



HLC Accreditation 2020-2021

Evidence Document

Office of the President

Strategic Communications

Wichita State University President John Bardo dies

Additional information: See this evidence on the WSU web page: https://www.wichita.edu/about/wsunews/news/2019/03-march/bardo_news.php (accessed April 26, 2021).

WSU Today: March 12, 2019

By WSU Strategic Communications

Wichita State University President John Bardo dies



John William Bardo, 13th president of Wichita State University, died Tuesday, March 12, 2019 at Wesley Medical Center. He was 70 years old.

Dr. Bardo was an innovator, nationally recognized scholar and deep believer in the value of public research universities.

Dr. Bardo first entered the hospital in late November 2018, suffering complications from a chronic lung condition. After spending several weeks in rehabilitation and at home, he returned to Wesley last weekend.

He is survived by Deborah Bardo, his wife of 44 years, and their son, Christopher.

Funeral services will be private, but a Celebration of Life event for the entire WSU and Wichita community will be held later this spring on campus. Wichita State would like to extend an invitation to anyone wanting to share their memories, bring cards or sign notes of remembrance to come by the President's Office, Morrison Hall, Room 203 during office hours (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) through next week.

Dr. Bardo became president in July 2012. He transformed the vision of the university, leading it through a period of rapid growth focused on applied learning for students and the economic growth of the region.

Dr. Bardo began his career at Wichita State as an assistant professor of sociology and also taught and conducted research in the Hugo Wall Center for Urban Studies. During his time at WSU, he obtained a Fulbright Scholarship to Australia where he and his wife Deborah studied Americans as migrants and had a sabbatical appointment at the University of Wales at Swansea in social policy.

After leaving WSU, Dr. Bardo held appointments of growing leadership responsibility at Southwest Texas State University, the University of North Florida, Bridgewater (MA) State College and Western Carolina University, where he served as chancellor from 1995 to 2011 before returning to Wichita State.

He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1948. He grew up in that area and graduated from Oak Hills High School. After high school, Dr. Bardo attended the University of Cincinnati, where he received a bachelor's degree in economics (1970). He also studied economics and social policy at the University of Southampton, England, during his junior year.

After graduating from Cincinnati, Dr. Bardo received a master's degree in sociology from Ohio University (1971) and a Ph.D. in sociology (1973) from Ohio State University. He also attended the Institute for Educational Management at Harvard.

March 12, 2019

President John Bardo led strategic and physical transformation of WSU

By Lou Heldman, vice president for Strategic Communications

Dr. John Bardo, the transformational 13th president of Wichita State University, returned to the university in 2012 with definite ideas about what was needed.

He began at WSU as a 24-year-old assistant professor of sociology; became a department head, husband and father here; left for three decades climbing the higher education leadership ladder; and eventually returned to reshape the university.

Bardo died March 12, 2019 at Wesley Medical Center. He was 70 years old.

Dr. Bardo's vision of creating an Innovation University unfolded over six and a half years of his presidency. He challenged faculty, staff, students and alumni to: "Envision being part of a university where innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and technology are making the future.

"We came home in 2012 to try to reposition this university as a key driver of the future of Wichita. It's been surprising to me how well it has worked."

From the start of his presidency, Dr. Bardo worked to shape Wichita State as a confident institution, willing to take intelligent risks to help build better lives for its students and a more prosperous future for the region and its residents.

The most visible evidence of his success was the creation of Innovation Campus. It began as a concept, to construct a building or two to house a combination of university research programs and partners from private industry. It grew to 120 acres of developed land east of the traditional campus, formerly occupied by Braeburn Golf Course.

The site now includes three engineering buildings, the Wichita-Sedgwick County Law Enforcement Training Center, two residence halls and three retail/restaurant buildings. A YMCA/Student Wellness Center, hotel and aviation crash lab are underway or due to begin construction this year. One of the partnership buildings is fully occupied, and another is under construction. A new business school building is planned.

Dr. Bardo was consistent in his messaging to the campus and community that WSU primarily exists to change lives for the better. The strategic planning process he set in motion in his first year had the ambitious vision of WSU becoming the internationally recognized model for applied learning and research, with the accompanying mission as an essential educational, cultural, and economic driver for Kansas and the greater public good.

Among accomplishments of Dr. Bardo's time at Wichita State:

- Creation and implementation of Strategic Enrollment Management process resulting in higher enrollment, a third record freshman class and greater diversity in the student body
- Identification and development of the I-35 corridor strategy, both for recruiting and economic development
- Affiliation with Wichita Area Technical College, now WSU Tech
- Doubling the university's funded research
- Creation of new degree programs, such as Master in Innovation Design, Bachelor of Applied Arts and Bachelor of Applied Sciences
- Growth of online courses and enrollment
- Modernization of on-campus housing
- Obtaining membership in the American Athletic Conference
- Creation of OneStop and other improvements in student advising to aid retention
- Building deeper and more rewarding relationships with some of Wichita's largest employers, while creating a stronger entrepreneurship infrastructure for WSU students, faculty, staff and the community

Dr. Bardo was always quick to say the campus expansion wasn't about the real estate; it was about moving the university forward. Last spring, he wrote to faculty and staff:

“The concept of Innovation Campus – collaboration, applied learning and research – is not just restricted to the 120 acres that used to be Braeburn Golf Course. It is our goal that the spirit of Innovation Campus comes to permeate every aspect of WSU, transforming the entire enterprise into a student-centered and innovation-driven university.”

He began his presidency in 2012 with clear priorities that came to be known as The Bardo Five: improve overall quality of education, increase enrollment, enhance basic research, pursue technology discovery in partnership with industry and improve the quality of student life.

He showed an immediate willingness to take risks to achieve his goals for the university, starting with displacing more than 600 prime parking spaces to build a new residence hall in the heart of campus.

He was impatient with university bureaucracy. In his first weeks on the job he put a red “yes” button on his desk and asked the university’s executives to read and discuss a book, “Getting to Yes.” He said later, “We had to take on the overly restrictive and bureaucratic structures that defined so much of how we did our business.”

His personal style was informal. He seldom wore suits and ties and was more comfortable in rumpled khakis, no belt and a short-sleeved golf shirt, worn under a blazer.

He didn't seek out expensive restaurants. During the day, he was happy with a Jimmy John's turkey sandwich and diet root beer. At night, he and his wife, Deborah, often cooked at home or went to her favorite Indian restaurant.

He had a spacious office with a large, formal conference table, but he spent parts of most days in the outer office, where his assistant, Anna Lanier, sat. He would talk with whomever came by. Many an issue was dissected, debated and decided with Dr. Bardo and his visitors sitting in front of Ms. Lanier's desk. After several years of this, she got a smaller desk and added chairs.

Even after decades in university administration, he still thought of himself first as the sociology professor he had been, content to spend hours at a time, or an entire weekend, reading serious books and articles and writing essays. He said he read approximately 30 articles every morning on the subjects that interested him the most, including economic development, globalization, quality of urban life and the future of higher education.

One summer he immersed himself in these subjects and wrote a 40-page essay, “Economic Development: Renewing Wichita's promise.” Another summer he wrote six articles on how WSU was adapting to trends shaping the future of higher education.

He also had pastimes he enjoyed – stained glass-making, gem polishing and taking long trips with Deborah.

Audacious goals

Dr. Bardo didn't plan to return to Wichita. He intended to stay in North Carolina and return to teaching before WSU President Don Beggs announced his retirement. Friends from the old days who remained on the WSU faculty, including Mark Glaser, Ron Matson, Charles Burdsal and Bob Ross, encouraged Dr. Bardo to apply for the presidency. On April 27, 2012, he was announced as the next president of WSU.

In the past year, as Dr. Bardo's health problems increased, he began using a golf cart, mobility scooter and occasional wheelchair to get around. But his dedication to his work remained strong. He relished the opportunity to tell WSU's story, including in an appearance before a Congressional committee last July.

He concluded his testimony in the same way he ended many speeches.

“If you follow athletics, you will know that our mascot is unique — it is a Wheatshocker. This mascot reflects the institutional history where many students worked in the wheat fields that used to surround the university. That is how they paid for their education. Well, madam chairman, we have never forgotten our roots of serving the hard-working people of our region and state. And, as we like to say in our part of the world: It is a Great Day to be a Shocker!”



Dr. John Bardo at the opening of GoCreate, Wichita's largest makerspace, on WSU's Innovation Campus.

Statement from KBOR Chair on the passing of Wichita State University President John Bardo

Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) Chair Dennis Mullin issued the following statement on the passing of Wichita State University President John Bardo:

I am deeply saddened by the loss of President John Bardo. On behalf of the Kansas Board of Regents, I extend our deepest condolences to Deborah Bardo and the rest of John's family.

John had a unique and transformational vision for Wichita State University. He led the development of Innovation Campus, which brought new buildings and improvements to Wichita State that are remarkable. However, even more important are the opportunities for students that he worked so hard to create. His action positioned the university as an economic driver and a leader in applied learning.

John also loved Wichita. During his updates to the Board, he frequently spoke of Wichita State's location as a major strength. He saw the city and university's relationship as mutually beneficial, with Wichita State helping to drive economic growth and prosperity in the region.

Even now, Wichita State University will continue to benefit from John's leadership as the team he put in place leads the university through this period of transition. The Board is confident that Acting President Rick Muma and the rest of Wichita State's leadership team will continue to handle the management and operations of the university during this time. We will make announcements about the search for a permanent replacement at the appropriate time.

Along with the Wichita State community, the Regents mourn John's passing. We will miss him as a leader and a person and are thankful for the opportunity to have worked with him. Wichita State University, the city of Wichita, and the state of Kansas are better places because of John Bardo.

A message from Richard Muma, Provost and Acting President

President Bardo had a profound positive impact on Wichita State and the community. Future generations of students will benefit from his foresight and leadership. He will be

greatly missed. In coming days, the university will schedule a memorial event to honor him.

Even during his illness these last few months, Dr. Bardo remained keenly interested in the work of the university. The strategy, vision, mission and goals developed under his leadership will continue to guide us as we move forward, together.

Our thoughts are with John's wife, Deborah, and their son Christopher.

The university is collecting tributes to Dr. Bardo. If you have thoughts or recollections to share, please send them to president@wichita.edu.