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# Disaster Science Operation Center to strengthen WKU's emergency response program

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Dr Josh Durkee, WKU professor of earth, environmental and atmospheric Operations Center (DSOC) Friday, Nov. 4, in front of the Environmental S

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On the second floor of Western Kentucky University's Environmental Sciences and Technology Building, students toggle between several computer screens, maps of all kinds projected on the walls in front of them.

It's the first fully operational week of the new Disaster Science Operation Center (DSOC), which brings faculty, staff and students from the meteorology, emergency management disaster science and homeland security sciences programs to improve the university's capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters like last year's tornadoes.

After seeing the success of White Squirrel Weather, WKU's own student-led weather forecasting service, WKU decided it should build upon the program, said President Timothy Caboni at Friday's dedication. The "large and historic events" of the past several years – the COVID-19 pandemic and the tornadoes – underlined that need.

"Great universities, as I say often, inspire innovation, elevate communities and transform lives," Caboni said. "And through our new Disaster Science Operation Center, we do all three."

During last year's tornadoes, EMS-trained WKU students worked in the field while others helped the National Weather Service conduct surveys to assess damage, said Dr. Josh Durkee, professor of earth, environmental and atmospheric sciences.

“We were able to serve as a pivot point for resources out of the university to help what was going on in the community,” Durkee said.

The DSOC will add extra support so WKU students can continue their community involvement both before and after graduation, he added.



“Our philosophy is that the best way to learn is by doing. Lifelong learning comes with experiences; it doesn’t come from homework and tests and things like that,” Durkee

said. “We can’t forget these students are the future in the workforce.”

Senior Cassie Campbell has been waiting for the DSOC for over a year. She said she’s glad to be able to experience it before she graduates. After the tornadoes, Campbell said she got to survey with the National Weather Service and experience one-on-one interactions with the public, just like she’ll do in her career as a broadcast meteorologist.

The DSOC is nimble, Campbell said, and can be used for anything from football games to concerts to the Chicago Marathon earlier this month.

“It’s great to have it here but to be able to pick it up and mobilize it to whoever needs help, it’s just amazing,” Campbell said.

The DSOC “raises the academic prominence of WKU” and is a testament to the university’s dedication to interdisciplinary projects that bring the entire campus together, said Rob Fischer, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

“This Disaster Science Operation Center really is the kickoff of the next five years of the of the strategic plan,” Fischer said. “I see this as a perfect example of how WKU takes an innovative idea and turns it into something that is working and is for the students and the faculty and the community.”

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## Sarah Michels

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