



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education News Clippings

Week of September 6, 2009



September 8, 2009

State higher education has gone through many changes

BY CASSIE SHANER The Dominion Post

West Virginia's higher education system — and WVU's relationship with other schools — has been revamped in recent years to create an independent community and technical college network that is intended to aid the state's economy.

"We're having an issue in West Virginia because we don't have the number of college graduates to sustain a global economy," said Sen. Robert Plymale, D-Wayne.

Jay Cole, interim chief of staff for WVU President James Clements, said developing higher-education policy is an art and a science that is often influenced by national trends, examples set by other states, timely issues and state finances. But the ultimate goal is to establish a higher-education system that is cost-efficient, accountable, outcomes-based, and affordable for the state's students and families.

"There is no such thing as a perfect system," Cole said. "We're always tinkering towards perfection."

National experts initially recommended that West Virginia switch to a separate community and technical college system in the 1970s, but Plymale said it would have cost too much. State officials instead tied community and technical colleges to other schools, but the schools became so closely intertwined that it was hard to distinguish their separate missions.

"You couldn't see where workforce development and some of the other focuses were," said Plymale, chairman of the state Senate's education committee.

A 1999 study conducted by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in Boulder, Colo., recommended states create separate community and technical college systems to focus on workforce development and training.

Plymale said West Virginia took the recommendations seriously and immediately began moving in that direction.

Lawmakers eliminated the state's dual higher-education system, which included separate divisions for state colleges and universities, in 2000. They established the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and created an interim governing board to oversee the state's higher-education institutions.

It was replaced a year later by a Board of Governors at most schools, including WVU. Also in 2001, lawmakers created the state's Community and Technical College System "to provide leadership and technical support to the community and technical colleges to aid them in achieving independent accreditation, enhance their ability to serve the interests of the people of West Virginia, and focus attention on achieving established state goals," according to W.Va. Code 18B-2C-1.

House Bill 2224, which took effect in 2005, made Potomac State College a fully integrated division of WVU. House Bill 4690, which took effect in 2007, did the same for the WVU Institute of Technology.

WVU-P, the Community & Technical College at WVU Tech and other schools previously linked with other institutions became independently accredited community and technical colleges with their own governing boards as part of House Bill 3215, which took effect in 2008.

The legislation gives the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education jurisdiction and authority over the schools, as well as the state's entire network of independently accredited community and technical colleges.

Jo Harris, president of Bridgemont Community & Technical College, formerly the Community & Technical College at WVU Tech, said West Virginia's community and technical colleges were less visible before the changes began.

Many people were unaware of the schools' two-year programs, and it was harder for the schools to respond to business needs. Community and technical colleges provide customized training and workforce development that distinguishes them from four-year schools, Harris said.

"The goal was to have a responsive community college system," Harris said of the changes in state law during the past 10 years. "That message is finally getting out. The governor wants a responsive community college system that can provide workforce development."

In a statement provided to The Dominion Post, Gov. Joe Manchin said the state needs skilled workers with a variety of training and experience.

"An educated workforce is the key to economic development," Manchin said. "Community and technical colleges must be able to train our workforce to meet the demands of the 21st century. These institutions are truly important to ensuring that individuals develop unique skill sets, to use in skilled jobs."

Plymale said the separate community college system also makes higher education more affordable. Tuition increases for community colleges are capped at a lower rate than four-year schools, and the Council for Community & Technical College Education can focus on the cost of tuition at community colleges specifically.

Plymale said tuition at many West Virginia community colleges was above the national average before the separate system was created, but it dropped at many schools afterward. Bridgemont was one of them, Harris said.

"If we can get community college students in the door at a lower price ... it's a gateway for individuals who thought they could never go to college or afford baccalaureate tuition," Harris said. "This whole thing is about getting the college-going rate up so we have a better economy and a highly skilled workforce."

Both Cole and Plymale said they expect to see fewer changes to West Virginia's higher education system during the next decade or so.

“I think there is a sense or a desire on the part of state policymakers to let the system that’s in place now run for a few years and see how it works,” Cole said. “We’ll see some modifications based on data and based on outcomes to specific parts of the system, but there won’t be the wholesale, systemwide types of reform that we’ve seen over the last 10 years.”

Plymale said there will likely be a greater focus on specific policies that maximize the state’s economic benefit.



September 8, 2009

WVU's divisional campuses have complex relationships

BY CASSIE SHANER

It was the perfect solution. Justin Keeler always wanted to go to WVU, but he didn't know if he could afford the cost of tuition for four years at the state's flagship university. So he opted to attend Potomac State College first year and then transfer to WVU. "For students that aren't sure about college, it's a good place to start," Keeler said. "There aren't a lot of distractions. It allowed me to focus on my classes, and I was able to save money."

Keeler, 20, of Bloomery, W.Va., graduated from Potomac State in May with associate degrees in business administration and physical education. During the summer he took online courses offered by WVU, and began taking classes on campus this fall.

Transferring to WVU was easy for Keeler, who plans to major in both accounting and physical education, because Potomac State College — in Keyser — is one of two fully integrated divisional campuses of WVU. The other — the WVU Institute of Technology — is in Montgomery, near Charleston.

WVU also provides services to WVU at Parkersburg (WVU-P) and Bridgemont Community & Technical College, formerly the Community & Technical College at WVU Tech. Though both schools were administratively linked to WVU in the past — as a separately accredited regional campus and a division of WVU Tech, Students at Potomac State College and WVU Institute of Technology, respectively — they are now independent community colleges.

The relationships between the schools have changed several times due to changes in state legislation. Officials say the complex relationships between the schools have created unique opportunities and challenges, but the arrangements have benefitted both WVU and the other schools.

Jay Cole, interim chief of staff for WVU President James Clements, has worked with the state Legislature on WVU's behalf. He has also served as an education adviser for Gov. Joe Manchin and deputy secretary of education and the arts for former Gov. Bob Wise.

Cole, a WVU alumnus, said the university gets as much as it gives from WVU Tech, Potomac State, WVU-P and Bridgemont.

"They contribute substantially to our identity and our mission," Cole said. "These are institutions that have good programs and proud legacies. It's definitely a two-way street. They benefit, and we do, too."

Campus connections

As divisional campuses, Cole said, WVU Tech and Potomac State are functionally the same as the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Engineering and Mineral Resources or any other school on WVU's Morgantown campus.

The only differences relate to geographic location, separation of financial resources and "unique operations that incorporate functional outsourcing," according to a report presented to the WVU Board of Governors by senior associate provost Russ Dean in June.

WVU Tech and Potomac State receive their own money from the state and operate financially independent from WVU. But they've called on the expertise of WVU employees in Morgantown to help with building projects and other activities.

Potomac State Provost Kerry Odell cited a \$19-million dormitory as one example. Officials at Potomac State worked with WVU's Facilities Planning department to design the facility, hire a contractor and complete construction.

"It was no small undertaking, and we don't have the personnel on campus that would be able to do that," Odell said.

The heads of the divisional campuses are referred to as provosts largely out of respect for their added executive power and the institution's history, Cole said. But they're essentially the same as another school's dean.

"The person who heads that operation really is apart and distant from Morgantown and has more executive responsibility or direct executive authority, and so they designate them as a provost," Cole said.

WVU-P and Bridgemont have their own presidents and independent governing boards. They're also separately accredited, but both schools have signed agreements to continue their relationship with WVU.

A memorandum of understanding between the WVU Board of Governors and the board for WVU-P outlines the relationship between the two schools and designates WVU-P "the exclusive platform for WVU to deliver educational services to the Mid-Ohio Valley."

A separate trademark agreement permits WVU-P to continue using the WVU name and logo. WVU will also provide administrative and academic support services worth about \$2.2 million a year to WVU-P for a discounted fee of \$500,000 under another agreement.

Each agreement will continue until it's terminated by mutual agreement or with advance notice by either institution. The trademark agreement was initially limited to two years, but WVU-P's board asked that it be revised to reflect the language in the memorandum of understanding, which continues indefinitely.

Connie Dziagwa, executive director of institutional advancement for WVU-P, said WVU-P could have opted to change its name — as Bridgemont did — but a majority of the 800-plus people who responded to an online survey about the matter urged school officials to retain the WVU name.

“It’s been a long relationship,” Dziagwa said. “The community is proud to have that relationship with WVU.”

WVU also has a memorandum of understanding with Bridgemont that allows the two schools to offer joint programs and share information about students as appropriate. WVU will also provide transitional support and other services to Bridgemont until 2011, according to a services agreement approved in June.

“We’ll continue purchasing from WVU and Tech the library services, career services,” Bridgemont President Jo Harris said. “Those are two examples. We’ll be sharing some space and paying some cost to WVU Tech.”

The service agreement states that Bridgemont will pay WVU “the appropriate amount” for the services provided, but it does not indicate the exact amount.

‘Having an affiliation with WVU has an impact’

The primary advantage of WVU’s divisional campuses and its affiliation with WVU-P and Bridgemont is that it helps to increase the university’s presence and accessibility throughout the state, Cole said.

“Students can go to different places around the state, enter the WVU system, and then transfer to Morgantown if they want to,” Cole said. “We think that’s a good thing.”

Dziagwa said “a number of students” who enroll at WVU-P plan to transfer to Morgantown.

Enrollment at WVU-P is about 4,000 students this fall, and Dziagwa estimated that about 300 students transfer to WVU’s main campus each year. A chart provided by Cole indicates that 38 undergraduate students transferred to WVU from WVU-P in 2008.

Kevin Kieffer, a 22-year-old WVUP senior from Ravenswood, said he considered attending other schools after he graduated from high school in 2005. He liked WVU-P because it was cheap, close to home and connected to WVU.

“That really was a major part of the decision, not only for my choice, but everyone else, as well,” Kieffer said.

About 178 of Potomac State’s 1,500-1,600 students transferred to Morgantown last fall. Odell said that number has gone up since the school became a division of WVU, and students are increasingly thinking of Potomac State as another part of WVU.

Gina Corley, 20, of Keyser, graduated from Keyser High School in 2007 and attended Potomac State for one year before transferring to WVU.

“It really helped me save a lot of money,” Corley said. “That was the big thing, and I knew that all the classes were transferring to WVU.”

WVU Tech Provost Scott Hurst said only a handful of Tech’s 1,200 students transfer to Morgantown, but the WVU name recognition that attracted Kieffer and Corley is a powerful marketing and recruiting tool for Tech, too.

“Marketing-wise, having an affiliation with WVU has an impact,” Hurst said.

Dziagwa elaborated: “You can’t say enough about the brand, the name recognition of WVU. You can’t put a price on that.”

Like the other schools, Tech provides space for WVU to offer its programs in other locations, and WVU benefits from the academic strengths of those institutions. For instance, Cole said Tech has strong engineering and printing programs.

“They’re good programs with proud histories,” Cole said. “It’s an advantage to us to have those as part of our course offerings and under our academic umbrella.”

Hurst and Odell also cited the integration of financial aid services and business operations as another benefit of their schools’ relationship with WVU. Though each school has its own financial aid staff to work with students one-on-one, they coordinate with WVU’s financial aid office in Morgantown.

In addition to providing additional expertise for administrative decisions free of charge, WVU also helps its divisional campuses cut costs through joint purchasing contracts. Odell listed dining services as one area in which WVU has ordered things in bulk.

Like Tech, Potomac State is a self-supporting institution, but Odell said the school pays WVU for its portion of the joint purchasing contracts. Tech may also have to pay some fees to WVU down the road, but Hurst said “the net value will be a huge cost savings.”

‘There have been bumps’

Officials at WVU-P, Bridgemont, Tech and Potomac State all said there hasn’t been much of a downside to their relationship with WVU. The few challenges that have occurred are minor, they said.

Dziagwa said there’s nothing WVU-P would have changed about its regional campus relationship with WVU, but the schools were forced to separate by state law.

“This isn’t something that either institution wanted,” Dziagwa said. “We’re doing what we have to do to adjust to the legislation.”

Harris said Bridgemont has had “a very positive relationship” with WVU and WVU Tech over the years, but the school has more autonomy and flexibility now that it’s under local control.

“The community college mission is different from the baccalaureate institutions,” Harris said. “Therefore, this flexibility will allow us to serve the needs of the region as community colleges across the nation have typically done.”

Harris said WVU offered a lot of expert resources, but being part of such a large entity made the school less responsive — slowing hiring and other processes.

Odell said communication is often time consuming. Because of the geographic distance between Potomac State and WVU, he said he doesn't have the ability to stop by someone's office when he has a question.

Instead, he spends a lot of time communicating by phone and e-mail.

"There has to be a lot of dialogue," Odell said. "We do it well, and I think we do it well because we know we need to keep them informed and they need to know what's going on."

Hurst said the primary issue he's had to address is alumni support. He noted that alumni provide financial support for the institution and contribute to the school's identity and reputation.

"There's a perception by many alumni that the school they attended no longer exists and now there's this new one that's associated with WVU," Hurst said.

The integration process has taken Tech three years, and Hurst said it should be completed this fall. Because most of the changes to date have been administrative, students and faculty have not really seen the full benefit of the divisional relationship, but Hurst said they will as time goes on.

"The mutual goal is that the two campuses grow and remain strong," Hurst said. "There's some more things that need to be addressed and pondered on so that we can make sure that objective is met."

Odell said WVU has agreements with Potomac State and WVU Tech — similar to those between WVU-P and Bridgemont — that guide the relationships.

"It's really worked well for us on this campus," Odell said of Potomac State. "There have been bumps, but they haven't been significant."



September 6, 2009

Registrar: Degree errors rectified

WVU working to improve its record keeping

BY CASSIE SHANER The Dominion Post

WVU is working to improve its record-keeping policies and procedures, and Registrar Steve Robinson said he's confident the discrepancies that left 118 degrees in question won't occur again.

"There's a lot of checks and balances," he said. "I'll never say anything's impossible, but I can't imagine it would happen."

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) recommended creating a registrar's office — and Robinson's position — earlier this year, after a record-keeping review indicated that WVU lacked campuswide policies and procedures for records management and retention.

As a result of WVU's failure to follow best practices, a follow-up report found that WVU had issued 104 undergraduate and 14 executive MBA degrees from 1997-2008 to students who appeared to have graduated with fewer than the required number of credit hours. In all 118 cases, the records required to verify whether those students earned their degrees were either missing or no longer existed.

AACRAO, a national nonprofit consulting group, was hired to examine records management at WVU after an investigative panel determined that the university had awarded Heather Bresch, the daughter of Gov. Joe Manchin and chief executive officer of Mylan Inc., an eMBA degree she did not earn.

AACRAO recommended a total of 30 action steps to help WVU address its record-keeping issues and prevent discrepancies from occurring in the future. Robinson said it's hard to say how long it will take to implement all the recommendations, but WVU is making progress.

Several critical elements have already been addressed, Robinson said. Deans are required to sign off on degree candidates, every college has designated someone who's responsible for records management, and schools have been directed to use Banner — the university's official record-keeping system — instead of other systems to document student information.

"Some of the other things are still a work in progress, but I think on some of the real hot-button items that were in the report, the university's already moved very affirmatively to deal with them," Robinson said.

He said a variety of individuals and offices at WVU are responsible for implementing the AACRAO recommendations, but WVU spokesman Dan Kim said the provost's office is ultimately accountable.

Jonathan Cumming, chairman of WVU's academic records management task force and WVU's AACRAO project team leader, said Robinson — who reports to interim Provost E. Jane Martin — has assumed the bulk of the responsibility.

“All the details of implementation that were easily done have been taken care of,” Cumming said. “We hired Steve, and that was a big step.”

‘Ready-made agenda’

Robinson said the AACRAO recommendations served as a “readymade agenda” when he started work at WVU, but some changes will take more time, like improving and increasing the use of Banner.

“Everyone was using it,” he said. “It’s just a matter of knowing its complete functionality and how it can support their individual missions.

“That’s really a process that’s going to take a while, as we uncover individual needs that we have never known about and demonstrate how we can support that in Banner.”

AACRAO recommended hiring a Banner specialist and expanding the registrar’s staff, if necessary, but Robinson said he’s not sure if he needs to hire anyone yet. There may be someone on staff now who can fill the specialist’s role, and AACRAO data shows that his staff is on par for an institution of its size.

Robinson’s staff consists of about 25 people who previously worked in WVU’s combined admissions and records unit. Another 30 employees within the unit report to Marilyn Potts, WVU’s interim director of admissions.

Other recommendations WVU is still working on involve crafting policies for unreported grades and document retention.

The retention policy will be a highly specific document that spells out record-keeping rules for each school and the campus as a whole. Robinson said he plans to start by determining what records will be kept in his office, and then work with the schools to determine what records they need to keep and for how long.

An advisory board with representatives from each college will meet with Robinson monthly and help determine school-specific rules.

“We’re definitely in the infancy on that one, but we have started it,” Robinson said. “We’re starting with my office, and then we’ll go university-wide.”

AACRAO also suggested WVU invest in additional software to improve record-keeping and degree certification. Kim said the university paid \$144,000 for a degree audit system called DegreeWorks, but document-imaging software has not been purchased yet.

WVU is seeking a new chief information officer, and Robinson said the person who fills that position will likely help select the best imaging software.

Student transcripts and other documents will still be kept in hard copy or on microfilm, but Robinson said the imaging software will help minimize paper and save space. Like

Banner, the information it contains will be safeguarded and backed up by WVU's information technology department.

Records kept in hard copy are stored in the registrar's office, at Colson Hall and off-site at Iron Mountain, a storage facility in Pennsylvania.



September 10, 2009

Tucker asked to reconsider ruling in Lang case

WVU contends court failed to hold preliminary hearing

BY CASSIE SHANER The Dominion Post

The WVU Board of Governors, President James Clements, the university's academic integrity officer and two WVU attorneys have asked a judge to reconsider a ruling that stopped WVU from holding an academic integrity hearing for former Provost Gerald Lang.

Attorneys filed briefs in the case Tuesday, the final day to do so under a briefing schedule established last month by Monongalia County Circuit Court Judge Susan Tucker.

Tucker set up the briefing schedule after attorneys for all five respondents filed motions asking her to amend or withdraw an April 24 order in the case.

The order indicated that WVU officials "acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner" and violated the due process rights of Lang and others in their investigation of academic misconduct charges.

The ruling terminated an upcoming hearing for Lang related to WVU's decision to award Heather Bresch — the daughter of Gov. Joe Manchin and chief executive officer of Mylan Inc. — an executive MBA degree that an investigative panel concluded she did not earn.

Assistant Attorney General Samuel Spatafore filed a brief on behalf of the board and Clements, who became involved in the case when he replaced interim WVU President C. Peter Magrath. He asked the court to withdraw the April 24 order and grant a motion to dismiss the case filed last spring, or collect evidence "so that the court can make an informed, proper disposition."

Spatafore argues that the court failed to schedule a preliminary hearing and consider relevant facts in the case.

He says that Lang had other options, and the court made a mistake when it denied motions to dismiss the case filed by the board and WVU's president.

Spatafore did not return a call to The Dominion Post in time for this report. He has previously declined to comment.

Scott Curnutte, counsel for academic integrity officer Marjorie McDiarmid, argues that the court failed to hold a preliminary hearing, notify the parties of the matters to be considered, appropriately consider motions to dismiss the case and answer the question before the court in April. He also says there's no evidence to support the court's ruling.

“I am hopeful that the judge will take the matters I’ve raised under advisement and reconsider her prior ruling,” Curnutte said Wednesday.

Like Spatafore, Curnutte asked the court to withdraw the April 24 order and grant a motion to dismiss the case, or collect evidence. He also asked the court to withdraw statements that indicate McDiarmid violated rules of professional conduct.

A brief filed by Debra Scudiere, counsel for WVU attorneys Mary Roberta Brandt and Beverly D. Kerr, on her clients’ behalf argues that the court determined Brandt and Kerr violated professional conduct rules without any evidence or due process. The ruling has had “lasting negative effects” on both women’s lives, she said.

Scudiere asked the court to enter a new order that makes no reference to ethical violations by Brandt and Kerr, or allow them to file an answer and set a hearing to collect evidence.

Scudiere did not return a call to The Dominion Post, and Lang’s attorney, J. Michael Benninger, could not be reached for comment in time for this report.

Lang has until Sept. 22 to respond to the briefs, and the remaining parties involved in the case then have until Sept. 29 to reply.

“The court will review the briefs as filed and make a ruling on the legal issues remaining to be decided in this case” after Sept. 29, according to Tucker’s order establishing the briefing schedule. “No oral argument will be heard on this matter unless desired by the court.”

Curnutte said the case — which began with Lang’s petition, filed in February — could be resolved if Tucker rules in the respondents’ favor.

“If not, it looks like we’ll still be in court for a while yet,” Curnutte said. “Hopefully, the judge will make a decision pretty soon.”



September 7, 2009

‘New’ Sunnyside projects begin

Group, individuals cleaning up area

BY CASSIE SHANER The Dominion Post

Revitalization projects sponsored by Sunnyside Up are no longer “coming soon.”

That’s the message behind the signs and advertisements promoting the “New” Sunnyside, said Jim Hunt, the organization’s executive director.

When he was first hired, Hunt said signs scattered throughout Sunnyside for a long time indicated that projects sponsored by the organization were “coming soon.” But the opening of Honors Hall, WVU’s newest dormitory, marked a turning point in the transformation of the student neighborhood.

“There’s a lot of different pieces, both big and as little as cleaning graffiti off a sign,” Hunt said. “But it’s all starting to cluster now.”

Last month, Sunnyside Up paid Mountain State Tree Service about \$6,500 to clean up unopened city rights-of-way between Grant and McLane avenues, as well as entrances to the rail-trail.

Hunt said Mountain State removed tires, overgrown trees and other debris that would have been difficult for volunteers to tackle. In some areas, contractors cleared sidewalks that had been completely concealed before.

“When the students got back, we wanted stuff as nice as it could be...,” Hunt said. “Cleaning [Sunnyside] up has really brightened it up and made it safer.”

Sunnyside Up also had graffiti removed from signs throughout the neighborhood and worked with property owners to improve the exterior of their properties.

Property owner Michael Pinion was awarded about \$5,500 in matching funds through the organization’s sidewalk program to replace the deteriorating walkway in front of two houses on McLane Avenue. Chris Romeo, owner of The Original Dish, received a facade grant to help create a new Applebee’s-style restaurant along University Avenue.

Romeo lives in Pittsburgh, but he grew up in the Morgantown area. He said he didn’t intentionally locate his business in Sunnyside, but he’s happy he did.

“Now that I’m here, I can see that they’re trying to change the image of the burning couches to something more like the downtown,” Romeo said, adding there have been a lot of changes in Morgantown since he was a kid. “It’s all been for the better, and I’m glad we’re here.”

Hunt listed Honors Hall, a 12-unit development near Seneca Center, and an expansion project at Bent Tree Court as other additions to the neighborhood. He hopes

Honors Hall will encourage WVU's top students to stay in Sunnyside even after they've moved out of the dorms, and Sunnyside Up is pursuing additional projects to encourage them to stick around.

The organization is working with students in WVU's Student Society of Landscape Architects to design a "pocket park" at the corner of Grant Avenue and 7th Street. A contractor will be hired to handle some aspects of construction, but students will supervise the project.

Morgantown native Nina Chase, a WVU senior majoring in landscape architecture, said she hopes the park will encourage additional development in Sunnyside.

"It kind of brings it all back to the middle of Morgantown, rather than spreading it out," Chase said. "That's how I think development should occur. It's more sustainable development."

Sunnyside Up also has committed \$15,000 to expand WE Car, WVU's hourly car rental program. WVU launched the program this summer with four Toyota Prius hybrids, but Hunt said an additional car will be available in Sunnyside in about a month.

"We're pretty confident that once people get used to it, that'll be one of the more successful locations," Hunt said, due to the lack of parking in Sunnyside and at the nearby dorms.

Rental fees will help cover the cost of the car, which will be parked near Summit Hall. But even if the organization ends up owing money at the end of the year, Hunt said it's a "positive, worthy investment."

Hunt said infrastructure work planned as part of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) project in Sunnyside will begin this spring. Morgantown City Council OK'd a Sunnyside TIF district worth up to \$7.5 million last year.

A TIF district uses income from increases in property values over a span of years to pay for bonds to fund improvement projects. Chase said the new sidewalks, lighting and other infrastructure work planned in Sunnyside will contribute to major changes.

"Definitely in the future, I think it will be a wonderful neighborhood for students to live in," Chase said.

Editorials

WVU Tech earns a vote of confidence

A 40 percent jump in enrollment is a strong nod from the marketplace

In 1992, enrollment at West Virginia Tech in Montgomery peaked at 2,183 students. But over time, enrollment dropped and other problems arose.

In 2006, the school became a division of West Virginia University and was renamed WVU Tech. An exodus of engineering students ensued.

WVU invested in renovations of the science building, the student union and several dorms.

Michael Mattison, the new dean of enrollment, set a goal of registering 500 new freshmen this year, and this fall, 524 new students did so.

WVU Tech has fierce defenders and is an asset to the community. Its success bodes well for the future of the Kanawha Valley.

There was a time when the continuation of WVU Tech was questioned. Now, 524 people have voted with their transcripts that WVU Tech should live on.

That's a remarkable achievement.

MU Board of Governors to vote on project requests

BILL ROSENBERGER, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- The Marshall University Board of Governors will vote on its annual five-year capital expenditure projects list at its meeting Tuesday at 11 a.m. in the Shawkey Dining Room in Memorial Student Center.

The list is compiled and updated annually and arranged according to what university officials consider a priority. Atop this year's list is the Applied Engineering Complex & Development Center, which was approved for \$25 million from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission in August. The money will come from a pool of about \$90 million the state appropriated to the HEPC this year.

President Steven Kopp said days after the early-August announcement that the project would cost \$50 million if funded at its highest level. It is listed at \$60 million on the capital projects chart.

Second on the list is \$15 million for a high technology classroom building, followed by \$2.5 million for Smith Hall repairs.

Also on the 52-item list is \$10 million for an indoor practice facility (ranked 17th), \$8 million for a baseball field (ranked 19th), \$24 million for football stadium expansion (ranked 30th), \$4 million for Drinko renovations (ranked 47th) and \$40 million for a clinical neuroscience and education center (ranked 51st).

Items one through 32 are not new, while 33 through 52 are new. The combined cost of all the projects is more than than \$342 million.

If approved by the board of governors, the list will be sent to the HEPC, which will review it and compile its own prioritized list for each of the 22 two- and four-year public institutions it oversees.

Richard Donovan, the chief financial officer for the HEPC, said they have to take into consideration the needs of all the schools. And he said state officials have told him there's only going to be a \$10 million pot in the next budget for capital improvements.

"It's really down this year," he said. "But we'll keep a list because you never know."

Donovan explained that there are three categories for projects: code compliance and deferred maintenance up to \$1 million, building renewal and major renovations and new projects. Priority, he said, is given to the first two categories so current buildings are maintained. And that's pretty much what the \$10 million will be used for.

"It doesn't look promising this year for any big capital projects," Donovan said.

In a year where more funds are available, Donovan said the HEPC will strongly consider recommending large projects in which some money has already been secured through federal dollars or donations. Marshall's only project that fits into that category is

a rural health and residency education center. At a cost of \$9.7 million, the university indicates on the list that there is \$2.7 million available already.

The agenda also includes:

A vote to award a construction contract to the lowest bidder for the Rural Health & Clinical Education Center in Chapmanville.

A review of the unaudited draft of the financial budget report for the 12 months ending June 30, 2009.

An update on investment earnings, which are up for the three months ending June 30, but down significantly over the 12-month period ending June 30.

A vote on the addition of a new master's degree program in accountancy. It was approved by the graduate council April 24 and received Kopp's approval May 15.

MU's financial report promising

BILL ROSENBERGER, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- Marshall University's net assets increased by \$3.7 million during the 2009 fiscal year, according to an internal budget report presented Tuesday at the Board of Governors meeting.

The internal audit shows graduate and undergraduate revenues exceeded expenses by \$450,000. President Stephen Kopp told the board that enrollment growth in the past few years has led to a turnaround from a \$5 million deficit in graduate and undergraduate programs not that long ago.

Outside auditors are working on the official report.

Kopp said much of the credit for the university's growth in net assets, however, goes to the Marshall University Research Corporation, which handles the Bucks for Brains money. While MURC is a separate entity, its audit gets thrown in with the rest of the university.

"Most of it was generated by MURC," Kopp said, adding that the money is restricted and not for a rainy day fund.

And while officials are happy with the increase because of the down economy, the growth from last year decreased. According to the revenue and expense comparison report from 2008, Marshall's net assets increased that year by about \$5.8 million.

Other expenses and revenues had an impact on the final figures. The proceeds from the sale of University Heights for \$2.3 million are in the current cash line item and have been appropriated for land purchases, building construction or renovations in the 2010 fiscal year budget.

The university's internal report also shows the \$350,000 annual payment to Marshall Community & Technical College as part of the separation agreement. The 10-year deal for \$3.5 million is a settlement for real estate assets on the northeast corner of 5th Avenue and 20th Street.

Non-current cash also decreased by \$2.5 million for the Forensic Science Building by MURC, which is offset by an increase in capital assets.

Marshall's investment returns also took an upturn during the last three months ending June 30. The CommonFund investment was up 17.61 percent, though the 12-month picture was a loss of 24 percent. Over the life of the investment, which dates back to 2006, it is down 4.94 percent.

Other investments are up 7.14 percent during the three months ending June 30, according to the report. But those, too, have not rebounded from an 11.46 percent loss during the previous 12 months. The three-year performance is down almost a half a percent.

Still, Kopp and members of the board said the investments have performed well compared to the state's CommonFund investments. Senate Bill 603, passed in 2005, gave West Virginia University and Marshall money to invest on its own. During the 2010 legislative session, the sunset provision kicks in, allowing the state to evaluate the performances of the universities and whether to renew the bill.

"We've had a 12.7 percent annual return in the (Marshall University) Foundation each year for five years," said board of governors member Dr. Joe Touma. "We lost a lot, but we've gotten 80 percent back."

Marshall's total portfolio, including its share in the state investment pool, is valued at \$59.6 million. Its life-to-date return is 2.75 percent, yielding more than \$4.8 million.

In other Board of Governors news:

Academic committee chairperson Letitia Neese Chafin reported the spring semester performance in the Buck Harless Student Athlete Program. Ten teams earned a 3.0 grade point average or better; 33 student athletes earned a 4.0; 150 student-athletes earned between a 3.0 and 3.9; the men's teams averaged a 2.99, with a high of 3.42 from the cross country team. The women's teams averaged a 3.22, with volleyball golf and soccer achieving a 3.47 or better.

Provost Gayle Ormiston said he will give the board a full layout of the university's new retention plan at the October board meeting. Part of the plan will include the creation of new core education requirements that will start during the fall semester of 2010. "We're trying to rethink the structure of academic offering," he said, adding that a new committee is being put together to determine what degree programs could be offered completely online.

A. Michael Perry, whose board member term expired, was honored for his long-time service to Marshall with a proclamation and letter from Gov. Joe Manchin.

The board also approved the capital expenditures projects list for the governor's office. The list includes 52 projects. Of the 52, only three have any funding available. "This is our wish list, if we have everything we needed," said John Hess.

The projects are listed in the order that the university has deemed priority. Projects from 33 through 52 are new and include \$40 million for a clinical neuroscience and education center. Those remaining on the list include football stadium expansion, baseball field, upgrades to Old Main and an indoor practice facility.

MU forensic science program gets major technology boost

BILL ROSENBERGER, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- Using Google Maps and new computer crime-fighting technology, Corporal Robert J. Boggs of the West Virginia State Police can determine where child pornography is being downloaded anywhere in the state.

Boggs talked about the advances in digital evidence analysis and collection Thursday afternoon at an open house at Marshall University's Department of Integrated Science and Technology to showcase the new digital forensics lab.

The expensive investment -- more than \$170,000 from department funds -- purchased equipment such as computers, software and hardware that allows law enforcement to analyze digital evidence that may be lurking on suspects' computers or cell phones. About \$50,000 was spent on devices to retrieve information from cell phones and hundreds of hookups for the numerous cell phone makes and models.

"(The lab) has all the latest tools ... to preserve and analyze digital evidence," said John Sammons, a former Huntington police officer who now teaches as an adjunct faculty member in the forensic science program.

Sammons said digital evidence is now prevalent in almost every crime, with the highest rate involving child pornography. But investigators can use e-mail accounts to deduce a timeline for when someone who is missing or the victim of a homicide last contacted a friend or family member. They also can use the equipment to bring back deleted files that may contain incriminating evidence linking someone to a crime.

"Computers and digital media impact almost every aspect you think of," Boggs said. "Our case loads are so high right now. We've got six months of backlog."

Boggs' unit within the state police has its own lab to train current law enforcement, but he hopes Marshall's new lab will enable more students to be trained in digital evidence collection and fill the gaps that all law enforcement agencies have.

"We're severely understaffed," Boggs added. "As are all labs. This field is growing exponentially, and it will only grow more. Computers are integrated into everything."

During a video presentation, Boggs talked about child pornography statistics in West Virginia. In August alone, there were 10,001 hits involving it. Hundreds involved residents in Cabell and Wayne counties.

Boggs also told the audience that a 10-year-old victim of child pornography was recently rescued from southern West Virginia. He said 56 percent of all cases submitted for analysis involved child pornography.

"We are making arrests out there and rescuing kids," he said.