

REPORT for the Budget & Finance Committee Meeting of 24 April 2025

The Budget & Finance Committee last met on 3 April 2025.

1. Meeting called to order: E. Kondratieff (3:50 pm).

Attending Committee Members (Voting):

Eric Kondratieff, Chair (PCAL, History)
Daniel Boamah (CHHS, Social Work)
Greg Ellis-Griffith (At-large, CHHS, Public Health)
Sean Kinder (Libraries)
Blair Thomas (At-Large, PCAL)
Kurt Neelly (At-Large, CHHS, Physical Therapy)
Jim Lindsey (GFCB, Alt. for J. Erickson, GFCB, AIS)

Attending Committee Members (Ex-Officio)

Shane Spiller (Faculty Regent)

Absent

John Erickson (GFCB; on family leave)
Jeremy Maddox (OCSE, Chemistry)
Bud Fischer (Provost, Ex-Officio).

Positions currently unfilled:

CEBS and SGA; Alternates for CEBS, PCAL, SGA

2. Chair Report – E. Kondratieff

- A. **Approval of Minutes from 04/03/2025 meeting** – approved after some discussion of Provost Fischer’s comments in the previous meeting re: the new across-the-board **course fees**. Also discussed: **WKU Library financial challenges**.

Course Fees: Discussion included the amount of revenue that will be generated by the fees, figured at approximately \$3.4m to \$3.5m. Some committee members voiced concerns about financial effects on students whose coursework previously included few or no associated course fees but now will have to pay on average (if FTE) \$225/semester (assuming \$15/hour).

Likewise, concerns emerged about how the Deans will use the excess funds derived from new fees for courses that previously had none. In the B&F meeting on 4/3/24, Provost Fischer stated that all funds would be used to promote student success; given the clear (and allowed) differences between Deans’ budgeting and spending priorities under the RAMP model, the committee worries that “student success” might be loosely defined to justify spending in areas only remotely related to “student success.”

Also discussed was the possibility of using excess course fees to hire non-recurring positions filled by, e.g., graduate assistants, student tutors, student workers, and other temporary but recurring support staff in depts. to facilitate student success in their respective majors / departments or toward Library Resources.

Library: Sean Kinder noted that the Library 1) is not revenue generating units (overdue fees historically went into the general budget), 2) is losing faculty lines, and 3) will need more resources to match the needs of an R2 university if that is what WKU is aiming for. He also noted that more funding is needed for e-books, physical books and databases, as well as more funding for the Interlibrary Loan system. Journal and database subscriptions increase every year, but the library does not get increased funding to maintain them.

Kondratieff suggested that the Budget and Finance Committee could investigate this situation in the next AY as part of its ongoing work to better understand and bring to light budgeting issues for different units of WKU. Since the State Legislature is clearly willing to fund capital preservation, restoration, and renewal projects—as the State owns most campus buildings—perhaps the legislature would also be willing to vote for funding library resource upgrades?

Kinder agreed that examining and publicizing budgeting issues besetting the Library would be helpful. He also noted that, as he is rolling off the senate, Todd Seguin (currently in Faculty Welfare) will be replacing him in the Fall.

AI: Kinder noted that the library is seeing a rise in student requests for help finding “sources” cited in generative A.I. “work” on papers they wish to submit as their own, but the sources are frequently bogus (A.I. hallucinations): “[A.I.] knows how to put information together, to make it look like an authentic source or citation, but they don't exist.... we've had those type of questions that show us that people are obviously using AI, and they're using it more.”

- B. **Chair Report in New Business** (below).

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3. New Business

- A. **New / Old Business:** Discussion of B&F Chair Kondratieff's third guest attendance at Faculty Welfare Committee meeting on 4/18 to discuss information prepared by Eric Reed on the current state of WKU faculty salaries and a pathway forward with a "Statement On Salaries" (SOS) requesting that Admin prioritize this ongoing problem; it is proposed that they bring forward this resolution in conjunction with B&F. Since the last meeting in March, Faculty Welfare has considered updated salary data provided by Eric Reed. Provost Fischer was in attendance, as was Tracy Jenkins (Chair of Academic Quality) and Eric Reed. The report from Faculty Welfare contains the details of that meeting, so will not be repeated here.
- B. **The Joint Resolution by Faculty Welfare, Budget and Finance, and Academic Quality, aka, "Statement on Salaries"** was discussed in and unanimously approved by the Budget and Finance Committee in the form that is now going forward to the SEC (this resolution will be visible on the SEC and Senate Agendas for May).

Kurt Neelly mentioned his appreciation of the resolution's last three points, i.e., those indicating that the Senate will take an active partnership role – as appropriate in a shared governance situation – with Administration in working to resolve the persistent salary issues at WKU.

4. Faculty Regent – Shane Spiller

- A. Spiller noted that some people worry that salary increases will be difficult when, e.g., we must pay \$40m to fill Hilltopper Hall; but Housing and Residential Life is a separate entity; they are on the hook, not WKU. While it does impact WKU in some ways (by taking an important dorm offline), WKU does not have to pay to fix it.
- B. CPE has approved new tuition maximums: a 3.8% increase for AY 25-26 and 1.9% for AY 26-27. UK and UofL get more.
- C. Side note: UK has increased its health premiums significantly more than WKU has had to over the last year.
- D. The budget is nearly done and will soon be submitted to the Board of Regents for approval; Spiller will likely be able to report on it to the Senate in the May 15 meeting. Most of the work that the Regents happens just after graduation; at that time, they will also review the 1st-quarter financial statement (the buzz is that spending is well within budget so far).
- E. Spiller offered to answer any questions B&F committee members, past and present, may have in the coming months.

5. Open Discussion

- A. Greg Ellis-Griffith noted a recent report that universities are making more money but that is not carrying over to salaries. Kondratieff noted that the long slog to pay down WKU's deficit from the Ransdell years is now at an end and that net tuition revenues are up 4% this year so next year may see some increases in salaries.

Spiller noted that with the Deans getting more money in course fees (along with Summer and Winter tuition dollars) that they may have the flexibility to move salaries upward. He also explained that 4 years ago our scholarship program was overspending (discounting tuition too much) but that the current model, with smaller scholarships, is more effective in that despite the small decrease in enrolment numbers WKU has seen an overall increase in revenues (in short, a better balance has been found to maximize the difference between "price," "(actual) cost," and "net revenues")
- B. Daniel Boamah asked Sean Kinder if the advent of A.I. will have an impact on what the Library does or has to offer.

Kinder responded that some of his newer colleagues are interested in working with A.I. and assisting faculty and students who want to embrace A.I. (e.g., integrate it in assignments without having it do all your work). Library is well equipped with technology to keep up with some needs. The main problem is loss of faculty, faculty lines, and the increased costs of journal and database subscriptions without requisite increases in funding to keep all those things current.
- C. Kondratieff thanked all present for their work and participation for this AY and looks forward to working with them in AY 25-26.

6. Motion to adjourn: Ellis-Griffith; adjourned @ 4:43 p.m.