



Next WKU president must have range of qualifications

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As noted in Saturday's paper, a search firm was selected by the Western Kentucky University Board of Regents to identify qualified candidates to fill Dr. Gary Ransdell's shoes when he retires next year. In fact, efforts are already underway to solicit input regarding the talents and abilities the next president should possess.

True to form, I have already heard the suggestion that we "need to pick somebody with a faculty background." The inference seems to be that someone who is trained in a field that has nothing to do with administration would be able to do the job as well as someone who has extensively studied how modern colleges and universities operate.

The world is much more complicated than it was during a simpler time when faculty were traditionally tapped to assume the presidency. Having a leader with no formal training in academic management take on the role of chief executive could yield disastrous – but entirely predictable – results.

It always amazes me when people fail to recognize their inherent limitations. If I asked to teach underwater basket weaving without having the appropriate underwater basket weaving credentials, I'm pretty sure I would be told I'm not qualified. But apparently anyone, or so the logic goes, can be an administrator.

Whoever is selected to lead WKU needs to be well-versed not only in academics and athletics, but also in contemporary administrative theory and practice, strategic planning, resource allocation, enrollment management, development and fundraising, higher education law, assessment, finance, and especially the legislative process – including an understanding of, and appreciation for, the current political landscape.

These are competencies most faculty do not have, and the assumption they can be mastered effectively and efficiently is naive and dangerous. Anyone with a Ph.D. in underwater basket weaving should probably stay in the underwater basket weaving department.

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