

Faculty Senate Meeting
President's Response to Evaluation
April 12, 2016
Jack Thomas

I appreciate constructive feedback on the presidential performance survey, and the recognition of the “significant budgetary and demographic constraints facing the University.” The state’s failure to pass an appropriation for this amount of time has never occurred in the 159-year history of Illinois public higher education. We are covering \$51.4 million in state obligations and an additional \$11.0 million in MAP grant funding. The other 11 public universities face similar, incomprehensible circumstances.

In moving ahead, it is sufficed to say that program elimination decisions are unpopular decisions. No one likes or wants to make these types of decisions. However, as president, I will keep the institution solvent and follow IBHE guidelines (i.e., enrollment and degrees conferred thresholds) for program continuation. The IBHE recently raised these thresholds. Provost Neumann is reviewing the implications for WIU.

My plans and decisions will continue to embrace shared governance. Each fall, my vision and goals (initiatives) are posted online after being discussed with each of the governance groups. The vision and goals are developed with the Board of Trustees during their annual July retreat.

The Leadership Team continues to plan the strong future of WIU as a Center for Regional Excellence. Our work is strongly informed by the academic excellence, affordability, and the social responsibility task forces. We await recommendations from the Academic Program Review and Elimination Committee, and we will carefully review all survey recommendations.

We are ensuring that plans have input, and follow institutional structures and processes. To be done right, things take time. We are completing our due diligence. We will come before the university community soon.

Actions from my office, according to the survey, have been reactionary. But this should not be confused with transparency. The first and immediate task is to keep the University solvent. We have no plans to close the University. I will remain transparent and keep the University informed on actions taken to remain solvent.

I am encouraged when we are all part of the solution. Our non-negotiated staff did not receive a raise in FY16, and will not receive a raise in FY17. Over 500 individuals are engaged in furloughs and voluntary no pay scenarios. We have given back to protect this great university and ask that our unions do the same.

I appreciate the support for funding MAP grants, lowering tuition, and the overall focus on student success. We serve a high percentage of MAP grant recipients. Three-fourths of WIU students receive financial assistance. We must remain fiscally conservative and responsive to issues of price sensitivity and elasticity.

We have not lowered admissions standards. We continue to support Western Commitment Scholarship programs. At the same time, we honor educational opportunity. As recently posted on

the WIU homepage, we are national leader in graduating more low-income students than predicted on entering student characteristics alone.

I understand that some question the impact of layoffs and furloughs will have on students and the reputation of the University. How we react to these measures will determine how the public perceives the University. The Leadership Team is working with our directors to ensure that there are minimal service disruptions. The Provost's Office continues to carefully monitor course enrollments.

Conversations of whether we should offer liberal arts or professional programs are counterproductive. It is not an either/or choice. Beginning in general education, the liberal arts give students the foundational skills to be successful in their future academic pursuits and chosen professions, inside and outside the liberal arts. Program eliminations will be the result of legal adherence to Illinois Administrative Code, and not the result of migration from our status as a comprehensive university.

Supply and demand will determine our portfolios. We cannot, as some have, assume that if a program is offered in one location, it detracts from the enrollment at another location. Students choose where they live. We will provide responsive academic programs to meet the needs of our host communities.

Do not assume faculty members were "targeted" for layoffs. Provost Neumann had a quantitative methodology. When concerns were raised regarding the layoffs of tenured faculty, we removed that component from the criteria.

I appreciate the recognition of the magnitude of the issues facing Illinois public higher education. There are very difficult and very unpopular decisions that have to be made as we position the University for the future. I continue to welcome constructive feedback in our shared efforts to succeed.

I thank Senate Chairperson Pynes for pointing out on the Senate floor that there is no place in a university - a community of scholars - for anonymous attacks. They serve no purpose. I understand that decisions will be second-guessed. However, together we will move this great university ahead. We will emphasize the public good of Western Illinois University. We will exercise civility and respect for the dignity and worth of every member of the university community. Thank you.

Things to consider:

1. Should the Provost and President's evaluations be done every two to three years instead of yearly?
2. Should every individual be allowed to evaluate the President and Provost, or should it be those groups that have direct report and the Faculty Senate?
3. Should the questions be reviewed for appropriateness? (ability to answer questions based on individual knowledge of the duties of the position)
4. Does this kind of evaluation encourage ad hominem and personal attacks?
5. Are other individuals' evaluations placed on the web as are the President and Provost?