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## WKU to receive \$74 million for new business building

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Grise Hall has long been where business students at Western Kentucky University called home, but another major shake-up for the ever-changing campus is now on the horizon.

As part of the 2022-24 budget approved in the Kentucky General Assembly last week, WKU was allotted \$74.4 million from the state to fund a new building for the university's Gordon Ford College of Business.

WKU spokesman Jace Lux told the Daily News the new structure will be built near South Lawn in the space previously occupied by Tate Page Hall.

Discussions are ongoing about future usage of Grise Hall, and Lux said it will not be torn down immediately.

He said WKU is in the early stages of planning construction of the new building, but a Chicago design firm named Gensler has been selected. He said WKU officials hope to have a design completed within the calendar year.

“Once a design is complete, a more definitive timeline can be established,” Lux said. “We are extremely grateful to the Kentucky General Assembly for its investment in higher education and WKU. This budget affirms the importance of higher education in the commonwealth, and it further advances WKU’s ability to provide unparalleled applied, hands-on learning and research opportunities for our students.”

Christopher Snook, dean of the Gordon Ford College of Business, said in a statement a state-of-the-art structure “will will enhance our ability to recruit students who will eventually become market-ready graduates.

“It will enable our faculty and staff to offer innovative learning experiences and will allow our curriculum to be more applied, flexible and adaptive to meet student needs and market demands,” Snook said. “The Gordon Ford faculty and staff are incredibly grateful for the General Assembly’s investment in this facility.”

The support for the new site of the College of Business is also the first capital project allocation WKU has received from the General Assembly since funding for Ogden College Hall in 2014.

The state Senate and House of Representatives are currently adjourned for a 10-day veto period.

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Among their final actions, the General Assembly passed the executive branch biennial budget which now awaits confirmation from Gov. Andy Beshear.

The budget provides more than \$34 million in each year of the biennium to address deferred maintenance on campus, with a commitment by WKU to match at 15%.

LifeWorks at WKU will also receive \$2.8 million from the State Fiscal Recovery Fund of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

WKU President Timothy Caboni praised the General Assembly in an email to faculty and staff.

“The budget includes significant investments in higher education for the first time in more than a decade,” Caboni said. “I want to thank our leaders in the General Assembly for their extraordinary support of WKU and postsecondary education. I also want to thank Jennifer Breiwa Smith, WKU’s executive director of government and external relations, for her dedicated representation of WKU in Frankfort and tireless advocacy for our needs. Jennifer will provide a final update of the legislative session following final adjournment on April 14.”

As part of the new budget, the higher education performance funding pool will increase by more than \$97 million in each of the next two years.

The state will pay 100% of WKU’s pension subsidy obligation for the Kentucky Employees Retirement System in 2022-23 and 90% of that amount in 2023-24.

The General Assembly also set aside a total of \$10 million for the “Bucks for Brains” initiative at comprehensive universities, which includes WKU.

The budget also adds \$1,000,000 to the WKU-managed Kentucky Mesonet, bringing total state funding for the network to \$1,750,000 each year.

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