

## Introduction

### The Year in Review: 2020-21 (FY21)

The spring term of 2020 turned from teaching in a traditional array of formats to a complete redirection and dedication to online instruction and interaction. While hope existed for a solution over the summer, WKU did not rest on this potential, but rather formed several restart committees to determine scenarios for the fall term as part of the **Big Red Restart**. This planning was anchored by the Healthy on the Hill committee and regularly updated website to guide the WKU community and beyond in navigating the initiation of the new academic year. Early in August 2020, a Faculty and Staff Zoom Forum continued the process of preparing for a year unlike any WKU or other institutions nationwide had experienced in over 100 years.

Confronting the challenges presented by the pandemic was a team effort guided by national, regional, and local healthcare experts, a diverse assemblage of WKU leaders, and the WKU Strategic Plan (SP) *Climbing to Greater Heights*. Like all institutions, WKU faced fiscal challenges as well. We remained dedicated to our core principles in making strategic decisions that prioritized long-term solutions over short-term fixes. By mid-year, WKU had exceeded its \$27 million savings goal included in the 2021 budget. Communication with and from stakeholders were key elements to inform decision-making. As the start of K-12 instruction was delayed in Kentucky, WKU maintained its August 24 start of classes with adjustments to instructional modalities, spacing in classrooms, and flexibility in workforce scheduling. An eleven-part video series was created to prepare students, families, and employees for the return to campus and classes. WKU remained steadfast in creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for students, employees, and guests.

Despite challenges, the WKU spirit rose to the occasion. The incoming class of 2020 grew by over 400 students from the previous fall, marking the largest single year increase for a freshmen class in over 30 years. Impressively, the 3.44 High School GPA for the class of 2024 was the highest in WKU's history. WKU retention rate rose above the national average with an AY2017-20 first-to-second year rate increase of 6.9 percentage points and an underrepresented minority increase of 15.2 percentage points. WKU awarded a record-setting number of degrees (>3,000) and achieved the highest six-year graduation rate (55.1%) in its history.

Students do not experience such success on their own. The faculty and staff continued to excel in providing a wonderful living and learning environment with a personal touch. Indeed, the entire WKU community pitched in to help with one prominent indicator reflected by the growth of the WKU Opportunity Fund to nearly \$50M. Another indicator of our team effort and resulting success was the January 2021 restoration of salary reduction and reimbursement of amounts withheld in the fall 2020.

## Budget Details

### 2022 Operating Budget



Athletics too were disrupted, yet the women's volleyball team in their first Sweet 16 appearance in history.

Overall, students performed admirably during an entire year of academics under the shadow of the pandemic with WKU celebrating graduations for the classes of 2020 and 2021 in May.



## Executive Summary

### Looking Ahead: 2021-22 (FY22)

The Strategic Enrollment Planning process has evolved over the past several years with key implementations occurring each fall. To provide further access to a WKU education, in keeping with the first goal (Affordability & Accessibility) of the WKU SP, the **Hilltopper Guarantee: Commitment to the Commonwealth** was announced for fall 2021. Coupled with this new program were the expansions of the **WKU Family Scholarship**, the **Border State Scholarship**, and the **Tuition Incentive Program**. While the pandemic delayed the application process in high schools and hindered our ability to meet in person with prospective applicants, another exceptional incoming class is eagerly anticipated.

In December 2020, WKU reached the 25% point of its current strategic plan, *Climbing to Greater Heights 2018-2028*. Excellent progress was made on multiple fronts for many more achievements anticipated in the next quarter. WKU is committed to maintaining and improving the physical and virtual structures that contribute to completion and success for all WKU students. To that end, the First-Year Village opens in the fall 2021, providing modern residence space in a holistic living-learning environment. The WKU Commons at Helm Library will open in the new academic year, providing multipurpose space for dining, cooperative work, and student engagement. WKU interaction with the community will be expanded through development of the Innovation Campus at WKU, serving as a hub for collaboration and entrepreneurship. WKU has developed a Master Plan and a six-year Capital Plan to facilitate future improvements.