

SBU ADOPTS STRATEGIC CHANGES FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY WHILE ENHANCING MISSION

BOLIVAR, Mo. — Southwest Baptist University President Dr. Eric A. Turner presented to employees on June 2 the University Sustainability Plan designed to guide the University through current and future disruptions to higher education.

The University is nearly two years into a strategic planning process, Shaping our Story Together. The Sustainability Plan was formed by the process and works in tandem with the overall strategic plan. Changes will be implemented throughout the next two academic years with a total savings of \$3.2 million, about 5 percent of the overall budget.

“Through this plan, we are addressing historic budgetary issues and we are responding to the enrollment concerns caused by COVID-19. However, we also want to plan for the future,” Dr. Turner said. “There is an enrollment decline in high school seniors coming in 2026 and beyond, and we need to be positioned to navigate the challenges it presents. In the end, we do not want a budget that is simply balanced. We want a margin for reinvestment in people, programs and facilities. We need to have the resources to fund the strategic plan, to implement the compensation study and to fulfill the facilities master plan.”

Executive Cabinet focused on streamlining operations; distributing workload, particularly among University and academic leadership, in a more-equitable manner; temporary savings measures; and evaluation of the paradigm.

Outline of changes

- Reorganize the Executive Cabinet to allow for greater agility in planning and in reacting to changing forces.
- Enact the Incentive Program for Retirement for eligible employees.
- Employee benefit changes include tuition benefit adjustments, a reduction in employee-sponsored life insurance benefits and a revamped Paid Time Off program. Health and retirement benefits are not affected.
- Restructure the University’s six colleges and 26 academic departments to a consolidated academic structure of three colleges and 12 divisions.
- Residence Life will utilize a combination of Resident Directors and Assistant Resident Directors to oversee residence halls and apartments.
- Matt Kimbrough, Assistant Professor of Theology, has been named the Assistant Provost for Spiritual Formation. In addition to leading the Redford Division of Theology and Ministry, he has been charged with leading University Ministries in an effort to accomplish the university focus of holistically developing students and Church Relations.
- For the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, faculty load temporarily will be adjusted to 30 credit hours over the course of the year, up from 24 hours. This approach reduces the number of positions to be eliminated and collectively shares the burden.
- Eliminate 14 positions through attrition and 10 positions through a reduction in workforce. These positions include both faculty and staff across all campuses. A work group is determining avenues for cost savings in Athletics.
- Discontinue optional academic program accreditations and reduce electronic library resources based on usage data and price-per-click.
- Operational changes include a reduction in operation hours for the swimming pool; continuing to review all vendors and consultants as renewal dates approach; and a temporary reduction in professional development expenses with a new allocation system to be developed for Fall 2021 implementation.

"There are no salary reductions, no freezes in retirement contributions, and no changes to health insurance," Dr. Turner said. "There are, however, many difficult changes, and it will take time for all of us to fully adjust. I am confident these changes are positive steps toward solving our budgetary challenges and positioning us to fund our strategic plan in a compelling, mission-centric way."

*Published: 6-2-2020