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WKU Regents select new health provider, approve inflation bonus

By SARAH MICHELS smichels@bgdailynews.com

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At the close of the 2022 fall semester, WKU's Board of Regents approved a new health contract, made a one-time inflation adjustment payment to a share of employees and accepted a national award for WKU's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

As students completed their final exams, WKU's regents met in Jody Richards Hall to discuss several business items.

First, the regents approved a 10-year contract for a new on-campus health services provider. Beginning Jan. 1, 2023, Med Center Health will become WKU's on-campus health services provider, replacing Graves Gilbert Clinic, which had been serving in that role since 2014.

"I don't think anything about selecting Med Center Health going forward should reflect badly on what Graves Gilbert has done in the past," said Dr. Jennifer Tougas, assistant vice president for business services. "They've been a very strong partner, it's just that at this point in time in what we were asking for through the RFP, Med Center Health was able to meet that ask better."

Med Center Health will provide a plethora of services, including:

- On-campus evaluation and treatment of illnesses and injuries, including annual wellness visits and in-depth physicals;
- Immunizations and allergy injections;
- Mental health services, including staffing of a mental health profession on campus at least half of each day;
- Physical therapy services open to the entire campus;
- Access to an electronic patient portal app with the technical ability “to meet students where they are” and a telemedicine visitation option;
- A strong sports medicine program;
- Requirements for continuing professional development to ensure that staff are keeping up with the changing needs of the student body;
- Consultation to manage infectious diseases like COVID-19; and
- Biometric screenings to employees as part of WKU’s Employee Wellness Program.

Med Center Health will strive to provide students, faculty and staff with resources they need to live healthy lives, said Jat Mountjoy, vice president of physician services at Med Center Health.

“We look forward to offering quality primary care services to everyone who is part of the WKU community,” Mountjoy said in a statement.

Second, the regents approved a one-time payment of \$950 to WKU employees who were hired on or before July 1, 2022, with an annual salary less than or equal to the university median salary, \$65,362.

This payment is designed to adjust for this year’s uniquely high inflationary pressures, said WKU President Timothy Caboni. The approximately \$1 million will be paid for with a 1.5 day reduction in the university’s cash on hand account, and should be paid to eligible employees in January 2023.

Caboni said that the payment is a “terrific” example of how the new budget process and shared governance works.

“Sometimes it’s painful, sometimes there’s some give and take, sometimes there’s a lot of take and no give, sometimes it’s all give and no take, but at the end of the day, a group of faculty, staff, administrators and colleagues took off their individual hats and worked to do something that’s the best interest of our faculty and staff, particularly those who are most needy of this inflation support,” he said.

Third, Caboni announced that WKU received the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' inaugural Excellence and Innovation Award for DEI Leadership for its ONE WKU Campaign. He accepted the award on behalf of himself and Co-Chief Diversity Officers Molly Kerby and Michael Crowe.

"We want to make sure we've created an opportunity to welcome everyone inclusively on this campus who studies, works, visits. What we've done is that and then some," he said.

The award recognizes institutions that show a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. The ONE WKU campaign, which launched in summer 2020, leads the university's DEI efforts. It includes the Inclusive Teaching Academy offering faculty and staff training on inclusivity in the classroom.

"Most institutions will create a vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion, have some small committee and check the box. As an institution, we are committed to creating significant and lasting change and one way you do that is by having an entire organization willing to be self-critical and work together across all of our institutional silos," Caboni said. "...When you make it one person's responsibility, it lets everyone else off the hook."

At the close of the meeting, Board Chair Phillip Bale said that the regents unanimously approved of Caboni's work through this year's "unprecedented challenges" in the annual presidential evaluation.

“Higher education across our nation grapples daily with new and daunting challenges related to rapidly changing demographics, technology, and economics,” Bale said. “It is the expressed opinion of WKU’s Board of Regents that President Timothy Caboni has performed at an exceptionally high level in meeting these challenges and positioning Western Kentucky University to thrive and attain those ever-greater heights imagined within our strategic plan.”

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Sarah Michels

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