

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

The Budget & Finance Committee last met on October 3, 2024.

1). Meeting called to order: E. Kondratieff (3:50 pm).

Committee Attendees:

Eric Kondratieff, Chair (PCAL)
Sean Kinder (Libraries)
Blair Thomas (At-Large)
Jeremy Maddox (OCSE)
Kurt Neelly (At-Large)

Ex Officio Attendees:

Shane Spiller (Regent, ex officio)

Absent:

Provost Bud Fischer (ex officio)
John Erickson (GFCB)
Daniel Boamah (CHHS)

Positions currently unfilled:

CEBS, SGA, At-Large #3

2). Chair Report – E. Kondratieff

- a) Minutes from 10/03/2024 meeting – approved.

3). New Business:

- i) Possible guest speakers for upcoming year?
 - (a) **Kondratieff** asked the committee if we should ask Wade Pinkard, Chair of the University Employee Benefits Advisory Committee (UEBAC) to present to the Senate Budget and Finance Committee.
 - (b) **Kondratieff** (UEBAC member for 10 years and counting) shared some historical perspective and the general function of the UEBAC. He explained why premiums had not increased for three years. This was mostly thanks to decreased claims expenditures during the Covid pandemic which allowed the reserve fund to increase significantly. The reserves were spent down to normal levels over the next few years, slowed in part by several cash interventions by the administration; however, medical and medication costs had been increasing due to inflation over the same period, which is why premiums finally had to be increased in 2024. Greater than expected claims expenses in 2024 combined with continued inflationary pressures on medical, medication, and other costs led to projections for 2025 that required an additional premium increase.
 - (c) **Kondratieff** noted that the UEBAC has worked hard to implement multiple cost-saving measures over the past few years and while significantly enhancing several benefits areas at little or no additional expense to employees.
 - (d) **Neelly** asked whether faculty and staff had any idea of the amount and depth of work the benefits committee does; Kondratieff noted that most faculty and staff likely do not know.
 - (e) **Spiller** suggested an annual benefits update presented at Faculty senate by Wade Pinkard, as done for Staff Senate (in conjunction with benefits roll-out and enrolment in October).
 - (f) **Kondratieff** agreed to ask Wade Pinkard, Chair of the UEBAC, whether he would be willing to meet with the Budget and Finance Committee or the full faculty senate in the next year, perhaps just before the 2025 Open Enrolment period.

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- ii) Flo-Rida concert: Brief Discussion re: the expense associated with the Flo-Rida concert on campus and whether this is wise stewardship of WKU monies (Short version: Campus activities board have traditionally funded these concerts, and they have occurred on an annual basis since COVID).
 - (1) **Spiller** provided his management/marketing perspective re: the concert and expressed his perspective that this was a worthwhile and effective cultural enhancement event for the students.
 - (2) **Neelly** asked about the funding source for this event.
 - (3) **Spiller** noted that, in the past, Athletics had paid for some expenses associated with such events.
 - (4) The Committee was not certain where specifically the funding did come from.
 - (5) **Spiller** also noted that WKU funds numerous other activities., e.g., band, theatre, newspaper, etc., and cautioned that we should maintain a diverse perspective with these activities.
 - iii) January Meeting: Todd Stewart with Athletics will attend and present at the January B/F meeting.
 - iv) Staffing of Committee (N/A)
 - v) Follow-up on Susan Howarth presentation to the Faculty Senate
 - (1) General review and discussion of VP Howarth's presentation to Senate. Committee and faculty regent agreed in commending the responsiveness of Susan Howarth and Renaldo Domoney re: questions about and sharing of WKU financial information when asked.
- 4) Old Business 4:10-4:30 PM**
- a) Provost Fischer was not in attendance to discuss his thoughts on having deans support and participate in faculty budget discussions and/or committees, as well as VSIP which was just released before our meeting.
 - b) Committee members briefly discussed suspected challenges in respective departments due to the recent VSIP announcements and pending vacancies.
 - c) Circling back to last month's committee meeting and Provost Fischer's comments, the Budget & Finance Committee briefly speculated on the possible savings of \$5-6 million this round (45% of the number of VSIP participants compared to last round) and will look forward to following up with Fischer.
- 5) Faculty Regent – Shane Spiller**
- a) Discussed topics presented at senate re: recent BOR and its Budget and Finance Committee meetings.
 - b) Spiller noted concerns about central administration becoming too lean to support faculty and academics.
 - c) Spiller also noted that WKU's Internal Audit team reported no significant problems in their latest audit.
 - d) **Individual course fees are being removed and college specific fees per credit hours are being implemented.** Spiller estimates these course fees may provide individual Deans/Colleges between 500K to 1 million in course fees, potentially for discretionary spending. Spiller wonders about the accountability for this additional college funding.
- 6) Open Discussion:**
- a) General discussion re: features and uses of Blackboard Ultra compared to prior iterations of Blackboard.
- 7) Meeting adjourned 4:59 PM (Motion to adjourn: Neelly; meeting adjourned).**