During the sixties, each fall brought a flock of gifted young faculty, new-fledged and eager for flight, swelling faculty numbers to 1,047 by 1970.

Movement toward the doctorate had started the year before, in 1958, when Bowman handed the academic reins to Robert I. White, dean of Education since 1946. An educator in the classic tradition, White was a complex man, vigorous, driven, forceful, yet droll and reserved, with a refined sensibility and a compassionate nature. He brought to Kent a great depth of teaching and administrative experiences in the public schools and at the University of Chicago, in graduate education. As academic vice president, he designed the infrastructure that swiftly enabled Kent to become a buzzing hive of research and graduate education. And when the Trustees picked him to succeed Bowman, in 1963, he immediately started shaping the school to match his own robust vision of a great university. He established the University Press, and, to lure talented graduate students as well as leading the faculty, he appointed four distinguished scholars to the new rank of University Professor: Harold Mayer (geography), August Meier (history), Richard Varga (mathematics), and Howard Vincent (English). Recognition came quickly: the Board of Regents, in 1964, designated Kent the official state university for northeastern Ohio.

White was a builder as well as an educator. Swinging the campus' gravitational center to the southeast, he supervised a prodigious expansion of the physical plant—from 29 buildings in 1963 to more than 100 by 1970. Most were residence halls—one a high-rise complex called Tri-Towers (1968)—built to catch up with fast-rising enrollments, which reached 21,370 in 1970. But seven were major academic structures. The most eye-catching was the Library (1970), with its twelve-story tower and holdings that grew from 214,751, in 1961, to well over a half million by 1970, and its Special Collections founded by Kent alumnus Dean Keller. The Kent Campus stretched a mile farther east when Dix Stadium, with a seating capacity of 28,000, was built. By 1967 the campus boundary had sprawled so much that the interval between classes was stretched to fifteen minutes and a sophisticated bus system (CBS) was devised to carry students around campus and town. In 1968 the founding of the Blossom Festival School turned a bright spotlight on the fine arts: Porthouse Theatre and later the Read Pavilion, for theatrical presentations, and the Eells Gallery and Arts Pavilion, for exhibits of graphic arts, were constructed along with Blossom Music Center, summer home of the Cleveland Orchestra. And extending McGilvrey's concept, White cast a network of seven vibrant Regional Campuses, each with its own facilities and faculty, over northeastern Ohio.

Each fall, during the sixties, brought a flock of gifted young faculty, new-fledged and eager for flight, swelling faculty numbers to 1,047 by 1970. White called them "Young Turks" and rejoiced in their zest for intellectual achievement and in their commitment to what all believed was the building of a great institution of learning and research. They regarded him as a "faculty president," because of his respect for them, their views, and their concerns. Consultation on policy and procedures at all levels became formalized through elective representative bodies for faculty and students. The principle of shared governance began on the department level, in 1963, when authoritarian "heads" gave way to "chairs" pulling in harness with elected faculty executive committees. And, prodded by faculty ombudsman Harold Kitner, with White's backing, academic units at every level codified due process protocols for promotion, tenure, and grievance. They also wrote
handbooks that stipulated faculty rights and obligations. Mindful of the frustrations and injustices a fast-growing “multiversity” could cause undergraduates, White appointed an ombudsman for students: Kent Alumnus Paul C. Kitchen. A tonic climate of collegiality and academic freedom was pervasive.

The primacy of research in graduate education changed the identity of the faculty member from teacher to scholar-teacher. The working assumption was: good scholars are by definition good teachers, but the converse is not necessarily true. This created a legacy of unresolved tensions, particularly regarding undergraduate programs, because the reward system, keyed as it was to the scholar-teacher concept, favored graduate education. Concerned that good undergraduate teaching might be lost in the publish-or-perish shuffle, the Alumni Association, in 1967, began giving monetary awards each year to outstanding teachers. The first recipients were Hugh Glauser (music) and Lawrence S. Kaplan (history), later appointed University Professor.

Academically, the swiftest, widest-ranging changes in the sixties were in the graduate college, on the watch of graduate dean Martin K. Nurmi (English), who established the protocols, procedures, and standards that gave the fast-growing programs their professional stability and ensured their scholarly quality. It was an exuberant and heady time. A charter class of one woman and twenty-six men registered, in 1961, for doctoral study—in biology, chemistry, education, English, history—and the first Ph.D.’s were awarded less than four years later. Six more doctoral programs were added between 1965 and 1968—

Each summer Kent students work with the Porthouse Theatre Company to create a production season alongside Equity actors, and professional guest directors, designers, and technologists.

During the presidency of Robert I. White (1963-1971) Kent enjoyed remarkable growth, both in quality and quantity, in personnel, programs, and plant, and suffered its greatest tragedy.
in business administration, exercise physiology, psychology, and solid state physics. More followed soon after. New M.A. programs mushroomed in such fields as art, science, library science, public administration, architecture, and music. Units offering terminal degrees turned their elementary courses over to graduate student teachers, shelving the instructor rank. Schools also proliferated, in library science, health, physical education, recreation, and nursing. Institutes and centers sprang up, seemingly overnight. On the undergraduate level, the founding of the Honors College, in 1965, marked the fruition of thirty-one years of honors offerings and an honors thesis in liberal arts.

The many protests of the period presented the University with challenges which, in significant instances, it incorporated into its mission. The Department of Pan-African Studies, for example, was formed, in 1969, under the leadership of Kent graduate Edward W. Crosby after the November 1968 walkout by black students protesting the presence on campus of recruiters from the notorious Oakland, California, police department.