

Questions from Regional Campus Staff Town Hall: March 8, 2024

Thank you to all staff who attended the Town Hall Teams Live on March 8. In an effort to answer your questions, Kent State University leadership involved in this session have provided written responses to unanswered questions that were not addressed due to time limitations. Should you have additional questions, please email regionals@kent.edu and your question will be directed to the appropriate individual for the most comprehensive response.

Q: Are you planning on forming a Staff Think Tank to help look at better ways to streamline some of the work we do systemwide, similar to the role and work of the Faculty Think Tank from last year?

A: At this time, we are thinking that smaller groups focused on particular functional areas across the system would be more productive. However, this is certainly a possibility! The campus deans and Dr. Shadduck will discuss this further.

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Q: Over the last three years, the communication we have received reflecting how we should operate has used different catchphrases, such as “doing more with less,” “staying lean to stay put,” and, more recently, “doing things differently.” Are there any plans to develop one set of communication phrases that might help us be more proactive and part of any proposed solutions?

A: As we all try to communicate ideas, we try out different phrases in our discussions. None of these are official policy statements. I (Peggy), personally, have heard the 2nd and 3rd phrases, but not the first while at Kent State. Different phrases resonate with different people, so I think our language will constantly evolve. The language that works best for me is that our mission is still — and will continue to be — quite consistent, but how we achieve the mission will change as the context in which we work changes. All of the phrases used have a common message that change in our organization is essential to function well in a changing world. Realistically, I think we will continue to make the best efforts we can to communicate in a variety of ways so that each person can find language that works for them.

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Q: In those cases where an RC unit is reporting to a full university unit, how do you ensure that regional campus needs are still being met? Maybe the unit based in Kent will not understand how much RC units cross-utilize each other — out of necessity. For example, under the current structure, first-year registration programming requires campus-level admissions, financial aid and advising units to work together. If RC teams are aligned with Kent-based units, how can we ensure that are able to work together?

A: The more that those of us based at the regional campuses work directly with our colleagues based at the Kent Campus, the more we will understand how our work toward common mission and goals aligns. Recruiting, financial aid, admissions processes, and advising are intertwined for all students, no matter the college of their academic program or the location(s) offering their classes. In the Regional Campus System, we have already worked in a cross-locational approach quite a bit. We have the opportunity to build upon that work, and to help the whole university benefit from a collaborative approach that is centered on the needs of the student. To ensure that people work together well, the most important thing is that all members of the team see themselves as contributing to the whole, not just to one sub-unit.

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Q: How is the administration addressing the “us vs. them” mentality across the system — campus vs. campus, faculty vs. staff, KC unit vs. RC unit?

A: The best way for all of us to address messages, based sub-units rather than the whole, is to continually strive as individuals and units to remember, and often discuss, how our work is a part of the whole mission of the university. The way administrators are addressing this is to repeat this same message of working together and remind all of this mission as often as we can. We also ask that those who are not in administrative roles do the same. If we all start each conversation and each initiative with a look at how it is mission aligned for the university, and then drill down to how the particular unit with the university is contributing to that mission, we will see first our opportunities to collaborate rather than opportunities to compete.

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Q: Unification has begun in the admissions and EMSS area. What areas might be next? What changes can we expect in the near future?

A: We will look at all functional areas to determine which can be most efficient and effective with some collaborative approaches. Some mentioned during the meeting on March 8 that we are taking a look right now, and in the near, include: Financial Aid, Advising, and Libraries/Learning Centers. Any functional areas that have good ideas for how a collaborative approach could be beneficial are encouraged to start interacting across the Regional Campus System and with Kent-based colleagues. Please let the campus/system leaders know of your ideas and please reach out for any support needed in having those conversations.

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Q: Is there a minimum or maximum number of positions that will be lost due to separations or attrition?

A: No, there are no specific numbers. Attrition happens when a person leaves through resignation or retirement. When that happens, it is a good time to look at the approach being taken to see if any changes could/should be made. This has been the primary approach of the Regional Campus System in handling declining revenue associated

with declining enrollment over the past decade. As expenses continue to outpace revenues, we need to be more proactive in looking at how functional areas can be reorganized to function in the most efficient way possible. That could include some systematic elimination of positions.

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Q: What assessment of the impact of the current restructuring upon student success is being done now or planned moving forward?

A: Things that can be useful in determining whether approaches are effective include numbers of learners impacted, measures of student success, and measures of community impact. For example, we look at enrollment numbers in different types of credit courses and other learning experiences. We also gather data on student retention and completion, broken down into various categories. For impact, it is valuable to look at employment of graduates and community economic and social health. Those are harder to measure, but worth some major effort!

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Q: How can the university reduce the budget by \$10 million to \$25 million each year for the next four years without more drastic cuts and building closures?

A: This is a question that is a bit higher than any of the leaders at the Regional Campus System can answer alone. In our focus on the Regional Campus System, we contribute to the overall university's efforts to match expenses to revenues. All other units in the university also contribute. Oftentimes, we work on things that cross lines between units to find the best solutions through reorganization and collaboration. Reduced space usage is certainly one point of study and work. Reducing a budget requires that we make hard decisions, including prioritizing some things over others.

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Q: What advice do you give staff who feel like their Kent State futures are out of their hands? What tangible recommendations do you have for us to remain positive, hopeful and supported in our roles moving forward?

A: If we all stay focused on the mission and on supporting each other through challenging times in higher education, which can help each person stay positive and hopeful. How we provide higher education may change, but the need for it is extremely unlikely to go away any time soon. If everyone helps to dispel rumors and myths by sharing the most accurate information they can, and if everyone asks questions when they need more information, we can work together on a good pathway forward. Also, realize that each of us has days when we feel more positive and days when we are frustrated and feel like we are not making progress. Let your colleagues vent a bit, and then look for opportunities to do good things and encourage each other.

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Q: Has there been any thought of offering a buy-out to staff members?

A: This suggestion has come from several people within the university, so it is being studied. It takes some analysis to determine whether the benefit to the university is worth the cost, so the answer may not come very quickly.