



## WKU Biology faculty receives NIH grant

Dr. Simran Banga, associate professor in the WKU Ogden College of Science and Engineering, has been awarded a four-year NIH R16 Support for Research Excellence (SuRE) award from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, one of the 27 institutes and centers of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to continue research that investigates how epigenetic modulations in host cell aids in survival and replication of *Legionella pneumophila*. The award for the current fiscal year is for \$177,467 and over the next four years, the grant is expected to total \$709,868.

*Legionella pneumophila*, the causative agent of the respiratory infection Legionnaires' disease, is a bacterial pathogen that causes inflammatory pneumonia in the lungs. The research proposed by Dr. Banga aims to understand how bacterial proteins alter gene expression patterns through epigenetic changes during an infection to hijack cellular processes. Thus, bacteria can change the way our body cells function.

This study will contribute to better understanding of bacterial pathogenesis which can help in designing new therapeutic approaches.

This project will expand research and education experience for undergraduate students at Western Kentucky University as the undergraduate students will be highly involved in the NIH-funded project.

This is Dr. Banga's third award in last two years. She was awarded an NSF award in 2023 to acquire a Flow Cytometer and an NIH award this summer for an Electrophoresis Imaging system.



# NEWS FOR THE COUNCIL ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

NOVEMBER 2024

## WKU listed in 'Guide to Green Colleges' for 15th straight year

For the 15th consecutive year, Western Kentucky University has been recognized as one of the nation's most environmentally responsible colleges, according to The Princeton Review®.



WKU received a Green Rating score of 91 in The Princeton Review Guide to Green Colleges: 2025 Edition. The Green Rating, on a scale of 60–99, provides a comprehensive measure of a school's performance as an environmentally aware and prepared institution.

“We are honored to be recognized again for our sustainability efforts,” said Dr. Leslie North, Director of Sustainability. “Our continued inclusion in The Princeton Review Guide to Green Colleges and other recognition programs wouldn't be possible without the support and commitment of our campus community.”

The Guide, a free online resource published since 2010, profiles 511 colleges that foster a culture of environmental responsibility and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability.

The Princeton Review chose the colleges for the 2025 edition based on a survey it conducted in 2023–2024 of administrators at nearly 600 colleges about their institutions' sustainability-related policies, practices, and programs. The company also surveyed students attending the colleges about their “green” campus experiences. The school selections were based on more than 25 data points from the surveys.

The profiles also provide notes on the schools' uses of renewable energy, their recycling and conservation programs, and the availability of environmental studies in their academic offerings. The profiles also include information on the school's admission requirements, cost, and financial aid.

WKU, which created its Office of Sustainability in 2008, has earned numerous national recognition and certifications, including the International WELL Building Institute for Ogden College Hall, the Green Restaurant Association Certified Dining program, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified buildings, AASHE STARS (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System), Tree Campus USA, U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools and more.



## Report notes WKU's economic impact on region, state

Western Kentucky University creates a significant economic impact for the community, region and state and generates a positive return on investment for students, taxpayers and society, according to an analysis by Lightcast.

In fiscal year 2022-23, the impact of WKU's operations, research, visitor and student spending, together with volunteerism and the enhanced productivity of its alumni, included the following:

- WKU added \$528.4 million in income for the Bowling Green region, a value approximately equal to 4.3% of the region's total gross regional product (GRP). WKU's impact is equivalent to supporting 9,404 jobs. For perspective, the activities of WKU and its students support one out of every 17 jobs in the region of Allen, Barren, Butler, Edmonson, Logan, Simpson and Warren counties.
- WKU added \$1.6 billion in income to the Kentucky economy, equivalent to supporting 23,996 jobs.
- WKU added \$134.0 million in income to the Regional Campus service areas, equivalent to supporting 2,167 jobs in the areas served by campuses in Glasgow, Owensboro, Elizabethtown/Fort Knox and Somerset.

To assess WKU's value to the regional economy, the report evaluated the university from the perspectives of economic impact analysis and investment analysis.

In FY 2022-23, WKU spent \$139.7 million on payroll and benefits for 2,580 full-time and part-time employees and spent another \$142.8 million on goods and services to carry out its day-to-day and construction operations and research activities.

Results indicate that WKU is an attractive investment to students with rates of return that exceed alternative investment opportunities. In 2022-23, students paid a present value of \$103.8 million to cover the cost of tuition, fees, supplies and interest on student loans. In return, students will receive a cumulative present value of \$951.3 million in increased earnings over their working lives or a return of \$3.90 for each dollar invested. Students' average annual rate of return is 14.7%.

Taxpayers provided WKU with \$119.3 million of funding in FY 2022-23. In return, total taxpayer benefits amount to \$258.0 million from added tax revenue and public sector savings. For every dollar of public money invested in WKU, taxpayers will receive \$2.20 in return over the course of students' working lives or an average annual rate of return of 5.1%.

In FY 2022-23, Kentucky invested \$452.5 million to support WKU. In turn, Kentucky's economy will grow by \$2.5 billion over the course of students' working lives and will benefit from \$210.3 million of public and private sector savings. For every dollar invested in WKU in FY2022-23, people in Kentucky will receive \$5.90 in return, for as long as 2022-23 students remain active in the workforce.



## WKU College of Health and Human Services receives nearly \$1.6 million in scholarships

The Western Kentucky University (WKU) College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) has been awarded nearly \$1.6 million in scholarships through the Council of Postsecondary Education (CPE) Healthcare Workforce Investment Fund. This funding will support students pursuing Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), and Master of Social Work (MSW) degrees.

CHHS Dean, Dr. Tania Basta, said "We are thrilled to receive nearly \$800,000 from the legislature and \$800,000 from our regional health care partners to provide up to 100 scholarships for our BSN, BSW and MSW students. Students who receive this funding will receive a scholarship for up to 2 years and will be required to work for one of our healthcare partners for up to 2 years after graduation. This funding is the perfect example of the state working with health care organizations and universities to create innovative solutions to address the healthcare shortage in the Commonwealth."

CPE awarded \$11.8 million in matching funds to 33 healthcare programs from 19 providers, in collaboration with regional employers, as part of its Healthcare Workforce Collaborative, which aims to unite state leaders, policy experts, educational institutions, and the healthcare industry.

According to the CPE, "Kentucky, along with other states, recognized healthcare workforce shortages during the 2023 legislative session in part by establishing the Kentucky Healthcare Workforce Investment Fund, which is a public-private partnership to provide healthcare training scholarships for Kentucky resident students and incentives to reward performance and excellence among healthcare professional programs."