**Research, Scholarship, and Creative Endeavors Working Group**

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**Charge**: Develop a strategic plan for research, scholarship and creative endeavors at WKU that will enhance the professional lives of our faculty and students, improve quality of life in our region and help to define and elevate WKU’s standing in the region and nationally.

Background

The term *research* or *scholarship* comprises a broad set of activities and outcomes. The WKU Faculty Handbook defines three areas of performance for faculty members: Teaching Effectiveness, Research/Creative Activities, and University/Public Service. Within the domain of Research/Creative Activities, the following exemplars are cited as evidence of successful performance:

1. Publication of books, monographs, articles, maps, bibliographies indexes, catalogs, textbooks, and papers in professional journals; production or direction of non-print media work; reports to federal, state, or local agencies; cases.
2. Presentations of papers, cases, media productions, etc., at professional and other scholarly meetings.
3. Participation in studies, programs, creative activity supported by extramural funds.
4. Production and display of musical compositions, paintings, sculpture, ceramics, weaving, photographs, graphics and other works of art; recitals, choreography, stage design and construction, costuming, direction; production of film and videotaped materials.
5. Inventorship or co-inventorship leading to U.S. and/or other patents
6. Participation in the development of innovative curricular materials such as curriculum guides, computer-assisted instruction, online resources, software, lab equipment, videotapes, films and film strips, manuals, workbooks, tools, or models which break new ground and successfully advance concepts, ideas and approaches that transcend ordinary instructional material.
7. Invitations to conduct research at other universities or research-oriented agencies; to prepare questions for professional examinations.
8. Continuation of current research or other creativity not yet resulting in publication, performance, or display.
9. Involvement of students in faculty research or creative activity.

In this document, we generally use the term “scholarship” to refer very broadly to research and creative endeavors. However, we also often use the term scholarship interchangeably with “research” because of its common usage in that regard.

Process

The committee began meeting in October 2017. Initial meetings focused on arriving at a common understanding of WKU’s traditional and aspirational mission in the area of research, scholarship and creative activities. In order to determine the current status of that mission, an email was sent to department heads and chairs soliciting their input. Specifically, they were asked:

*With respect to Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities in your unit, what are your major: 1) Strengths (including opportunities unique to our region, university structure, your departmental expertise), 2) Challenges, and 3) Aspirations. Where relevant, please consider the role of business/industry partnerships and collaborations that could intersect with your research, scholarship, and creative activities.*

In addition, the committee members provided input on the same set of questions.

Responses were recorded and categorized. A few major themes emerged from his process, particularly with regard to WKU’s strengths and challenges:

Strengths

* WKU values a diversity of scholarly activities.
* We have well-trained faculty who value research.
* Students are involved in scholarly activities as true collaborators.
* We have relatively strong internal grant funding mechanisms.
* An appropriate value placed is on faculty members’ acquisition of external funding to support research.
* We engage in applied research that addresses local issues.
* We have faculty members who are internationally recognized for their research and creative activities.
* We have strong potential for interdisciplinary collaborations.

Challenges

* There is a lack of meaningful incentives for faculty members engaging in research and creative activities.
* A higher proportion of faculty members should be engaging in research and creative activities.
* Faculty members at WKU have relatively high teaching and service loads.
* Our funding for graduate students (assistantship, stipends, research and travel funds) is inadequate to support their involvement in scholarship.
* Administrative support mechanism can sometimes present a stumbling block for those involved in research activities (especially, grant- and contract-funded activities).
* With only undergraduate and masters level students, the time available to develop students as research collaborators is often inadequate.
* It is difficult for faculty members to find the time, or develop the networks, for establishing collaborative relationship with other scholars.

Aspirations

* WKU could become a destination of choice for students who want to do hands-on scholarship.
* WKU faculty should be recognized in their disciplines for producing high-quality work.
* We want more extensive collaborative efforts within the university and across the region.
* We want to see a greater number of students involved in all types of scholarship (service learning, internships, etc.).
* We want faculty and students at WKU to engage in research that address worldwide issues and creates mutually beneficial connections with both local and global communities.
* We want our graduates to be well equipped for the careers of today and the careers of the future.

In addition to soliciting this feedback on strengths, weaknesses and aspirations, we used data from within and outside of the university to establish norms for faculty workload. The Faculty Work-Life survey, conducted annually by the WKU University Senate, includes questions on workload. Similar questions were asked in the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty. Results show a high level of consistency over time in WKU faculty members’ self-reports of time spent on various activities as well as remarkable similarity to the responses of faculty members at other public, masters-level institutions.

Percent of total workload spent on research, teaching and service

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Teaching | Research | Service |
| All public Masters | 0.66 | 0.14 | 0.19 |
| WKU |  |  |  |
| 2017 | 0.64 | 0.14 | 0.22 |
| 2016 | 0.65 | 0.15 | 0.21 |
| 2015 | 0.64 | 0.15 | 0.21 |
| 2014 | 0.66 | 0.14 | 0.20 |

Thus, although faculty members at WKU report spending about the same amount of time in the various components of academic workload as do faculty members at other public, masters-level universities, research seems to take a back seat to teaching and service. This pattern of workload may be insufficient to support our goal of being a “student-centered, applied research university”. Moreover, it is clear that time spent in traditional classroom-based teaching activities is not the only route to achieve positive student outcomes. The Council on Undergraduate Research reports a number of positive benefits accruing to students from inquiry-based learning experiences in which students make “an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline”. These benefits include increased retention, especially for underrepresented students and an increased likelihood of pursuing advanced degrees (Elrod, Kinzie, & Husic, 2010).

Finally, we sought input from local community and business leaders. Through a review of information and tools available on the website of The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, we discovered an assessment tool for examining the role of Universities in regional economic development. APLU’s Commission on Innovation, Competitiveness, and Economic Prosperity (CICEP) has created two assessment tools to help universities better understand their roles in creating regional innovation and prosperity. The tools encourage institutions to examine policies and practices that enhance their impact on regional economic development. These nationally-validated assessments were very similar to one another, but one was designed to solicit internal feedback, while the other was designed to collect information from external partners. Accordingly, then, we used this tool to solicit information from a selected group of WKU administrators, faculty, and staff, as well as a group of selected regional industry leaders. It should be noted that both groups had been identified and assembled earlier in 2017 in order to begin the process to assess how WKU could better play their position in the region. Further emphasis was added when we had the chance to host a breakfast with our group of industry leaders where Dr. Caboni had the chance to encourage their feedback through the use of this tool. Those results will be reviewed in a later section of this report, but suffice it to say that we took special note of those areas where both the internal and external group rated the action or characteristic as highly important, but felt that we were significantly under-performing. These are the opportunities for improvement that we will outline later.

Our vision statement, mission statement, goals and objectives were derived through this process of information gathering along with multiple meetings of the working group.

Vision: Transformative Scholarship in a Student-Centered Learning Environment

Mission: WKU fosters an environment in which all faculty and students have an opportunity to engage in nationally competitive scholarship

Goals, Objectives and Metrics

Research, scholarship and creative activities provide benefits at several different levels. Our goals address the need to recognize and expand those benefits.

It should be noted that many of the metrics proposed here depend on tracking activities that we currently do not record in a consistent manner. Increasing our research, scholarship, and creative activities requires that we incentivize and provide time for these activities to occur. Providing incentives and adjusting workload require adequate and accurate accounting of involvement in the desired activities.

**Goal 1. Advance students’ personal and professional development through research and creative activities**

Mentored student research has a positive impact on student recruitment, retention, graduation and post-graduate success. Thus, expanding access to mentored student scholarly activities and promoting mentoring by faculty should be a primary goal. At the same time, it is important to recognize that quality mentoring is time-consuming and cannot simply be added to the existing teaching workload. Instead, the university may need to deeply reconsider the notion of *teaching* as an activity that occurs solely in a classroom setting and strategically expand the teaching workload to encompass mentored student research and creative activities. In addition, time spent in mentoring student research may well reduce the faculty member’s own scholarly productivity, depending on the discipline and the mentorship model that is adopted. A high level of flexibility with appropriate accountability will be required to expand opportunities for mentored student scholarly activities.

Objective 1a. Expand access to mentored student research activities

Metrics:

* Number of students enrolled in independent research courses
* Number of honors theses, masters theses, and dissertations
* Number of authored and co-authored student presentations, publications, exhibitions and performances

Objective 1b. Increase faculty involvement in mentoring of student research

Metrics:

* Number of faculty members mentoring undergraduate researchers
* Number of faculty members chairing and serving on thesis and dissertation committees
* Number of scholarly products (presentations, publications, creative activities) with student co-authors

Strategies

1. Brand WKU as the destination of choice for undergraduate research, with research broadly construed, not just in STEM fields.
   1. Infuse university web pages and recruitment materials with references to student research
   2. Prioritize publicizing of student research, scholarship and creative accomplishments on main university web page, undergraduate admissions web page, and Graduate Studies and research web page.
2. Bring all student research, scholarship, and creative activities into the Office of Research and Creative Activities
   1. Increase student access to undergraduate research by consolidating all undergraduate research functions and funds into this office
   2. Align the research functions of the Office of Graduate Studies and Research with the Office of Research and Creative Activities
3. Assign an ad hoc committee to develop strategies, mentoring, and support for undergraduate research, scholarship and creative activities in the arts and humanities through a careful examination of “best practices” from other universities.
4. Evaluate programs across the undergraduate curriculum for incorporation of undergraduate research and creative activities
   1. Encourage tracking of student involvement in research and creative activities
   2. Program review should include assessment of inclusion of undergraduate research experiences
   3. Charge the Colonnade committee with exploring opportunities for inclusion of undergraduate research and creative activities in the Colonnade program
5. Reconsider workload policies within every academic unit
   1. Incorporate research mentorship into the base teaching load
   2. Increase base teaching load for faculty who are not involved in research activities
   3. Encourage differential workload agreements and performance evaluations such that faculty who are not involved in research activities have workload assignments with more teaching and service and are evaluated on a different set of activities than faculty who are research active
6. Provide faculty professional development for faculty members to expand their research mentorship skills

**Goal 2. Raise the scholarly profile of the university through faculty and student research and creative activities**

Research, scholarship, and creative activities are energizing forces with the university. For example, when research is valued at least as much as teaching by an institution, faculty members have greater job satisfaction, are more positive about teaching, and see their institution as more attractive to new faculty members (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009). Creating opportunities for high-level scholarship at WKU is a central goal.

Objective 2a. Prioritize and reward faculty and student scholarship within all units

Metrics

* Number of state, regional, and national level outcomes of scholarly activities
  + Publications
  + Presentations
  + Exhibitions
  + Performances
* At the unit level, metrics should be developed that reflect a recognition of quality of scholarship for the discipline (e.g., citation counts, external letters of support, etc.)

Objective 2b. Increase monetary support for student and faculty scholarship

Metrics

* Funding for scholarly activities, number of proposals, number of awards, and total dollar amount of awards
  + External grants
  + Internal grants
  + Philanthropic gifts
  + Research-related travel funding (including conferences) for faculty members and students

Strategies

1. Institute comprehensive supports for faculty scholarly productivity
   1. use exit interviews to pinpoint necessary support for research-active faculty members
   2. encourage graduated service loads for untenured faculty members to protect them from heavy service, advising, and administrative workloads during their first 3 years
   3. institute a university-wide research mentoring program for tenure-track faculty members
2. Review guidelines for hiring, tenure, promotion, sabbatical applications, performance evaluations and merit pay
   1. Incorporate mentoring of graduate and undergraduate research in a compensatory manner (that is, acknowledge that individual faculty productivity is decreased through such mentorship)
   2. Charge every academic unit to develop clear, minimum expectations for research and creative activities with measurable outcomes for inclusion in tenure, promotion, sabbatical and annual review documents
3. Evaluate the amount and use of graduate assistantship funds
   1. Benchmark graduate assistant support against aspirational benchmarks
   2. Assistantships should be allocated in support of scholarly research and creative activities (e.g., thesis-producing programs, support of lab or studio courses) and in a timeframe that allows funds to be used for recruiting excellent students
   3. Reward programs that obtain external funding for research with additional support in the form of graduate assistantships
   4. On an annual basis, assess the use and effectiveness of assistantship funds in promoting scholarly activities within each unit
   5. Encourage targeted growth or reduction in graduate programs for a balanced portfolio of professional and scholarly programs
4. Examine administrative support mechanism (e.g., purchasing, student employment, human resources, etc.) to ensure that there is adequate understanding of, and support for, the research, scholarship and creative activities of the university
   1. Designate the ORCA as the contact point for referrals of problematic support mechanisms
   2. Provide the head of ORCA with the authority to negotiate changes in problematic support mechanisms
   3. Provide professional development for staff
   4. Regularly examine other institutions for “best practices”
   5. Provide additional staff support for faculty members with a designated level of extramural funding.
   6. Consolidate administrative support functions that support research (especially funded research) into the ORCA.

**Goal 3. Leverage faculty and student scholarly expertise to improve quality of life and support regional economic diversification**

Objective 3a. Achieve successful collaborations between community agencies and academic programs

Metrics

* External Applied Research Dollars Received from Community/Industry Sources
* Regular Assessment Tool to discern current and ongoing regional needs
* Number of External Requests made of WKU for regional work

Objective 3b. Expand opportunities for internships and partnerships with business and community partners

Metrics

* Number of external internships by college, by semester
* Number of faculty/staff collaborations with regional partners

Objective 3c. Increased university-industry collaborative innovation and entrepreneurship

Metrics

* Small Business Accelerator activity
* Campus-wide tracking of Intellectual Property filings
* Campus-wide tracking of patents, innovation awards

Strategies:

1. Encourage alignment of business and community needs with research expertise at the university.
   1. Create and maintain a database of faculty expertise, which would be publicly accessible.
   2. Mechanisms for external support of graduate students.
   3. Using [NSF’s Big Ideas](https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/big_ideas/index.jsp?WT.mc_id=USNSF_51) model, host a roundtable discussion with WKU faculty and regional business and community leaders to develop 10 long-term research ideas for future investment.
   4. Create mechanism for providing scholarships to students who take unpaid internships
   5. Emphasize hiring of faculty with industry experience where appropriate to the discipline
2. Improve the role that WKU plays in the regional economy.
   1. Work in partnership with regional government and community officials to determine actionable economic growth priorities.
   2. Assess the strengths and needs of the regional industry and align WKU’s key research assets with these strengths and needs.
   3. Engage more of the campus senior leadership in regional economic growth initiatives.
3. Create a more supportive culture at WKU for these efforts to collaborate in the region
   1. Make our cooperative research centers and/or laboratory facilities available to external partners.
   2. Support consulting and exchange programs for faculty with industry to foster more personal interactions.
   3. Implement more efficient procedures to enable faculty/staff to more easily create agreements with entities in the region.
   4. Promote linkages between faculty and companies seeking access to their expertise, and work to simplify and accelerate connections.
4. Ensure that other relevant University activities are benefitting the general public.
   1. Capitalize on University cultural and athletic activities and ensure that those products add to a dynamic local environment.
   2. Create the infrastructure that supports early stage innovation and entrepreneurship.
5. Contribute to the development of a regional innovation economy.
   1. Fostering public-private partnerships and programs, including those with national labs

as well as local and regional industry.

* 1. Maintaining technology transfer capacity for licensing/patenting university discoveries.
  2. Partnering with community members to define public and private investments that catalyze economic and innovative growth.

1. Ensure that WKU is offering relevant educational opportunities and programs
   1. Align education and talent development (undergraduate and graduate; degree,

certificate, and continuing education such as DELO) programs with regional needs,

based on the results of regular assessments.

* 1. Support delivering courses and programs in a manner flexible enough to enable students and community workforce members to update their skills and credentials.
  2. Ensure minimal overlap between SKyCTC and WKU’s offerings.
  3. Provide for robust career/recruiting services that highlight professional opportunities in the region.

1. Promote an atmosphere of openness, accessibility, and responsiveness.

a) Designate one entity as first point of contact for industry and economic development

activities.

b) Develop structure and networks (eg. Advisory groups, forums) to facilitate

interactions among key WKU personnel and the region’s major economic players.

1. Actively communicate contributions, successes, and achievements that benefit the region

a) Broadly disseminate information about university-community and university-industry

collaborations.

b) Report the impact of WKU contributions to regional innovation and economic growth

to local and regional stakeholders.

Finally, in this area of the university’s role in the regional economy, we would recommend that WKU pursue a certification under the Innovation and Economic Prosperity University Award Program, as sponsored by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU).

The APLU Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities program recognizes institutions for exemplary, innovative, and sustainable efforts in economic engagement by those who have received the IEP University designation. The designation identifies institutions working to advance the engagement and economic well-being of their states, regions, and the nation through a variety of efforts. Designees have worked through an intensive process of institutional self-study and engagement with stakeholders to identify the strengths of the university’s economic engagement enterprise as well as areas for growth and improvement.

The committee does not believe that this would be an instant recognition but the mere preparation and submission process would be valuable in allowing us to learn more about how WKU could play a better position in supporting the businesses in our region and thereby contribute to the economy in our areas of service. During the course of our work group investigations, we have met with a number of individuals who would be willing to assist us with the process, including some who have led similar-sized universities through the awards process. Incidentally, all of the strategies outlined above are perfectly consistent with the IEP Awards Program process, and represent most of the elements involved in the institutional self-study.