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UA3/7/4/1 Press Conference

Joe Iracane
WKU Board of Regents

Kern Alexander

Paul Cook

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Western Kentucky University
UA3/7 Kern Alexander Papers
Series 4 Interviews / Oral History
Item 1 Press Conference Recording Transcript

Contact information:

WKU Archives
Department of Library Special Collections
1906 College Heights Blvd.#11092
Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092
Phone: 270-745-4793
Email: archives@wku.edu
Home page: <http://www.wku.edu/library/archive/>
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Biographical/Historical Note:

The president's office was created in 1906. From Donald Zacharias's 1985 summer resignation to the end of the year Paul Cook served as interim president while the Regents searched for the next president. On December 14 Kern Alexander was elected president but because of contract with the University of Florida he would not officially begin his WKU tenure until May 15, 1986. He would serve a brief two years as WKU's president resigning April 11, 1988.

Description: Press conference regarding the selection of Kern Alexander as WKU president. Joe Iracane, Kern Alexander and Paul Cook making statements and fielding unidentified reporters' questions.

Dates: December 17, 1985

Formats: 1 audiotape, 1 wav file, 1 mp3 file

Subject Analytics:

Alexander, S. Kern, Jr. b. 1939
Audio recording
Cook, Paul
Iracane, Joe
Press conferences
Western Kentucky University

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Oral History Recording List UA3.7.4.1 ~ Records

06/17/2013

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
Tape 1	1	00:00:16	<i>Joe Iracane: . . . a new president and he is forthcoming. I apologize for the delay, but it was unavoidable this morning.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:00:36	<i>Joe Iracane: I'd like to say that we're excited about having our new president on campus Dr. Kern Alexander from the University of Florida. Dr. Alexander's appointment as president will begin immediately. His compensation package will relate back to the University of Florida. We will use him on a part-time basis and we will compensate the University of Florida for the time that he spends on our campus. As a Board we feel like we've over achieved. We have a one-two punch in place and we feel like a combination of things that we brought him back to Kentucky with outstanding credentials. We're excited about his vision for the future and we think we have a fine university in place that he can build on and expand and we can grow and we're just thrilled to have the presidential search behind us. I'm looking for our College Heights person who has a button for me, that says, here it is. I think this is newsworthy. It says "I survived the 1985 Presidential Search," and I'm tickled that I survived it because it was a tough presidential search.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:01:51	<i>Applause</i>
Tape 1	1	00:01:53	<i>Joe Iracane: I think this time that there's are a lot of thanks that we have been making through the search, to the committee to Joe Bill Campbell and his committee, to John Holland to the faculty members of the committee and to all of the Board of Regents that gave up a lot of their personal time and stayed here in Bowling Green for a three day period and worked very diligently and objectively delivering what we felt was the best person for the job. So all the thanks behind us and hopefully everybody is pleased and we are looking now to the future. And I'd like to turn the press conference over to Dr. Alexander so that you can question him and give the faculty members an opportunity to say anything they want to them as well as the press. Dr. Alexander.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:02:42	<i>Applause</i>
Tape 1	1	00:02:55	<i>Kern Alexander: I'm certainly pleased to be able to return to Kentucky and Western. As you know, I'm a native of Kentucky and this is the culmination of my, my career as far as I'm concerned. Is to get back to Western and to be able to assist in the advancement and the progress of this great institution. I am particularly honored that I can follow in the footsteps of former presidents here, Dr. Kelly Thompson and Dero Downing, Dr. Zacharias and of course the earlier presidents.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:03:44	<i>I want to thank the search committee, the advisory search committee for the way they conducted this search. I want to in particular express my appreciation to Joe Bill Campbell. He did a wonderful and professional job. I would have congratulated Joe Bill and the search committee if they had not selected me. I feel that this Board of Regents is one that is forward looking and will be able to provide the policy that will carry Western forward and I'm enthusiastic about the future.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:04:36	<i>As I spoke to the faculty earlier I feel that we don't have to be in an era of limitations. That we can expand. We can improve our programs. We can work with the public schools of Kentucky in bringing the students from those public schools through higher education and we have a bright future _____. Concerning our next steps and getting started I want to announce today that I will recommend to the Board of Regents that Dr. Paul Cook be named executive vice president for administrative affairs.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:05:27	<i>Applause</i>
Tape 1	1	00:05:37	<i>Dr. Paul Cook is an outstanding educational administrator. I've known of his work for years. I have a great deal of respect for him and I will depend on him to assist me and to continue to do the fine work here at Western. Now if you would like to ask questions of either me or our chairman or Dr. Cook, I would open it up for anything that you might want to raise. Yes.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:06:21	<i>Reporter: How would Dr. Cook's duties differ in this position of executive vice president for administrative affairs from what they have been as assistant to the president . . . ?</i> <i>Kern Alexander: I asked Dr. Cook if he would continue in the very important role of planning and budgeting. In addition to that he will have other responsibilities which we will work out together during the next few months. But, at the very least he must continue in that role and he has indicated that he would be happy to. Planning and budgeting is so important to the university. Beyond that he and I will sit down and examine the organization. I will confer with other vice presidents, other administrators and we will then decide after a few months what the responsibilities, the total responsibilities will be.</i>

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
			Yes?
Tape 1	1	00:07:36	<p><i>Reporter: What do you see as Western's biggest problem and how would you solve it?</i></p> <p><i>Kern Alexander: I think Western biggest problem is one of, which is faced by all institutions of higher education in Western's situation, in this type of college, university, that is, attracting good quality students and maintaining open access. Those two things go hand in hand. Western was created, established here to provide higher education for the children of Kentucky and service to the state of Kentucky. Western must in the future expand that role in bringing to Western quality students as well as students who are, who have high aspirations and want to achieve and who may not have had the opportunity in high school to establish an outstanding scholastic record or very high test scores. We want those students. We want to bring them into Western and give them the opportunity to be a productive member of our society with a, with a degree from Western.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:09:03	<p><i>Reporter: What specific things do you, at this point do you see you want from the General Assembly, beginning next month?</i></p> <p><i>Kern Alexander: At this point there is, I doubt if I would be able to make much impact. The General Assembly is just a few short weeks away, however, I think that we can begin to set a long range pattern of relationship and rapport with the legislature. To establish that now and I believe it will pay dividends in the future. What I will be working for is to get that relationship started and to continue it, it is already, Western has already had a good relationship, to continue and improve that relationship with the legislators.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:09:56	<p><i>Reporter: Do you have any specific goals or changes in mind already that you want to work on at Western?</i></p> <p><i>Kern Alexander: I have some goals and I wouldn't say changes because I don't know that anything will need to be changed at Western. But I believe that we must look at our curriculum, to expand our curriculum to make it more attractive to the students emerging from high school, number one. Number two is we must look to this recruitment and retention of students. We want to get more and better students but we must also prevent them from dropping out and falling by the wayside once they get here at Western. To make them comfortable, to make them feel a part of Western from the day they walk in. And not end when they receive a bachelor's degree but then feel a part of Western throughout their life. That's important, extremely important. A third area is development. Higher education is becoming more and more dependent upon the private sector for assistance and support. We need to coordinate our development activities for that kind of external, non-government support for Western. Those of course encompass those three encompass many things, but for me those are priority issues.</i></p> <p><i>Kern Alexander: Other questions?</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:11:38	<p><i>Reporter: How do you feel about sports?</i></p> <p><i>Kern Alexander: Sorry?</i></p> <p><i>Reporter: How do you feel about sports here?</i></p> <p><i>Kern Alexander: Sports? If it hadn't been for that last eleven seconds the other night . . . [laughter] I would feel much better about sports here. [laughter] I think we can beat Louisville. [laughter and applause] And I know we can beat Kentucky. [laughter] We, when I was a child living in Bowling Green, I always, I listened to every game if I couldn't sneak up here and see it. And I always wanted to play Louisville and Kentucky and finally Kentucky was forced to play Western in a NCAA years later and that was a high point of my basketball life, was that wonderful game. Concerning sports, I'm a great sports advocate. I believe that sports are an important part of the university community and life. It's important not only to the players but it's important to the other students who enjoy it. And because of that enjoyment feel more, more a part of the university. It's a catalyst for the alumni. I can't envision Western without having a topnotch basketball team and an outstanding football team. And an outstanding women's basketball, men's and women's I saw this morning in the paper we're seventh in the country in women's basketball. I would hope that we could, we could pay for these programs and expand the programs and be winners. I don't like to play if we don't win and so I think that we need to be sure that we have good strong athletic program.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:14:00	<p><i>Reporter: What about athletic deficit, especially football is that something you're going to look at?</i></p> <p><i>Kern Alexander: Certainly, that's a problem. I'm going to look at it and we'll spend a great deal of time on that I've discussed it with Chairman Ircane and Dr. Cook already and others. It's a problem, but it's not a unique problem. It's a problem of universities who are playing football in and that caliber of football that Western has played and the 1-AA and it's something that may take modification at the NCAA level. But we're going to look, to look carefully at the cost of the program. I want to maintain the strength of the program and, but of course, you must operate within the budget and we'll see to that. And we'll examine all the alternatives.</i></p>

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
			<i>Kern Alexander: Other questions?</i>
Tape 1	1	00:15:06	<i>Kern Alexander: If, I would like to ask Dr. Cook to say a couple words if he would please and you might want to ask him a few questions. Dr. Cook.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:15:24	<i>Paul Cook: Well first of all President Alexander let me congratulate you on a camera and wish you the best [laughter] just for the record. [laughter] And say to you, as I have said to you in private that you have my support and I think we're on a good road.</i> <i>Kern Alexander: Thank you very much.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:15:43	<i>Applause</i>
Tape 1	1	00:15:50	<i>Kern Alexander: He's not just saying that for the cameras. He did say that to me. [laughter]</i> <i>Paul Cook: I don't know that I have much to add. I have talked to more media people lately than I have before and maybe I want to in the future. No, no, that's not really true. [laughter] I had indicated to the board and to many of those in this room that when I was a candidate for this position that I recognized that there would be several candidates and one president. And I also indicated to people at the time that whoever the Board selected that I was going to be supportive of the Board and if that individual and I were compatible and that person wanted me to work with him I would be glad to do that. Dr. Alexander and I spent most of yesterday together. Had a very pleasant day, right busy day, we talked about a lot of matters and as I have said to him already I think that we are on the right road. And as a member of this staff I'm very supportive of his role as president. I would encourage faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of this institution to put their shoulders to the wheel and get busy with the moving this institution forward. As most of you know this is a period of time where there are a number of things that are vital to our future, particularly the legislative session. Excuse me. On January 6th, I'll just tell you now so you can mark your calendar 4:00 p.m. there'll be a rally in the Downing University Center. There'll be rallies in seven other locations around the state of Kentucky put on by the Kentucky advocates for higher education and the thrust is to promote in the state of Kentucky the importance of education to the future of our state. Dr. Alexander has indicated that he will be back here on January 6th and will participate in that rally. And I would encourage you to be there and bring some people with you. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you have. Other than that, I don't think I have anything else to say.</i>
Tape 1	1	00:18:14	<i>Reporter: Just one comment . . .</i> <i>Paul Cook: You want the chair?</i> <i>Joe Iracane: I think the theme, the theme of this press conference should be that we over achieved in getting a Kentuckian home, a Kentuckian from Florida back to Kentucky with Western ties. And also that we probably will have the best one-two punch in the state of Kentucky and people in the legislators and everyone should watch out because we feel like, as a Board we couldn't have done any better in delivering a one-two punch that will support Western's efforts in the future. And that should be the theme of this press conference. So we thank everybody for coming.</i> <i>Paul Cook: In other words you want them to make that the headline</i> <i>Joe Iracane: Make that the headline.</i> <i>[laughter]</i>
Tape 1	1	00:18:58	<i>Joe Iracane: That's all I have</i> <i>Paul Cook: Is that it?</i> <i>Joe Iracane: Let's go to the next one.</i>