

From the Acting Provost -- University News, September 1, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, then-Provost Nancy Berner began sending a regular communication from her office to update the University community on our operations. At the time, this regular email was a vital means of informing the community about the administration's approach to meeting the challenges of the pandemic and helping maintain social cohesion as we were sequestered at home or in offices with little social interaction. Although the pandemic has abated and officially been declared "over," the newsletter still serves as an important line of communication between the administration and the University community. I am happy to continue to provide updates on University matters to our community in order to keep you informed about policies and other developments on campus.

Housing Updates:

Over the last year, a major focus of administrative work has been in the area of employee housing. The summer saw two major initiatives come to fruition. First was the announcement of a shared-equity investment program, under which the University will provide funding for up to 20 percent of a purchase price for a University employee purchasing a house on the Domain. The [shared-equity investment program policy](#) includes details on who may qualify and how the University shares in the capital gains resulting in the sale of the home.

Second, Sewanee Village Ventures built five houses for sale exclusively to University employees. Construction of those houses was completed under budget, and on July 28, a lottery was held to determine who would have the first opportunity to purchase the new homes. Ten employees submitted their names in the lottery, and all five houses, ranging in price from \$275,912 to \$323,408 are now all under contract to employees.

I am delighted to announce that earlier in August, the Board of Regents' Investment Management Committee and Economic Development Subcommittee approved a Sewanee Village Ventures investment proposal to construct up to 48 apartments in six individual buildings on a vacant leasehold along Highway 41A between Alabama Avenue and Kennerly Road. The apartments will include a mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units. These apartments are intended to provide a different form of new and affordable housing opportunities to employees. Additional information about this very exciting project will be communicated by Vice President for Economic Development and Community Affairs David Shipps as the overall plan and elements of timing begin to take shape.

Campus Safety and Bicycle Lanes:

[In a recent email](#), Vice President for Public Safety Chip Schane and I announced renewed efforts to protect cyclists and pedestrians by enforcing the bicycle lanes on University Avenue. The decision was motivated by a number of concerns including promoting a healthy lifestyle and public safety, especially for young children who like to bicycle to school during the day and pedestrians who drivers find difficult to see at night when they step out between parked cars. Enforcing the parking restrictions on University Avenue will improve visibility and bring us into compliance with traffic regulations.

The decision to enforce no parking in the bicycle lanes in compliance with Tennessee State code, effective Sept. 4, was made after months of discussion at the University and at Community Council meetings. Thank you to the many parties who participated in those conversations and have offered recommendations. The University will continue to work with student organizations, employees, and the Community Council to increase the safety of our streets for all users. In order to accommodate drivers who need space for their cars, the University has already added spaces to existing lots and created additional lots on campus, and we will work to identify other areas for new parking as needed.

The College Class of 2027 Arrives:

This fall, the University welcomed 452 new first-year students and 21 transfer students to the College. The new students were recruited from a pool of more than 5,700 applicants. The Office of Admission uses an evaluation system that ranks applicants according to their academic achievement in high school, and this year's matriculating students represent a continued improvement in the academic quality of our student body. The new students hail from 31 states, including the District of Columbia, and 13 countries. Among the first-year class, 36 percent are student-athletes. While the slower pace of summer is appreciated, it is great to see a return to the high level of activity on campus in the fall.

Construction Updates:

Those walking along University and Tennessee Avenues will note the ongoing construction projects at the future home of the Biehl Commons and a renovated Hamilton Hall. As has been experienced since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain issues continue to present challenges to timely completion of construction projects. The Biehl Commons project is awaiting the arrival of an elevator before the building can be completed. The building, which will house a limited dining facility and recreational game and meeting spaces, is now scheduled to be completed by mid-October. The outdoor portion of the Biehl Commons will be completed later in the fall. The Hamilton Hall construction work, however, is proceeding as expected with the building estimated to be ready for classroom activity in August 2024. If the construction continues on schedule, School of Theology students and faculty will be able to open their Advent semester in their renovated space.

Life in transition:

For most of us, the last three years have been a period of unpredictability, when policies and leadership have been in flux. Since the start of the pandemic, the University has had four vice-chancellors to lead us through a series of policy adjustments and institutional development. The many changes on campus, in the community, and in the field of higher education writ large create a degree of uncertainty and mental load for many of us. Since 2000, I have moved from serving as associate dean to associate provost to acting provost. Given the unusual trajectory that led me to the provost's office in 2022, I often think of myself as the "accidental provost." In an effort to embrace my professional fluidity (and to save trees), I quit having business cards printed in 2020.

The last three years have felt like we were navigating rapids, but with the election of Rob Pearigen as the 18th vice-chancellor, there is a sense of the waters calming. Part of that settling is

due to the yearlong process of selecting a new vice-chancellor, but it also comes from the level of familiarity that many of us have with the vice-chancellor and his warm personality. Undoubtedly, there will be changes ahead for the University and for many of us who work here, but there is also an excitement about where we might go in partnership with a new vice-chancellor. As it develops a new vision of our future, I look forward to working with the University community to advance the institution.

Sincerely,
Scott Wilson