



Faculty Senate Report – September 22, 2021

WELCOME

- Good morning. Life on campus has been very busy since I met with you in late August.
- Students are fully-engaged with campus activities, athletics has hosted two home football games and you, our faculty, have taught classes now for at least a month. **Times goes by fast!**
- I want to take some time during today's meeting to provide you with responses to key concerns you have shared with me as faculty senate members.

COVID 19

- The first topic of concern is your desire for timely Covid-19 updates. Hopefully, all of you are receiving the weekly campus updates that restarted with the academic year.

Those updates have included information on vaccination rates, updates Catamounts Care protocols, and other important notices.

- As we all know this continues to be a fluid situation of concern not only for WCU, but all of higher education. I know we all get a lot of emails, especially now that school is in session, but I am asking you to take a few minutes to read these weekly updates.
- To date, 59% of resident credit students (those living on and off campus) have submitted proof of being fully vaccinated. In addition, 94% of permanent faculty and 83% of permanent staff have attested to being fully vaccinated. 75% of all employees (permanent, part-time and temporary) have submitted proof of vaccination.
- I am so happy that the message is resonating well with our employees as I truly believe that vaccination is our best defense against Covid-19.
- To encourage unvaccinated faculty and staff to get vaccinated and to offer a chance to win for those who took this important step to protect our community early on, we

have been holding \$500 random drawings for faculty, staff and students.

- To dispel rumors, eligibility for the drawings was NOT limited to those who were vaccinated only after the start of the school year.
- We structured the drawings into pools based on the month employees and students received their shot, so even those vaccinated very early were eligible to win and, in fact, some have done so. Here are the winners thus far:
 - Ivy Gibson – Associate General Counsel
 - Elizabeth Wall-Bassett – Assoc. Professor, Health Sciences
 - Stephen Mercier – Tech support in IT
 - Laura Lembeck – Instructor in Dept. of Mathematics
 - Alex Camargo – Psychology Intern in Counseling and Psychological Services
 - Don Connelly – Professor in Communication
 - Tim Tweed – Library Technician in Hunter Library
 - Shyla Coleman – Asst. Women’s Basketball Coach
 - Scott Bassett – Cat-Tran Driver

- Miranda Miller – Instructor in the Dept. of English
- Jalynn Meads – University Police Officer
- Ben Page – Director of Ticket Operations in Athletics
- An additional two faculty/staff will be drawn next week and another two on October 1.
- By the time we are done, we will award a total of 16 individual \$500 awards to faculty and staff and 32 individual \$500 awards to students.
- I believe conducting these drawings for the last two weeks is positively impacting our reported vaccination numbers.
- I also want to point out that we have updated some of our Catamounts Care guidelines.
- We have added explicit language outlining how masks are to be worn (over nose and mouth).
- I'm also happy to report that many of tents are back up on campus to allow some outdoor gathering spaces for our students, faculty, and staff.
- Use of the tents is available to all in the campus community.

ENROLLMENT/ RANKINGS

- Now let's talk about our enrollment. I am sure by now you had read internal and external reports on our census numbers which were reported Sept. 3.
- As expected, WCU's overall enrollment declined to 11,877 from a high last year of 12,243. That accounts for a 3% decline in enrollment.
- New Undergraduate transfers, distance students and continuing graduate students all saw increases, but those gains did not offset the losses we saw in new freshmen and in continuing resident undergraduate enrollment.
- Additionally, our fundable student credit hour production was down a little more than 5%.
- The decline in headcount and in SCHs is of significant concern given the budgetary impact it will have.
- Declines in headcount mean fewer students paying fees, which translates into direct budget impacts on fee-supported units this fall.

- And the decline in SCHs will catch up to us next year in our enrollment growth funding, which will impact units supported with state funding.
- Enrollment is our bread and butter and I want to reiterate that recruitment and retention is not just a job for Admissions.
- We each have a role to play to make sure that students want to choose WCU as a destination and that, when they are here, they get the high touch, high quality student experience WCU is known for, both in and out of the classroom.
- I am so proud of all we are doing to give our students the best academic experience we can provide and I am confident that will have an impact on enrollment in future years.
- And this is not just recognized by me, but by our external publics as well.
- Just last week, *U.S. News & World Report* reported that Western Carolina University moved ahead in four categories of the 2022 university rankings.

- WCU is now 9th among Top Public Regional Universities in the South, up from 10th last year.
- 21st among all Regional Universities (Public and Private) in the South.
- 8th for Best Value among all Regional Universities in the South (public and private), up from 9th last year.
- 8th for Best Colleges for Veterans in the South, up from 13th last year.
- And 16th for Best Social Mobility among all Regional Universities (public and Private) in the South, up from 18th last year.
- This ranking reflects being an NC Promise university and, more importantly, our rank in social mobility demonstrates WCU's dedication to make quality education more accessible, especially for first generation students with acute financial need, AND to get those students to graduation.
- But, rankings aside, you only had to listen to the stories last weekend at our annual legacy pinning ceremony for students whose families are WCU alumni to understand

how WCU is fulfilling its promise to change the lives of our students and the lives of their families and communities.

- THAT is something to be proud of!

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

- In budget news, we continue to monitor movement now that the budget is in conference where the Senate, House and Governor attempt to work out their differences.
- We are hoping that the budget will be approved by the end of the month, but it could be sometime in October.
- We are hopeful that there will compromise on the salary issues for ALL of our faculty and staff.
- And I am genuinely pleased and grateful that both houses of the General Assembly have included our remaining legislative priorities (recurring funding for NC Promise, Enrollment Growth and building operations) in their proposed budgets as well as our capital requests, including a full renovation of the Moore Building and a host of other much-needed campus R&R projects.

- We have no details at this point, but we understand that the House and Senate have worked out many of their large differences over salaries, tax cuts, and other policy matters and are engaging with the Governor's office on areas of compromise.
- Meredith Whitfield can provide more detail later.

Parking Update

- The last update I would like to give this morning is on parking. I know there are a lot of concerns about parking.
- As you may already know, our new parking deck has finally opened. Also, there is more parking opening back up in McKee after the temporary boiler is removed.
- We are also prioritizing communication about any changes to parking as early as we can with regular reminders, such as we did for the Apodaca Science Building's grand opening two weeks ago.

University Accolades

As I mentioned earlier, there have been so many good things happening on campus. Allow me to highlight just a few.

- Western Carolina University held a successful grand opening of the new Apodaca Science Building on Friday, Sept. 3, with a large number of state officials, faculty, staff and students in attendance.
- I am thrilled that our students now have new and updated laboratory, classroom and assembly space to become our next generation of scientists.
- The University of North Carolina System recently announced that WCU 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 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.

- A few of our English graduate students launched, with the help of our Senate Chair, Dr. Laura Wright, a new online literary magazine, displaying tremendous initiative and innovation.
- The Environmental Educators of North Carolina presented its 2021 award for exceptional environmental education programs to specialist Patrick Bannon with Highlands Biological Station.
- Jamie Raynor, our VC for Advancement, has named Ben Pendry, a WCU Alum, as the new Associate Vice Chancellor for Advancement. If you haven't yet met Ben, be prepared for his infectious personality and his love of WCU!
- Last night, we hosted a successful meeting of the State's redistricting committee and many students and faculty came out to exercise their civic privileges to provide input into the process. Thanks to all who turned out for that.

- This weekend, we will be bringing back the annual Mountain Heritage Day festival on Saturday here on campus so please make plans to attend.
- And, finally, on Sunday, I will be participating in the unveiling of the Harriet Tubman traveling sculpture exhibit in Bridge Park Downtown Sylva. It will be a wonderful event and I encourage you all to attend.

CLOSING

- Whew! That's a lot. (Pause) But it's a lot of great news that should make you feel good about your work here at WCU.
- In closing, I extend additional thanks to each of you for your efforts each and every day to honor our promise to our students.
- Happy to take any questions.