



Faculty Senate Report – August 23, 2021

COVID-19

- Catamounts, it is clear that we are not yet out of the woods with respect to COVID-19. It is equally clear that vaccination remains our best path forward in defeating this virus and ensuring a robust campus experience for all.
- I continue to **strongly urge** that all faculty, staff and students who have not yet done so, get vaccinated as quickly as possible. Our WCU Clinic is offering free COVID-19 vaccines.
- I recently announced that in addition to masks being required in all instructional and some other areas on campus, we must again require them in all indoor public spaces for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals for everyone's safety. My decision was based on updated CDC guidelines and was needed as extra protection for everyone's safety at WCU.
- We are also asking all faculty and staff to attest to their vaccination status when they log in to myWCU and to upload their vaccination information at <https://www.wcu.edu/discover/about/operations-procedures.aspx> under the Vaccine Status Submission links.

- WCU will also be offering \$500 cash awards to 16 lucky, fully vaccinated faculty and staff members who have already taken steps to protect our campus community by getting vaccinated. The first drawings will begin August 30th, so please upload your vaccination today if you've not yet done so.
- We recently communicated new guidance from the UNC System to establish a “get vaccinated or get tested” expectation for all faculty, staff and students at UNC System institutions.
- Students living in campus residence halls were required to submit proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test prior to moving in.
- WCU is giving students not in residence halls, faculty, and staff until October 1 to submit proof of vaccination or be subject to weekly testing protocols.
- October 1 was chosen as it allows those who are unvaccinated time to receive both vaccine shots (if they choose Pfizer or Moderna) in advance of testing protocols beginning.

Parking Update

- I know there are a lot of concerns about parking on campus at the beginning of the year.
- After a delay in receiving the Beneficial Occupancy certificate, which is our last hurdle, our new parking deck is expected to open this week.

- Also, communications recently went out regarding additional parking being made available in the Baptist Tier lot and the Killian East lot.
- I hear your frustrations on the lack of available parking, and we are doing what we can in the midst of on-going construction to make as much parking available as possible.
- We will continue to explore ways to maximize parking for faculty and staff on campus.

Legislative Update

- I understand that the salary equity and compression salary issue we have at Western has been a problem for many years, but let it be known that I'm committed to compensating our faculty and staff appropriately.
- You all may know that recently, the North Carolina House included a 5% across the board raise (2.5% in each year of the biennium) for most of our faculty and staff in the budget. Although that is good news, I am concerned about the differential treatment of our professional staff (EHRA non-faculty) who were initially excluded from the salary increases, but were eventually added to the budget at a lower rate - 3% or 1.5% each year of the biennium for those making under \$95,000.
- The budget now goes to conference where the Senate, House and Governor will attempt to work out their differences.

- We are communicating directly with our legislators and advocates to make a strong case for equitable treatment for **ALL of our** critical staff who were and continue to be essential front-line employees during the pandemic.
- In addition, the UNC System Office is actively working to address the issue with leaders in the Senate, House, and Governor's office.

Apodaca Science Building

- After three years of construction, I am happy to announce that we have opened our Apodaca Science Building!
- A HUGE thank you to the faculty and staff in the College of Arts and Sciences for their patience and enthusiasm in getting moved in this summer.
- There will be an official Grand Opening ribbon cutting event at 2 p.m. next Friday, Sept. 3, but classes there have already begun.
- The Grand Opening is open to the public.
- This new \$110.5 million structure, which is part of the Connect NC bond initiative for education improvements across the state, replaces the 1970s-era Natural Science Building. This space allows our faculty to now teach the next generation of scientists the latest techniques and approaches that can be applied to real-world research.

- I most excited about the shared lab spaces. These large spaces, which are sometimes called research neighborhoods, can hold more than one class and allows them to perform research at the same time and/or collaborate on a larger project.
- The shared labs serve as a combined space with people who have similar equipment and space needs. While in these spaces, students use the same industry-approved lab instruments that instructors will use, which is unique. Some schools provide a different set of instrumentations for students versus faculty.
- The new labs also simulate those found in the workplace today, which draws excitement from both faculty and students.

Construction Updates

- In addition to the Apodaca Building, there is a tremendous amount of activity going on around campus to address new construction as well as renovation and repair.
- This construction and R&R activity is critical to address space and maintenance needs on campus.
- However, some of the construction will create inconveniences.
- We will do our best to minimize disruptions to campus and I have asked our Facilities' staff to communicate disruptions to foot and vehicular traffic, whenever possible.

- Work on the lower campus residence halls to replace Scott and Walker is progressing rapidly and the first of the new halls will be open next August.
- The old Natural Sciences Building is undergoing abatement and demolition of that building will occur later this fall. This project will have significant impact on Stillwell and on Hunter Library.
- As the NSB abatement and demolition is underway, entrance to Hunter Library will be through Stillwell building.
- And, you will continue to see activity in and around the Steam Plant as work progresses on WCU's new energy production facility.
- I know it's a lot and we appreciate your patience as this necessary work unfolds.

University Accolades

There have been so many good things happening on campus, some of which you may have heard about during Fall Opening last week. For the sake of time, I would like to mention just a few that exhibit our goal of becoming the best regional comprehensive university in the Southeast.

- Western Carolina University is a recipient of a recurring grant from the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program that will provide \$4.1 million over the next six years, the University of North Carolina System recently announced. The grant will help

WCU's North Carolina School Executive Leadership

Program prepare effective principals to meet the demands of public education and administration, and to equip top tier candidates for school leadership who positively affect student learning in North Carolina.

- Kae Livsey, an associate professor in the School of Nursing at Western Carolina University, is the recipient of a \$10,000 prize award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to help improve pediatric care in Haywood County.
- And, our Educational Leadership Program was recognized as the 2021 Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED) Program of the Year. Congratulations to Dr. Jess Weiler and all the faculty in that program on this outstanding achievement!

Closing

- Finally, I remain excited and committed to a robust campus experience this fall.
- We can and will deliver on our promise to deliver the best education to our students both in and out of the classroom. Thanks to each of you for your efforts to get us there.
- Thank you and have a great school year!