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## UA3/8/6 Findings & Recommendations

WKU Scholarship Committee

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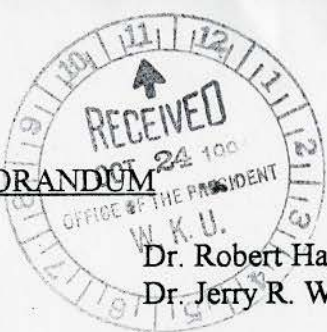
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To: PRESIDENT MEREDITH



MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Robert Haynes, Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Dr. Jerry R. Wilder, Vice President for Student Affairs

FROM: Ad Hoc Committee on Awarding of Academic Scholarships:  
Dr. Cheryl Chambless, University Scholarship Committee  
Ms. Marilyn Clark, University Scholarship Committee  
Mr. Rob Evans, SGA President  
Dr. Elizabeth Lemerise, College of Education  
Dr. Sam McFarland, University Scholarship Committee  
Dr. Charles McGruder, College of Science, Tech., and Health  
Dr. Patrick Moore, College of Business Administration  
Dr. Larry Snyder, College of Arts and Humanities  
Mr. Stephen Smith, University Honor Student

- non-Duplication policy should be dropped.  
- Student workers dollar should be used to recruit.

*If get one, how keep it?*

DATE: October 21, 1994

SUBJECT: Committee findings and recommendations

The committee met September 16, September 23, and September 27. In the initial meeting, various committee members expressed the opinion that Western's target for outstanding students should not be limited to National Merit Finalists or Semi-finalists, but should emphasize top performing students who score high on the ACT and have high GPA's coming out of high school. As part of this discussion, Dr. Chambless explained Western's current scholarship program for attracting outstanding high school students with American College Testing (ACT) scores of 26 or higher and high school grade point averages (GPA) of 3.5 or better. Merit scholarships totalling approximately \$1.5 million (see attached breakdown) are used to attract students primarily from the Kentucky, north central Tennessee and southern Indiana region. Likely targets are identified from several sources including:

- ▶ names of ACT and SAT test-takers who list WKU as a college choice on their test forms
- ▶ names of high school juniors in the region who take the ACT but do not list WKU as a college choice; even though this list includes some students with lower ACT scores and GPA's than our scholarships require, the list gives access to a number of likely scholarship candidates we might not otherwise reach (list purchased from ACT)
- ▶ names from lists of honored students including National Merit Semi-finalists, National Achievement Semi-finalists and Commended Students, and Kentucky Governor's Scholars
- ▶ names gathered during high school visits
- ▶ names of students requesting WKU information



- ▶ names of students who respond to WKU's requests to high school counselors inviting their juniors to join our mailing list.

The names and scores are sent to academic departments in which the students express an interest, and the students are sent special correspondence about the scholarship program. Outstanding students (as identified by ACT scores greater than 25 and high school GPA of 3.5 and above) are invited to a special day on campus hosted by the Honors Program. Those with ACT scores of 28 or higher and GPA's of 3.9 or over are guaranteed at least a Regents scholarship (in-state tuition, renewable for four years) if they choose Western. As shown on the attached breakdown, the top level scholarships currently awarded by Western appear to be competitive with other institutions in the region. Basically, an outstanding student receiving a Presidential or Award of Excellence scholarship has most of the expenses associated with college completely defrayed by the scholarship, and the Regents scholarship defrays in-state tuition. There also appears to be adequate publicity aimed directly at rising high school seniors and their families. After the Scholarship Selection Committee competitively awards scholarships during March, April, and May, the recipients and awards are publicized in hometown newspapers and formally presented by WKU faculty, staff, current students, or alumni at appropriate high school awards and graduation ceremonies.

Based on this information and discussion, committee members expressed satisfaction that:

- ▶ Western's current scholarship awards program is reaching outstanding high school students in the region, including National Merit Semi-finalists
- ▶ the monetary incentives offered to students are competitive with other institutions who are seeking the same students
- ▶ publicity concerning the level of scholarships available should be hitting a critical target market: potential future outstanding students at regional high schools and their families.

The committee next turned to an analysis of why, with this system in place, we have only six National Merit Semi-finalists enrolled in the current freshman class at WKU while UK has announced they have enrolled 82. It was the unanimous conclusion of the committee members that the problem lies not with WKU's promotion, but with the product. In short, WKU is reaching outstanding students in the region with the message that we provide adequate monetary incentives (scholarships) to attend here, but the students are going elsewhere despite Western's offers of low tuition, a "small college" atmosphere, and the chance to work closely with faculty in smaller size classes. It appears that outstanding students are not being attracted by these offerings.

The committee examined three courses of action based on this conclusion. In the short term, members felt that expansion of the recruitment area on a selective basis might prove effective. Drs. McGruder and Lemerise advanced the idea of "geographical diversity," pointing



out that WKU is virtually unknown in the Eastern States where the price of a college education as well as the cost of living are high. WKU would have a market advantage in this region on both counts. They also suggested that a low-cost way to increase our presence in other regions would be to call upon alumni located in those areas to advance Western's cause at such events as college fairs, or by hosting receptions for outstanding students, or by interviewing prospective students.

Another promising course of action proposed by Dr. McFarland would be to implement a program of on-campus interviews for scholarship applicants similar to one currently carried out at Ball State University. There, a selection of top applicants is invited for an interview, a competitive test, and a tour of the campus, both as a way of final screening for the premier scholarship, and as a way of showing off the campus to these students. According to Dr. Arno Wittig, Dean of Ball State's Honors College, "Seventy percent of those who interview . . . attend BSU the following year, even though less than 10 percent actually receive" the top level scholarship. A similar event hosted by the honors program at WKU might be a strong selling point with potential outstanding students.

A concept also advanced by Dr. McFarland received strong support from committee members as a long term solution to WKU's difficulty in attracting outstanding high school students. Based on the successes achieved by Ball State University and The University of Montana after their implementation of honors colleges, the committee agreed that creation of an honors college at WKU would accomplish two desirable goals. First, having the only such college in Kentucky would give WKU "a unique product that would accentuate WKU's commitment to excellence" (Dr. Snyder), a concrete selling point specifically aimed at the outstanding high school students we are in competition to recruit. The committee was impressed to hear that, while Ball State's honors program had 500 enrollees in 1983, honors enrollment underwent a 140 per cent increase after creation of the Ball State Honors College, reaching 1,200 in 1993.

Second, an Honors College would provide a unique educational niche that could "create public excitement" (Dr. Snyder) and provide a concrete target to attract donors wishing to give money to support strong academic programs. The committee was also impressed by the fund raising experience of the University of Montana after creation of their honors college. In three years the new college raised \$3 million to fund its building and endowments. Dr. John Madden, UM's Dean of the Honors College, said of this fund raising experience, "All these wealthy people who had never heard of the honors college before were attracted to the idea."

There may also be additional benefits from creation of an honors college which cover a broader area. Specifically:

- ▶ The Ball State Honors College is credited with increasing the overall academic standing of the University. Since creation of the honors college, the overall SAT score for freshmen entering Ball State rose from 45 points below to 26 points above the Indiana average for all freshmen

- ▶ Retention and graduation rates have improved at Ball State since creation of the honors college. The most recent four-year cohort had a 60 per cent increase in the number of students who graduated in four years accompanied by a 69 per cent decrease in the number of students who took five years to graduate
- ▶ An honors college at WKU would be consistent with and further the goals expressed by President Meredith in his call for advancement of the institution to a new level.

The WKU Honors Program is preparing a proposal to create an honors college here, at an estimated first-year startup cost of approximately \$175,000. The committee feels that such an investment would "demonstrate that the University is committed to meet the educational needs of high achieving students . . . [and] create the kind of intellectual atmosphere these students are seeking as well as show that the University places a high value on such an intellectual atmosphere" (Dr. Lemerise). Based on the experience of other institutions, it should also act as a magnet to draw donor funding which might well permit the honors college to pay for itself.

Therefore, the committee recommends:

- ▶ No change in the existing scholarship allotments
- ▶ Study of the feasibility of "geographic diversity" by identifying states with high tuition and cost of living which would make WKU an attractive alternative, possibly to be implemented by calling upon alumni support
- ▶ Examination of the efficacy of having WKU's honors program host an on-campus interview process for the top 100 candidates for the Presidential Scholarship as an opportunity to sell WKU to these outstanding students in person
- ▶ Establishment of an honors college at WKU to show that we have the kind of intellectual atmosphere attractive to top level high school graduates.