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Caboni talks compensation at Senate meeting

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Western Kentucky University President Timothy Caboni speaks to the Staff Senate on Tuesday, Sept. 6, 2022.

Sarah Michels

Western Kentucky University President Timothy Caboni said Tuesday an 8% raise pool for faculty and staff to match the current inflation rate isn't feasible.

“As much as I wish we could have an 8% raise, for those folks who work on the Budget Executive Committee, we know that that’s probably not doable – because of well,

math,” Caboni said at the Staff Senate’s monthly meeting. “We have to do what’s possible, and that’s where the conversation really has to begin.”

Caboni said he was aiming for somewhere closer to a 2% raise pool, with a range to distinguish between lower and higher performers.



“I think where we’re headed as an organization – this is what high-performing organizations do – is being able to ... reward people who are over-performing and say ‘thank you’ in a way that feels like ‘thank you.’ And for folks who are underperforming, having a difficult conversation.”

Staff Regent David Brinkley said it’s understandable for people to see WKU’s cash on hand and expect some of it to be used for raises.

However, it would ultimately be a mistake to do so, he said, since using one-time funds for recurring expenses would eventually dig WKU into a hole in future years.

“When you look at what needs to happen, we have to work within the framework of recurring or sustainable sources of money,” Brinkley said. “And so we’re going to be careful, we’re going to be deliberate and the requests that we make to the president and that he makes to the board (of regents) are going to follow the pattern of sustainability that he has spoken to today.”

Caboni said that while it doesn’t help pay the bills, WKU has worked hard to offer other benefits like fall and spring break vacations, summer hours and a stable individual health care contribution in the absence of raises matching inflation.

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“I do hope that provides a little bit of relief,” he said.

“When you think about money we spend these are all trade offs. It’s a finite fixed pie.”

Brian Campbell, Staff Senate chair and a member of the Budget Executive Committee, said that the historic, “fairly incredible” one-year inflation spike requires greater

creativity in compensation when direct salary increases are not possible.

At the end of the day, Campbell said, everyone is working toward the same goal – “making sure that faculty and staff here can serve the students the way that we really need to do and also feel fairly compensated and feel like WKU is a place where they want to work.”

Caboni was clear that he plans to avoid situations like the 2017-18 academic year, with a deficit that led to a significant reduction in force and the elimination of University College.

“I have a fiduciary responsibility to the university, to do everything in my power to not ever let that happen again,” he said.

Several other business items were discussed, including:

- Caboni’s plans to increase accessibility by reducing the grade of some of the campus’ steeper areas and creating more stair-less pathways up and down the hill.
- The human resources department is holding pilot training sessions for full-time faculty and staff supervisors to cover subjects like emotional intelligence, unconscious bias and how to have conversations about performance expectations. The first applicants will provide feedback for future trainings.
- Caboni spoke on the dissolution of the Arabic program as a necessary evil to continue growth – “You can’t just keep doing new. Some others have to go away when you’re as tight as we are.”

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