



## WKU PRESIDENT TIMOTHY C. CABONI

Timothy C. Caboni, a 1994 Western Kentucky University graduate, returned to the Hill on July 1, 2017, as WKU's 10th president. Shortly after assuming the president role, President Caboni launched a comprehensive strategic planning process aimed at developing a roadmap for the University's next decade of growth. Thus, WKU's 2018-2028 strategic plan, *Climbing to Greater Heights*, was finalized in summer 2018, and its implementation is well underway.

President Caboni quickly generated a renewed institutional focus on student-centeredness, applied research, recruitment, retention and growing partnerships within WKU's 27-county service region and beyond. Of particular importance to President Caboni is WKU's responsibility to advance the City of Bowling Green, the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the world by inspiring innovation, elevating communities and transforming lives.

A number of key initiatives have launched during President Caboni's tenure at WKU, including the Summer Scholars program, the Intercultural Student Engagement Center Academy, the Burch Institute, the First Year Village and associated Living Learning Communities, the First Gen program, the Commons at Helm Library, the Opportunity Fund, the Innovation Campus, centralized advising, a revised institutional scholarship program, a comprehensive academic program review and revised admissions standards. The intentional groundwork laid through the strategic plan and these initiatives, supported by collective university-wide efforts under President Caboni's leadership, has generated significant positive momentum and record-breaking successes at WKU.

Since his arrival in 2017, President Caboni has overseen campus improvement projects totaling \$649 million. In 2018, he dedicated Ogden College Hall, which houses most of WKU's science disciplines. He championed the construction of WKU's First Year Village, which opened in fall 2021 and is home to many of the university's Living Learning Communities (LLCs). Additionally, the Commons at Helm Library opened its doors to the campus community in the spring 2022 semester. This unique, modern multipurpose facility transformed a traditional campus library into an intellectual hub where students, faculty and staff gather to share ideas and engage in active learning.

In summer 2023, the university broke ground on a state-of-the-art home for the Gordon Ford College of Business and in the fall opened its new Soccer/Softball Complex, forever changing the operations of the university's women's soccer and softball teams. Also in fall 2023, WKU broke ground on its new Hilltopper Fieldhouse, set to provide space for the institution's award-winning forensics team, Big Red Marching Band, e-sports team and Athletics. President Caboni recently announced a significant investment in Cherry Hall to facilitate needed preservation work as well as a reimagining of one of campus's most iconic structures, and the Hilltop Restoration Project was completed in summer 2024, making the top of the Hill more accessible,

providing outdoor space for the community to gather and returning the top of the Hill to President Cherry's original vision. Finally, the university will soon break ground on a replacement for its Academic Complex, made possible by a \$160 million appropriation from the Kentucky General Assembly, the largest capital project appropriation in WKU's history. The Academic Complex currently serves as the home of the College of Health and Human Services.

At the start of his third year on the Hill, Dr. Caboni announced bold changes to the University's scholarship program, increasing institutional aid by \$5.2 million. The revamped freshman scholarship model, coupled with aggressive affordability marketing and outreach, has led to 93% of the incoming class receiving merit awards to help fund their education (rising from 39% in 2019).

From the 2016-17 academic year to the 2022-23 academic year, overall student retention increased 8.1 percentage points (69.9% to 78%). Retention of Underrepresented Minority (URM) students increased 16.9 percentage points (57.8% to 74.7%) during that time, and low-income student retention increased 9.6 percentage points (60.2% to 69.8%). The 2022-23 academic year saw the highest retention rates in WKU history for all students (78%) as well as for URM students (74.7%).

Western Kentucky University's fall 2023 first-time, first-year class returned the following spring in record fashion. Overall, almost 92% of first-time, first-year students who were enrolled at WKU for the fall 2023 semester returned in spring 2024, a 5.3 percentage point increase since the 2017-18 academic year. Fall-to-spring retention of first-time, first-year low-income students rose to 90%, an increase of nearly 5 percentage points since 2019. Additionally, almost 89% of first-time, first-year students who identify as the first in their family to attend college returned for the spring 2024 semester, a 2-percentage point increase among this group from the previous year and a 4.2 percentage point increase since 2019. Fall 2023 first-year students who participated in WKU's Living Learning Communities, housed primarily in the First Year Village at WKU, were retained at a rate of 94.8%, which is 4.4 percentage points higher than non-LLC participants. Nearly a third of first-year students were involved in an LLC to start the 2023-2024 academic year.

With President Caboni at the helm, more students are choosing WKU because it's been made more attractive and more accessible than ever before; more students stay and complete their degrees because of the growth and enhancement of its targeted student-support structure; and more graduates are choosing to remain in Kentucky because of the growing partnerships in the University's 27-county service region and beyond.

President Caboni has overseen the transformation of the university's 285,000-square-foot Center for Research and Development into an Innovation Campus – an environment where students, staff and faculty connect with entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and business resources to create jobs, develop talent pipelines and propel the region's economy. Numerous local, national and global companies, such as Kentucky to the World, Logan Aluminum, Holley Performance Products, MyXR, Lunae and beingAI have since established a presence at the University's Innovation Campus, and WKU students are benefitting from the opportunity to research, create and learn alongside industry leaders.

Under President Caboni's leadership, the university has also experienced significant fundraising success. Shortly after arriving at WKU in 2017, he announced the creation of the WKU Opportunity Fund, an effort to support WKU students experiencing financial difficulties. The fund surpassed its initial goal of \$50 million, and in 2021, President Caboni announced an even more ambitious \$100 million goal. The Opportunity Fund has grown to \$102.4 million and has resulted in the creation of 267 endowed scholarships.

President Caboni, who holds a PhD in higher education leadership and policy from Vanderbilt University, served as the vice chancellor for Public Affairs at the University of Kansas for six years. Prior to that he was associate dean of the Peabody College of Education & Human Development at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

As the vice chancellor at KU, Dr. Caboni led public affairs for KU's four campuses and the KU Medical Center. He served as the principal spokesman and coordinated the communication activities of the University with those of the KU Alumni Association, KU Endowment and Kansas Athletics, Inc. Dr. Caboni oversaw the communications, marketing and advocacy efforts of the University and coordinated KU's legislative agenda at all government levels, championing issues that include research funding, higher education policy and health care. He also was responsible for the operations of Kansas Public Radio and was associate professor of educational leadership and policy in the School of Education.

Dr. Caboni was an active member of the Lawrence, Kansas, community, serving on the board of the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce and the Joint Economic Development Commission of Lawrence and Douglas County as well as the boards of the Lawrence Art Center and the Lied Center for the Performing Arts.

As associate dean at Vanderbilt, Dr. Caboni oversaw the Peabody College's 21 professional graduate degree programs and graduate and professional financial aid for the college, and he led outreach, partnership and program development efforts for the college as well as communications and admissions. His leadership contributed to the school's rise to No. 1 in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of graduate schools of education for three consecutive years.

President Caboni is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana, and received a bachelor's degree in speech communication and rhetoric from Louisiana State University. He earned a master's degree in corporate and organizational communication from WKU. His higher education professional experience includes alumni relations, fundraising, prospect research, teaching, academic administration, communications, marketing and government relations. He has published nearly 30 articles and one book. His current research is focused on use of data-based decision-making in higher education fundraising.

President Caboni is married to Kacy Schmidt Caboni, who was director of development and team leader for the School of Business with the Kansas University Endowment. She was instrumental in the construction of Capitol Federal Hall, the new home of the KU business school, funded entirely through private philanthropy. In addition to serving as WKU's First Lady, Kacy is director of principal gifts and special initiatives in the WKU Division of Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement.