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Readiness Initiative Sets Winthrop's Course for Both 'New Normal' and 'New Future'

Winthrop University

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Readiness Initiative Sets Winthrop's Course for Both 'New Normal' and 'New Future'

Quick Facts

- Global learning, interdisciplinary programs and sustainability studies top new plans.
- Faster undergraduate/graduate degree options are also in development.



Anthony DiGiorgio

ROCK HILL, S.C. - Winthrop University faculty and staff were given an in-depth briefing April 22 about what they can expect over the next 12-15 months, as families look for higher education attuned to 21st century demands – and both state and federal funding for higher education shrinks.

President Anthony DiGiorgio said the recommendations resulting from the "Readiness Winthrop" initiative he announced to employees exactly one year ago require Winthrop to address not only the "New Normal," but also the nation's "New Future" as it emerges in economic recovery.

The sweeping initiative includes a **cross-campus global learning emphasis**, some **new approaches to academic programs**, **development of options for quicker completion of degrees** and a **more interdisciplinary approach** that reflects the way people live and work in the 21st century.

DiGiorgio also detailed strategies for **increasing enrollment**, now that Winthrop has completed an ambitious five-year building plan that added a new **general classroom building**, a new high-tech **College of Business Administration building**, a new **health, education and wellness center** and a new **Campus Center**. Likewise, he detailed how an important part of the **Readiness initiative** will be retaining students who have already enrolled, but need additional academic support to succeed as they adjust to the academic demands of college.

Developing some of the approaches will require investment, DiGiorgio said. Some of that investment will come from **continuing efficiency improvements**, such as those enabled by a two-year conversion to a new institutional computing system that will allow Winthrop to move to a paperless payroll and employment information system beginning in July.

Other savings will come from continuing to **allow selected positions to remain vacant** until personnel needs of new programs are fully determined. And some will come from steps Winthrop is taking to enhance its own revenues by **establishing dedicated fees** for some services, such as career counseling to long-time alumni and health services to part-time students. An **on-campus pharmacy** also will be closed, since Winthrop now has three private-sector providers within sight of the campus. Those steps will help relieve some budgetary pressure to increase general tuition and fees more than the president wants, even given that state funding support is expected to fall by another \$800,000 in the next academic year.

But it is the academic program part of the plan that DiGiorgio described as central to the initiative, because it will reflect a more profound shift to 21st-century needs than might have been imagined just

a few years ago.

Investment will be made in Winthrop's new **Global Learning Initiative**, which is designed to prepare students from all backgrounds to live and work in an increasingly interconnected world, both socially and economically.

Already scheduled to launch July 1 is a new **Department of Interdisciplinary Studies**, which will provide opportunities for Winthrop to develop new areas of study that cross usual academic boundaries, such as individualized majors, which have particular appeal to honors students.

DiGiorgio described the new department as "an incubator for new interdisciplinary programs that will connect offerings from various colleges at Winthrop in ways attractive to today and tomorrow's students." **Marsha Bollinger**, currently **Dalton Chair in Environmental Studies and Environmental Science**, was recently appointed as chair of the new department.

Sustainability Studies is seen as an especially timely growth area for Winthrop in the future, DiGiorgio explained. First steps will include a Sustainability minor that will debut this Fall, along with a concentration in **Sustainable Business** that will be offered by Winthrop's **College of Business Administration**.

Other new programs in development within Winthrop's various existing colleges are:

- **Five-year master's programs**, such as Master of Social Work and Master of Business Administration;
- **Music Theater** as a new concentration for Theater majors;
- **Legal studies** as a new academic option;
- **Feasibility studies** for undergraduate degrees earnable in three years.

Friday's session came exactly a year after DiGiorgio launched the "**Readiness Winthrop**" initiative, in which he challenged the campus to "review, re-evaluate, re-shape and re-organize" wherever necessary to meet both the needs of 21st century students and current limitations on public funding.

"Winthrop will be all the stronger for having undertaken this work, in this way, at this time," DiGiorgio said, adding, "...because we no longer are responding to change – we are now harnessing that change and making it work for us and for our students."

Over the past several months, **various campus workgroups** were tasked to explore options and put forth recommendations. Some recommendations were given fast-track status by university administrators and initial steps toward implementation already are underway. Implementation of others will be embedded in the university's annual work plan for the next academic year.

Acknowledging the challenges faced by a **state appropriation that has fallen by approximately 50 percent over the past three years**, plus the loss of \$3.4 million in federal stimulus funds on June 30, DiGiorgio said "**self-reliance**" is a greater imperative than ever, and that means it's time for the university to let its enrollment grow incrementally.

Student recruiters already are emphasizing new program offerings in their outreach, as well as providing prospects with more detailed information about some of Winthrop's more distinctive features, such an **outdoor classroom** for biology and environmental science students, and service learning opportunities.

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