

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY NEWS

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WESTERN TO HOLD REGIONAL SUMMIT TO SEEK SHARED PRIORITIES, STRATEGIES

CULLOWHEE – Leaders from throughout Western North Carolina will meet at Western Carolina University on Friday, Feb. 21, for a daylong summit to identify the greatest needs of the state and the region and to pinpoint how Western can help address those needs.

“We are striving to create an ‘engaged’ university,” Western Chancellor John W. Bardo said. “To be a university whose faculty, students, staff and administrators understand and are fully committed to meeting the needs of the state and the WNC region, we must develop a common understanding of our highest, shared priorities. That means as a university, we must first ask and listen.”

Titled “A Regional Summit: Meeting Western North Carolina’s Needs through Higher Education,” the program will begin at 10:30 a.m. in the Liston B. Ramsey Regional Activity Center. Guests invited to come and share their views include municipal, county and state government officials; business and industry leaders; and school superintendents and principals.

N.C. Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight will be the keynote speaker. Also presenting on the program will be Phil Kirk, president and secretary of North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry, and chairman of the State Board of Education; Mary Jo Waits, associate director of The Morrison Institute for Public Policy Research at Arizona State University and nationally recognized expert on university engagement in helping solve state problems; and Greg Bischak, chief economist with the Appalachian Regional Commission.

After the presentations to the full assembly, smaller discussion groups will focus on areas such as government, tourism, utilities and infrastructure, business, schools, community colleges, health care, biotechnology, communication technology, engineering, media, emerging sciences, the criminal justice system, social services, diversity issues, environment/natural resources/development, and aging.

Questions the groups will discuss will center on top priorities, immediate needs, long-term needs, and identifying directions Western Carolina might take to provide assistance.

“We regard the conference as a key step to identifying the greatest needs of the region and the state,” Bardo said. “We know this effort requires not only excellence in teaching and in programs that contribute to economic development, but also collaboration with our key constituencies. It is the beginning of a broader dialogue, with profound implications for the future.”

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