Reflections on Year One

July 1, 2014

Wow – What a year! As I reflect on year one - since joining the University of West Georgia as its seventh president - I’ve learned a tremendous amount. It has been a whirlwind of meetings, conversations and presentations with internal and external constituencies from faculty, staff, and students; to community members and groups; to state representatives and the BOR. I’ve spent the time listening, communicating, and learning – and providing a vision (muddy at times), then building trust, process and energy to implement that vision (clearer now). Mostly, it has been an opportunity for me to engage, understand culture, hear needs and concerns, and establish relationships.

When I look back at all we’ve accomplished the last 12 months, I’m a bit amazed. We’ve created a cross-divisional learning network in order to facilitate communication across all areas of campus, implemented an innovation squad to develop and deliver new innovative programs and delivery mechanisms aligned with market and economic growth and worked on developing UWG’s plan for MOOCs and online delivery. We embarked on a national search for a provost, which was completed successfully (it’s great to have Micheal as a partner). We also recruited a new dean for the School of Nursing, secured State funding for many critical initiatives, and committed record funds to bring our faculty and staff compensation closer to the median.

We developed strategic plans for enrollment and for our athletics programs, improved our Capital Campaign readiness, developed an Academic Master Plan for 2014-2020, and developed and provided an internal peer review presidential grant program for academic projects and initiatives that cultivated student experiential learning, community engagement, research, and presentation. We explored and developed more robust articulation agreements with partners; we were included in Chamber initiatives to bring new technology and industry to Carroll County and the region; and we are in the process of centralizing our community engagement office to monitor, assess, and evaluate our service efforts to the region with a goal of 75,000 community service hours per academic year. It was a record year for philanthropic support of UWG with over $6.7M in gifts and pledges and University Communications and Marketing developed the next iteration of the 'Go West' campaign to be implemented this coming academic year.

We developed and are beginning the implementation of our new Quality Enhancement Program, passed our SACSOC reaffirmation (still some work here with assessment), and have begun a process to improve our goal setting and assessment methodologies. We also delivered UWG’s first-ever employee engagement survey (with a 90% participation rate) and, through the process of open discussion of the results, have begun the all-important cycle of evaluation, dialog, planning, and action necessary to make our university the best place to work, learn, and succeed. Our quarterly Leadership Development Institutes are a key indicator of our commitment to this process – and to hardwiring success in every colleague by improving engagement and providing our leaders the tools they need to create a culture of high achievement.

Perhaps the most successful initiative and demonstration of inclusive internal and external input and participation was the development of a new, highly focused strategic plan, 2014-2020, which includes a new mission, vision, and values statement. This gives us a way to measure our success using data and also provides a rallying point for all campus constituencies. Most importantly, it unifies us as an institution, while providing evidence of each individual’s contribution to our goals.
As I’ve said before, I believe the success of our strategic plan and of achieving our institutional goals will only be accomplished if each and every faculty and staff member is actively engaged. Student success - retention, progression and degree attainment - must be everyone’s responsibility on our campus.

I very much believe that there has been a true embracing of change both from a leadership and cultural perspective – both externally and internally – and I am so pleased that this is the case. In order to create a true best place to work, learn, and succeed, we must cultivate a culture of teamwork blended with individual accountability, explore innovation, and hardwire the habits and skills that lead to our success – and to the success of our students. We’ve accomplished so much already and I am excited to see how much farther we’ll “Go West” in the coming year.

A year ago, I was excited to take on a new challenge and learn everything I could about my new home. Today I can honestly say I am glad to know many of the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of this university and I am proud to be your president.

Sincerely,

Kyle