” Caboni said.

The president closed the meeting by taking a moment to honor the late Gregory McKinney, who passed in December.

McKinney, a Bowling Green native and Warren Central High School graduate, served as the board’s student regent in 1974-75, making him WKU’s first-ever Black regent. He was a member of WKU’s forensics team and was an officer in the inter-fraternity council.

“Gregory represents what we want for all of our students,” Caboni said. “He was an advocate for his fellow Hilltoppers, he was courageous when entering uncharted territory, he was involved in every part of our university and represented and elevated our reputation.”

The board’s next meeting is scheduled for March 3.