



## 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, 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.

In just five years (AY 2016-17 to AY 2021-22), WKU's first-to-second-year student retention increased 6.7 percentage points, and underrepresented minority (URM) retention jumped 15 percentage points – both representing the largest five-year increases in WKU's history. First-to-second-year retention among low-income students also experienced significant increases, jumping 11.1 percentage points in five years.

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%).

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.