REPORT OF A

COMMISSION-MANDATED FOCUSED VISIT

Assurance Section

TO

UNIVERSITY OF AKRON
Akron, Ohio

February 16-17, 2015

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

Donna Kempf, Assistant Professor Communication Studies, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53201

Janet Smith, Assistant Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas, 66762 (Chairperson)

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I.   CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT

A.   Purpose of Visit

The comprehensive visit of March 4-6, 2013 resulted in a mandated Focused Visit to address two issues: assessment and governance. More specifically the purpose of the current Focused Visit is to address (a) assessment of student learning in general education and in undergraduate and graduate majors and (b) relationship and roles of faculty in shared institutional governance.

B.   Accreditation Status

Accredited: the next Standard Pathways Year Four evaluation is scheduled to take place in February 2017.

B.   Organizational Context

The University of Akron is a comprehensive, publically assisted metropolitan university in the Carnegie classification of "Research University, High Activity." The institution has a current enrollment of approximately 27,000 students. The University offers degrees at the Associates, Bachelors, Doctors, Masters, and Certificate levels, totaling approximately 300 programs across a wide variety of disciplines within the Colleges of: Arts and Sciences; Business Administration; Education; Engineering; Health Professions; Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering, Applied Science and Technology; and the School of Law.

The University was founded in 1870 as the Buchtel College, becoming the Municipal University of Akron in 1913, and then the University of Akron in 1967. The institution has been regionally accredited since 1914 and is one of thirteen post-secondary public universities in Ohio.

D.   Unique Aspects of Visit

None.

E.   Interactions with Organizational Constituencies

Meetings were held with the following groups:

President and President's Cabinet
- President
- Senior Vice President, Provost & Chief Operating Officer

- Vice President and General Counsel, Secretary to the Board of Trustees
- Associate Chief Financial Officer
- Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trustees, Special Assistant to the President
- Vice President for Institutional Advancement
- Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Operations
- Associate Vice President & Chief Communication Officer
- Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management
- Vice President for Student Success

Faculty Senate Executive Committee
- Associate Professor, Law; Chair
- Associate Professor, English, Vice Chair
- Associate Professor, Economics
- Associate Professor, Curricular & Instructional Studies
- Professor, Psychology

University Council Steering Committee
- Associate Vice President, Student Success, Chair
- Professor, Psychology, Vice Chair
- Project Manager, Application Systems Services, Secretary
- Director, Admissions
- Director of Network and Telecommunications
- President, Graduate Student GovernmentAAUP Executive Committee

AAUP Executive Committee
- Professor, Biology; President
- Distinguished Professor, History; Vice President
- Professor, Mathematics; Chief Negotiator
- Professor, Family and Consumer Sciences; Secretary
- Professor, Biology; Grievance Officer
- Assistant Professor, UL Science and Technology; Liaison Representative
- Associate Professor, Myers School of Art; Past President

Board of Trustees

Deans, Associate Deans, and Department Chairs
- Dean, College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering
- Executive Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences

- Dean, College of Business Administration
- Dean, Honors College
- Dean, School of Law
- Dean, Interim, University Libraries
- Dean, Interim, Wayne College

- Dean, Interim, College of Education
- Associate Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences
- Associate Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences
- Associate Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences
- Associate Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences
- Associate Dean, Interim, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences
- Associate Dean, Interim, College of Applied Science and Technology; Chair, Acting, Department of Public Service and Technology
- Associate Dean, Polymer Science
- Associate Dean, College of Business Administration
- Assistant Dean, College of Business Administration
- Assistant Dean, School of Law
- Associate Dean, Interim, College of Health Professions; Director School of Counseling
- Associate Vice President, Office of Academic Affairs
- Chair, Applied General and Technical Studies
- Chair, Biology
- Chair, Business and Information Technology
- Chair, Chemical & Bio-molecular Engineering
- Chair, Interim, Computer Science
- Chair, Engineering & Science Technology
- Chair, English
- Chair, Geosciences
- Chair, History
- Chair, Interim, Mathematics
- Chair, Interim, Modern Languages
- Chair, Philosophy
- Chair, Psychology
- Chair, Sociology
- Chair, Marketing
- Director, School of Art,
- Chair, School of Accounting
- Chair, Finance
- Director, Communication
- Director, Nutrition/Dietetics
- Director, Sport Science and Wellness Education
- Director, School of Music
- Director, Interim, Developmental Programs
- Assistant Director, UG Programs, School of Nursing
- Head, Electronic Services

Faculty Open Forum
- 10 faculty members

Office of Academic Affairs

- Senior Vice President, Provost & Chief Operating Officer
- Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Operations
- Vice President, Student Success; Vice Provost for Academic Success
- Executive Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences; Vice Provost

- Associate Vice President, Inclusion & Equity; Chief Diversity Officer

Assessment Committee and College Assessment Representatives
- Special Assistant to Office of Academic Affairs
- Associate Dean, UG Studies
- Associate Professor, Law
- Associate Professor, Civil Engineering
- Assessment Officer, College of Business Administration
- Associate Dean, Interim, College of Health Professions & Director School of Counseling   Associate Professor, Marketing
- Associate Professor, Associate Studies
- Associate Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences
- Associate Professor, English
- Professor, Department of Statistics
- Professor, Wayne College, Chair of Wayne College Assessment Committee
- Associate Dean for Programs, Policy & Engagement
- Associate Vice Provost, Office of Academic Affairs
- Associate Provost, Talent Development

General Education Committee and Chairs of Senate DLO and TLO Committees
- Associate Professor of Geosciences
- Associate Professor, English
- Distinguished Professor, History
- Associate Professor, Curricular & Instructional Studies
- Associate Professor, Mathematics
- Professor of History
- Professor of Sociology
- Associate Dean, Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences

Exit Interview
- President
- Senior Vice President, Provost & Chief Operating Officer
- Vice President and General Counsel, Secretary to the Board of Trustees
- Associate Chief Financial Officer
- Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trustees, Special Assistant to the President
- Vice President for Institutional Advancement

- Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Operations
- Associate Vice President & Chief Communication Officer
- Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management

F.   Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed

- Report of the Academic Policies Committee to the Faculty Senate 2014
- 2014 College Assessment Plans and Reports
- General Education Revision Process. Report to the Board of Trustees, May 2, 2012
- Learning Outcomes Assessment for Faculty Development
- Academic Program Assessment Accreditors
- Academic Program Assessment Plans
- Annual Assessment Report Form
- Degree Program Assessment Plan Template
- Assessment Committee Members
- Essential Elements for a University-wide Assessment Plan of Student Learning
- General Education Implementation Committees
- New Faculty & Teaching Assistants Orientation, 2014
- Assessment Sessions for Faculty and Chairs
- Investing in Student Success: Transforming general Education. September 21, 2011
- Documenting Student Learning Series
- 2013-14 University Council Satisfaction Survey Results
- Collective Bargaining Agreement between the University of Akron and the American Association of University Professors, the University of Akron Chapter, July 1, 2013-June 30, 2015
- Memorandum from President Scarborough: Board of Trustees Strategic Issues Committee Review of University Council Draft Bylaws
- From University Proposed Bylaws: In-Depth Report, Budget and Finance Committee, 10-14-14
- Faculty Senate Bylaws
- Physical Environment Committee In-Depth Report to University Council, 9-9-2014
- Student Engagement and Success In-Depth Report to University Council, 10-14-2014
- Talent Development and Human Resources In-Depth Report to UC 8-26-2014
- Topic Submission Process, University Council December 10, 2013
- University Council Annual Calendar
- University Council Issue Brief Status Report
- University Council Motion Status Report
- University Council Standing Committee Goals and Steering Committee Feedback, 2013-14

- University Council Bylaws, 11-12-2013
- Faculty and Staff Handbooks
- Organizational University Rules
- Student Handbooks
- The University of Akron October 2014 Board Minutes Approving Retention and Completion Plan
- Key Performance Indicators, February 2015
- Campus Retention and Completion Plan
- Faculty Senate Minutes and Transcripts
- University Council Minutes
- University Council Steering Committee Minutes

II.   AREA(S) OF FOCUS

A-1. Statement of Focus

In the report of the most recent comprehensive visit to the University of Akron (March 4-6, 2013), the team's response to Criterion Four recommended commission follow-up, noting that assessment of student outcomes is not evenly developed across academic departments and especially needs improvement in the area of general education. The team report specifically indicated that a Focused Visit in Spring 2015 was needed to "demonstrate that each graduate and undergraduate academic major and the general education program have assessment programs in place that include: 1) the skills and concepts to be mastered, 2) the assessment methods employed 3) the results of the assessment, and 4) how the assessment results are being used to improve each of the programs." The team report further noted that these concerns were identified in the 2003 report of a comprehensive visit and that concerns that had been identified during the 2003 visit remained valid in 2013.

B-1. Statements of Evidence

- **Evidence that demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.**

- Based on review of the Focused Visit Report and supporting evidence, along with discussions with faculty and administration, it is evident that the institution has given serious consideration to the recommendations of the previous site visit team. The Focused Visit team commends the institution on the significant amount of progress in the area of assessment of student learning that has occurred in the very short time interval of two years since the last comprehensive visit.

- Based on review of the Focused Visit Report, the institution has committed to improvement of assessment of student learning as a

formal priority as evidenced by: support of academic leadership for assessment activities; communication to campus of the importance of assessment by the Provost; presentation to the Board of Trustees on progress of assessment activities; formation of necessary committees to support assessment efforts; and dedication of resources to assessment, including the hiring of a special assistant in the Office of Academic Affairs to provide leadership in the assessment of student learning in academic programs.

- Based on both a review of the Focused Visit Report and interactions with members of the Assessment Committee, the institution shows evidence that it has developed the necessary infrastructure to support assessment of student learning at the program level. This has included: development of a university assessment committee with members serving as liaisons to their respective colleges; creation of a university-wide assessment plan that guides the activities of the university; provision of templates to provide structure and clarify expectations to program faculty; provision of formal training to faculty and chairs, as well as faculty to faculty mentoring to assist in development of skills necessary for effective assessment activities; use of a common language to address assessment; and provision of feedback on program assessment plans. In addition, the institution took steps to make assessment activities manageable by focusing only on active programs and started with one college to develop effective assessment practices before broadening activities to other colleges.

- A sampling of program assessment reports by the Focused Visit team revealed that all programs have developed student learning outcomes and assessment measures, and many programs show evidence of using data to improve student learning. Review of program assessment reports indicates that programs show significant variation in the level of sophistication of assessment activities at this point, however. According to the assessment committee, the institution is now working to ensure that student learning outcomes are consistent across all course sections, standardizing coursework across full-time and part-time faculty. According to the Assessment Committee, the institution is also working toward integrating assessment of student learning into the curriculum proposal system in a meaningful way.

- The University is currently undergoing substantive revision of the general education curriculum. As a result, less progress has been made in actual assessment of the general education curriculum. However, the site visit team commends the institution for making assessment an integral component of initial discussions surrounding curriculum reform. Based on discussions with the General Education

Committee, all outcomes need to be measurable and any department that puts forth a course to be included in the general education curriculum has to identify artefacts of student learning that address the relevant assessment component. In this manner, the institution is building the foundation for integration of assessment into the general education curriculum. The committee shows evidence of solid assessment practices, namely staging their outcomes and starting with the easiest first in order to learn from successes and challenges. In addition, there is a general plan to keep things manageable by looking at general education outcomes on a rotation basis, using random sampling to determine if learning outcomes are being met. What remains unclear from interaction with the General Education Committee is how this plan will be implemented on a practical level and how data will be used to improve student learning.

- Finally, the institution shows greater use of assessment data beyond student learning outcomes. Based on discussion with President's Cabinet and review of key enrollment management documents, the institution is using data to inform decision-making at the institutional level. Within the area of enrollment management, there is greater intentionality is use of data and predictive analytics to inform decision-making.

- **Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.**

- While the institution has made impressive progress since the 2013 site visit, the University is at a critical point in the continued success of its assessment efforts. The institution has demonstrated that it has the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in the assessment and improvement of student learning and administration has shown support for these accomplishments to date. However, the level of continued resources devoted to assessment of student learning will play a significant role in how well the institution is able to build on current successes. The Focused Visit team is concerned that some of the structures that are key to the recent successes appear to be temporary in nature. These include committee structures and leadership being provided by the special assistant to the Office of Academic Affairs being a temporary, part-time position. The institution needs to develop an ongoing, sustainable approach to the assessment and improvement of student learning, that includes resources for permanent leadership.

- Based on conversations during the Focused Visit, it is apparent that members of the Assessment Committee are dedicated to the

assessment and improvement of student learning and that some faculty members are beginning to appreciate the value of assessment activities. However, it was also apparent that much of the campus views assessment activities as burdensome rather than meaningful and there is a need for ongoing efforts to move the campus from a compliance mindset to a commitment to improvement of student learning. Based on the varying quality observed in program assessment plans, this will necessitate an ongoing training component for campus.

- While the substantive revision of general education clearly involves discussion of assessment as a central component, there is much work to be done to implement an ongoing assessment plan on a concrete level. The General Education Committee appears to be highly engaged with assessment, but there is currently no structure or process in place to move beyond development of assessment measures and artefacts. As with assessment efforts at the program level, resources need to be devoted to providing leadership and expertise to ensure successful collection and use of assessment data to inform improvement of the general education curriculum.

- **Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention and Commission follow-up are required.**

- None. The next Standard Pathway review (year four) is scheduled for 2017.

- **Evidence is insufficient and demonstrates that Commission sanction is warranted.**

- None.

A-2. Statement of Focus

In the report of the most recent comprehensive visit to the University of Akron (March 4-6, 2013), the team's response to Criterion Five recommended commission follow-up, noting that because of the uncertainty of the final outcome of the current faculty governance structure, a focused visit in the spring of 2015 was recommended to assess the nature of the relationship and roles of faculty in shared institutional governance.

B-2. Statements of Evidence

- **Evidence that demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.**

- Based on review of the Focused Visit Report and supporting evidence, along with conversations with faculty, staff, and administration during the site visit, the institution has taken active steps to address concerns with shared governance. The report outlined several examples of faculty involvement in key initiatives since the 2013 site visit, including general education reform and decision to terminate or suspend admission to a substantial number of academic programs. While significant challenges remain, there is evidence of progress in this area.

- Overall, based on conversations with campus groups, several individuals noted perceived improvements in shared governance. Some faculty, particularly members of Faculty Senate, noted improvement in transparency and cooperation between faculty and administration. It is noted, however, that this view of improved cooperation and communication was not consistent across all individuals and that the Focused Visit team observed significant lingering sentiments of frustration with and distrust of senior administration.

- The appointment of a new President in 2014 has created an opportunity for changes in shared governance. During discussions with campus constituents, many individuals expressed a level of "cautious optimism" or at a minimum, a "wait and see" attitude regarding shared governance under President Scarborough. The President's book club was frequently noted as an avenue for having open dialogue around higher education issues and many individuals noted increased transparency around budget as a result of regularly scheduled meetings between the President and campus groups. Many individuals commented on the timing of the Focused Visit, with six months of a new presidency being insufficient time to gauge progress.

- The Focused Visit Report described three key structures that play a role in shared governance: Akron-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement; Faculty Senate; and University Council. Discussions with these key groups during the Focused Visit confirmed the role of these structures, although the Focused Visit team noted mixed perceptions of the effectiveness of these structures.

- Faculty Senate Executive Committee confirmed that the Faculty Senate is active and has a clearly defined role in academic matters.

They noted an increased willingness on the part of senior administration to have open discussions and consult up front on academic matters, whereas in the past their perception was a tendency for administration to announce decisions and then Faculty Senate would need to assert themselves. They also noted that elections to the Senate are now more competitive and described a more positive view of the Senate by the faculty body. There was considerable evidence of faculty involvement in major academic decisions, both presented in the Focused Visit Report and confirmed in conversations during the site visit.

- The AAUP Collective Bargaining Unit expressed concern over their current role in shared governance. Members stated that historically, their first negotiations with administration were very adversarial and that there was a tendency to file grievances as a method to get their needs met. However, members described their relationship with senior administration as "maturing," noting that the current President is willing to listen to their concerns. Continued concerns center around perceptions of "top down" decision-making with insufficient communication by senior administration, a sentiment noted across meetings with several constituent groups. The Bargaining Unit expressed interest in improving relationships with administration, noting that the main theme for their upcoming negotiations is to improve lines of communication, including making contract language more explicit in order to better clarify the role of the Bargaining Unit in shared governance.

- University Council, totaling 130 members, provides an avenue for constituents across campus to participate in shared governance, especially in regard to non-academic issues outside the purview of Faculty Senate. The group noted that it is only within the past year that they have begun to work effectively and that the structure has allowed for increased opportunity to voice opinions and collaborate across campus, along with increased transparency. Members noted concrete results of the work of University Council, although they noted that their biggest challenge is legitimacy and support for their work, as by-laws have not been approved by the Board of Trustees. Several individuals across campus also noted confusion over the role and scope of University Council, including how this interfaces with Faculty Senate.

- **Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.**

- Since its 2013 Comprehensive Evaluation visit, the University of Akron appears to have made progress toward addressing the team's concerns within Criterion Five. However, observations during the Focused Visit are strikingly similar to observations made in 2013. Specifically, in the 2013 team report, it was noted that "there are several structures that promote shared governance including the Faculty Senate, the AAUP, the Collective Bargaining Agreement, and University Council. The administration uses all of these structures but conversations with a range of constituents revealed that there is still a strong sense of a need for additional improvements in consultation, transparency, and in particular, in explaining decisions." The team also noted that "full implementation of the University Council (UC) could go a long way toward resolving concerns." Among the concerns noted in the 2013 report were a lack of approved University Council by-laws and a "lack of resource support for (faculty and staff) participation on the UC," and the call for "course-release time and for secretarial support." Further, the report indicated that while progress had been made in addressing past concerns about shared governance, "there are concerns about how effective the processes that are in place are providing transparency and a sense of inclusiveness in the operation of the institution, particularly with respect to the operation of the University Council." These statements are applicable to the recent site visit.

- The concerns stated in the 2013 report appear to persist in 2015. The University Council still does not have approved bylaws and the effectiveness of the University Council as an instrument for involving the faculty in shared governance was questioned by various groups during the Focused Visit. However, a different sentiment may exist; the shift mentioned by some faculty members toward a more optimistic attitude from the time of the 2013 Comprehensive Visit to that of the Focused Visit stems from the appointment of the new President. Having been in place for only six months prior to this visit, it was suggested that it is too early to tell whether or not his leadership would encourage substantive improvement in the relationships between the shared governance groups and the administration.

- Of note, the Trustees' perception is that their role and influence does not extend to the institution's challenges with shared governance. Being that University of Akron's trustees are appointed through a political office (the Ohio Governor) rather than elected or chosen through University of Akron and/or the board, the Trustees' orientation appears to concentrate more on matters peripheral to the university (i.e., relationships with donors and fundraising) than on issues that are integral to the University's structure and operations (e.g., shared governance). It would be in the best interest of the University if the

Trustees took a more informed role in its interaction with the institution, particularly in the area of shared governance. For instance, the University Council by-laws have been under consideration by the Board for an extensive period of time and there is urgent need for the Board to take action in order to ensure full functioning of this Council.

- Despite continued concerns outlined above, the institution appears to be acutely aware of challenges, with both administration and faculty expressing interest in working toward resolution. Drawing from conversations with the President and some faculty members, the team perceives that a culture shift is underway within the institution. Given that tension between the faculty and the administration had existed for some time, it may be that faculty complaints and reports of dissatisfaction reflect residual attitudes, i.e., those based in institutional memory rather than being representative of the evolving faculty-administration dynamic. With time and an adaptive, collaborative spirit from *both* the faculty and administration, the structures and processes that have been established will be given an opportunity to become fully operational toward enacting effective shared governance.

- Considering: a) the institution's change in president, b) signs of movement toward a more cooperative climate, and c) the imminent 2017 Standard Pathway review, the team will refrain from recommending Commission follow-up in the interim in order to allow the University of Akron to direct its energy toward strengthening its shared governance practices.

Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention and Commission follow-up are required.

- The original team recommendation of no Commission follow-up required has been amended based on additional evidence received and reviewed since submission of the Final Report. The team now recommends an embedded monitoring report on shared governance within the scheduled 2017 year four review of Standard Pathway. See addendum for details.

- **Evidence is insufficient and demonstrates that Commission sanction is warranted.**

- None.

C.   **Other Accreditation Issues** [If applicable]

None.

D.   Recommendation of Team

- Evidence sufficiently demonstrated. No Commission follow-up recommended. Year Four Standard Pathways review is scheduled for 2017.

III.   STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

No change.

Affiliation Status: Member (1914-)

Nature of Organization: No change

Legal status: No change

Degrees awarded: No change

Conditions of Affiliation: No change

Stipulation on affiliation status: No change

Approval of degree sites: No change

Approval of distance education degree: No change

Reports required: None

Other Visits Scheduled
> **Type of Visit:** Standard Pathway
> **Topic(s) and Date:** Year Four Review, February 2017
> **Rationale and Expectations:**
The University of Akron has demonstrated progress in the areas of assessment of student learning and shared governance. While there is still significant work to be accomplished in both areas, the institution has demonstrated a serious commitment to making changes and appears to have both the understanding of the necessity for future work and the capacity to achieve further changes. Therefore, no additional visit or report is required prior to the 2017 Standard Pathway review (year four).

Summary of Commission Review

Year for next comprehensive evaluation: No change (2017)

Addendum (August 26ᵗʰ, 2015)

After submission of the final Report of a Commission-Mandated Focused Visit, the team chair received a registered letter dated May 8, 2015 from the President of the University of Akron AAUP. The team chair brought the letter to the attention of Dr. Mary Vanis, staff liaison for the University of Akron and the letter was forward to HLC legal department for input. The Coordinator for Legal and Governmental Affairs drafted a letter to the President of the University of Akron, requesting response to a number of questions pertaining to the complaint from the AAUP President. The site visit team has reviewed the initial complaint letter, the request for information from HLC, and the response from the institution. The team has determined that an additional visit is not warranted at this time, but does amend the original recommendation pertaining to shared governance. The team stands by the original recommendation pertaining to assessment of student learning.

In the Assurance Section of the Focused Site Visit Report, the team noted that it was difficult to determine if challenges in shared governance observed during the site visit were due to residual attitudes resultant of a long-term history of adversarial relationships between faculty and administration or if they reflected ongoing concerns. Given signs of movement toward a more cooperative climate, the team decided to give the institution the benefit of the doubt to reinforce positive changes that had been made and allow the institution to direct its energy toward strengthening shared governance practices. However, it appears that those signs of movement toward a more cooperative climate have not been realized. Instead, newly presented evidence indicates that there persists significant concern associated with the two of the three structures that form the foundation for shared governance at the University of Akron. Specifically, the University Council's role in shared governance has yet to be enacted. At the time of the site visit this body continued to operate without formally endorsed by-laws and there was lack of clarity of the role of this body in shared governance. In addition, the recent complaint from the University of Akron AAUP President indicates ongoing challenges between administration and this aspect of faculty governance.

As a result, the site visit team amends the original recommendation and now recommends an embedded monitoring report on shared governance within the scheduled 2017 year four review of Standard Pathway. This report should confirm that the University Council is fully operational and that the role of both University Council and the AAUP has been clarified to realize their potential contribution to shared governance. It is clear from the University of Akron response to the AAUP complaint that administration takes the issue of shared governance seriously and that structures are in place to support effective shared governance at the University of Akron. However, it is also clear that shared governance continues to be a challenge and, as noted in the body of the Focused Visit Report, will require an adaptive, collaborative spirit from both the faculty and administration to make progress in this area.

REPORT OF A COMMISSION-MANDATED FOCUSED VISIT

Advancement Section

TO

UNIVERSITY OF AKRON
Akron, Ohio

February 16-17, 2015

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

Donna Kempf, Assistant Professor Communication Studies, Marquette University,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53201

Janet Smith, Assistant Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, Pittsburg State
University, Pittsburg, Kansas, 66762 (Chairperson)

ADVANCEMENT SECTION

CONSULTATION OF TEAM

    A. Observations of Team Regarding Area(s) of Focus

- The current Focused Visit addresses two areas that represent a long-standing history of challenges for the University of Akron. In addition, the current Focused Visit addresses two areas that typically involve considerable periods of time to effect meaningful change, as both assessment of student learning and shared governance speak to the culture of an institution. The Focused Visit team recognizes that there has been a relatively short period since the 2013 comprehensive visit and is impressed with the level of assessment activity to address concerns of the previous site visit team. The Focused Visit team also acknowledges that it will take time for some of the activities that have been implemented in the areas of both assessment and shared governance to have a meaningful and lasting impact on the culture of the institution and therefore it is critical for the University to continue to focus its attention on both assessment and shared governance beyond meeting the requirements of this Focused Visit.

- Regarding the area of Assessment of Student Learning, the team offers the following observations:

  - The University has devoted considerable time and energy to addressing the concerns of the 2013 site visit team. All of the basics of an effective assessment plan have been put into action and this had resulted in a significant improvement in assessment of student learning. Key elements include support from administration, substantial faculty involvement, infrastructure (including identified leadership and expertise), and provision of clear expectations and training to meet expectation. At the program level, there are student learning outcomes and measures identified for each program and there are many examples of programs fulfilling the purpose of assessment to improve student learning. In terms of general education, assessment has been a central component of discussions around curriculum revision. This has positioned the institution well to engage in effective assessment activities rather than having to retro-fit an assessment component to an existing general education curriculum. The institution is commended for taking sufficient time to develop measurable outcomes in a planned manner, rather than rush to complete a general education assessment plan that is not meaningful and/or cannot be sustained over time. However, in order to realize the potential of the groundwork completed to date, there needs to be significant attention given to practical details of fully implementing the assessment concepts that have been developed in general education.
  - Currently, it appears that accreditation requirements are driving assessment activities. While the pairing of assessment and accreditation is sometimes necessary and can provide strong impetus for individuals to engage in assessment activities, there is a danger that the inherent value of assessment will be lost. The site visit team noted examples of

assessment data starting to drive useful conversations around student learning, indicating the beginnings of a potential shift away from compliance mentality to a commitment to improvement of student learning.

- Regarding the area of Shared Governance, the team offers the following observations:

  - The University has appropriate structures in place that allow for shared governance to occur. Namely, the Akron-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement, the Faculty Senate, and University Council provide avenues for campus constituents to contribute to governance of the institution. Of these structures, Faculty Senate currently appears to be operating most effectively. The strength of University Council is that it has created an opportunity for cross-campus discussion and collaboration. However, this body continues to operate without approved by-laws. In addition, while members of University Council provided examples to demonstrate effectiveness of the structure, the scope of the Council in terms of types of issues automatically brought before the Council, along with how it relates to other governance bodies such as Faculty Senate, needs further clarification.
  - A critical element of progress consistently noted across many meetings during the site visit is increased transparency and communication around budgetary matters. This was stressed by the 2013 site visit team as being central to promoting successful shared governance. The current President has made a very deliberate effort to engage the campus in conversations around budget and these efforts have clearly been recognized by campus constituents.
  - There has been a long-term history of adversarial relationships between faculty and administration at the institution. During the Focused Visit, the team noted willingness on the part of both administrators and faculty to work together, along with beginnings of a shift in attitude that will allow the existing governance structures to operate more effectively. It appears that the appointment of a new President has positively contributed to this shift and has created an opportunity for the institution to work towards overcoming past history by engaging in collaboration and cooperation on the part of both faculty and administration. However, the team noted continued concerns with trust towards upper administration, expressed across several campus meetings.

    ### B. Consultations of Team

- Regarding the area of Assessment of Student Learning, the team offers the following recommendations:

  - One of the most critical components to future success will be to establish a permanent infrastructure that sustains assessment efforts over the long-term. The institution has demonstrated success with the temporary committee structure and special assistant to the Office of Academic Affairs. However, similar infrastructure needs to be in place on a permanent basis. The site visit team strongly recommends that

the institution create a permanent assessment position to provide leadership and expertise in the area of student assessment. In addition, the institution needs to continue to involve faculty in the assessment of student learning and the Focused Visit team recommends that the institution examine the critical elements of its committee structure that contributed to recent success and ensure these elements continue on a longer-term basis.

- The current assessment plan is based on numerous effective principles and has served the institution well over the past two years. However, the current plan frames assessment activities in terms of compliance with HLC requirements and explicitly identifies actions to be completed before HLC visits. The Focused Visit team recommends eliminating reference to HLC in the assessment plan. The institution needs to create an updated version of its assessment plan that retains many of the sound principles of assessment, but addresses assessment activities beyond the next HLC visit and from the perspective of what is in the best interest of the institution rather than what is needed to satisfy HLC requirements. Unless the institution begins to promote the value of assessment beyond meeting accreditation standards, there is a serious danger that assessment efforts will come to a halt after the 2017 HLC site visit given the intervening period between the subsequent visit will be six years.

- In promoting the value of assessment, conversations need to focus on improvement of student learning so that faculty see assessment efforts as meaningful to their work with students rather than simply as an added burden. This has already begun to happen with a limited number of faculty and will assist the institution in moving from a compliance mentality to a commitment to the assessment and improvement of student learning.

- The institution has engaged in numerous activities to provide training to faculty, chairs, and graduate assistants, including faculty to faculty mentoring, new faculty orientation, workshops, and a resource library. Ongoing training will need to be a component of the assessment plan. While continuing to offer workshops is of value, typically only a small number of faculty will self-select to attend such events. Therefore, the institution is encouraged to examine ways to impact greater numbers of faculty. In addition, given the increased reliance on adjunct faculty, training needs for this group must be considered. More importantly, any training efforts need to focus on use of assessment data to make a meaningful impact on program curricula.

- The University needs to build on the work of the General Education Committee and develop concrete details of how they will access and use identified artefacts from general education courses. At present, this plan has been developed at the conceptual level, but details are lacking. The plan needs to include a manageable way to collect data regarding the effectiveness of the general education curriculum. In addition, the institution needs to develop the infrastructure or capitalize on existing structures to be able to use these data in a meaningful way to inform improvement of general education.

- Finally, continued support from administration will be critical to ongoing success with assessment. This extends beyond provision of resources and includes continued communication from the Provost and college deans regarding the value of assessment. It appears that this has been a key component in success to date and ongoing communication from administration can assist in moving the institution from a compliance mindset to engagement in assessment activities that truly have the ability to advance the mission of the institution.

- Regarding the area of Shared Governance, the team offers the following recommendations:

  - In order for the University Council to have a legitimate role in shared governance, by-laws need to be formally approved and resource support provided for this group. In addition, the institution needs to determine the types of issues that will automatically be brought before this group and develop a mechanism for this to occur. It has been two years since the previous site visit team noted the need for full implementation of the University Council. Although the Council has begun to play a more active role in shared governance, this role cannot be fully realized until official by-laws are in place and the role of the Council and its relationship to other governance entities more clearly defined.
  - The AAUP Collective Bargaining Unit's goal of making communication a focus of upcoming negotiations is on target and has the potential to positively impact shared governance. Revisiting contract language to clarify areas of ambiguity will likely assist in more clearly defining the role of this group. Successful negotiations will require willingness to collaborate and cooperate on both the part of the faculty and administration.
  - Given the long history of challenges in shared governance and lingering impact of past adversarial relationships between faculty and administration, the institution might give serious consideration to engaging a neutral third party, external to the University, in order to capitalize on the opportunity presented with the new presidency and guide the institution in a more collaborative direction to build the future course for the University of Akron.

STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS WORKSHEET

INSTITUTION and STATE: University of Akron OH

TYPE OF REVIEW*:* Focused Visits

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW: (Spring 2015) on (a) relationship and roles of faculty in shared institutional governance and (b) assessment of student learning in general education and in undergraduate and graduate majors.

DATES OF REVIEW: 02/16/2015 - 02/17/2015

☐ No Change in Statement of Affiliation Status

Nature of Organization

CONTROL: Public

RECOMMENDATION:

DEGREES AWARDED: Associates, Bachelors, Doctors, Masters, Certificate

RECOMMENDATION: No Change

Conditions of Affiliation

STIPULATIONS ON AFFILIATION STATUS:
Prior Commission approval is required for substantive change as stated in Commission policy.

RECOMMENDATION: No Change

APPROVAL OF NEW ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS:
The institution has been approved for the Notification Program, allowing the institution to open new additional locations within the United States.

RECOMMENDATION: No Change

APPROVAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREES:
Approved for distance education courses and programs. The institution has not been approved for correspondence education.

RECOMMENDATION: No Change

ACCREDITATION ACTIVITIES:

Monitoring, Focused Visit: 02/16/2015
(Spring 2015) on (a) relationship and roles of faculty in shared institutional governance and (b) assessment of student learning in general education and in undergraduate and graduate majors.
Multi Campus Visits, Multi Campus Visit: 2016 - 2017

Standard Pathway, Comprehensive Evaluation: 02/13/2017
Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation. A multi-campus visit will occur in conjunction with the comprehensive evaluation to Wayne College,1901 Smucker Rd.,Orrville,OH 44667.

RECOMMENDATION:

Multi Campus Visit: 2016 – 2017
Standard Pathway, Comprehensive Evaluation: 02/13/2017
Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation. A multi-campus visit will occur in conjunction with the comprehensive evaluation to Wayne College,1901 Smucker Rd.,Orrville,OH 44667.
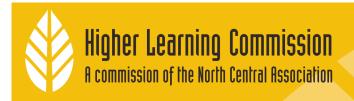

Interim report: Report on shared governance embedded within the scheduled 2/13/2017 Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation, Standard Pathway.

Summary of Commission Review

YEAR OF LAST REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION: 2012 - 2013

YEAR FOR NEXT REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION: 2022 - 2023

RECOMMENDATION: No Change

Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the North Central Association

Internal Procedure

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE WORKSHEET

INSTITUTION and STATE: 1599 University of Akron OH

TYPE OF REVIEW: Monitoring: Focused Visits

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW: (Spring 2015) on (a) relationship and roles of faculty in shared institutional governance and (b) assessment of student learning in general education and in undergraduate and graduate majors.

☒   No change to Organization Profile

Educational Programs

Programs leading to Undergraduate	Program Distribution
Associates	30
Bachelors	96

Programs leading to Graduate	
Doctors	21
Masters	80
Specialist	0

Certificate programs	
Certificate	79

Recommended Change:

Off-Campus Activities:
In State - Present Activity
Campuses:
Wayne College - Orrville, OH

Additional Locations:
Midpoint Center - Brunswick, OH
Lorain County Community College - Elyria, OH
Lakeland Community College - Kirtland, OH
Lakewood Bailey Building - Lakewood, OH
Medina County University Center - Medina, OH
Stark State College - North Canton, OH
Eastern Gateway Community College - Steubenville, OH
Tallmadge High School - Tallmadge , OH

Recommended Change:

Out Of State - <u>Present Activity</u>
Campuses: None.

Additional Locations: None.

Recommended Change:

Out of USA - <u>Present Activity</u>
Campuses: None.

Additional Locations: None.

Recommended Change:

Distance Education Programs:
<u>Present Offerings:</u>
Master 51.2201 Public Health, General Master of Public Health One-way or Two Way Transmission

Master 45.1099 Political Science and Government, Other Master's in Applied Politics One-way or Two Way Transmission

Bachelor 13.1319 Technical Teacher Education Bachelor of Science in Teaching and Training Technical Professionals Internet

Certificate 13.1319 Technical Teacher Education Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Training Technical Professionals Internet

Certificate 13.1319 Technical Teacher Education Undergraduate Certificate in Teaching and Training Technical Professionals Internet

Master 13.0501 Educational/Instructional Technology Master of Arts in Instructional Technology Internet

Certificate 13.1315 Reading Teacher Education Literacy Specialist Certificate Internet

Master 52.1601 Taxation Master's of Taxation Internet

Master 13.1319 Technical Teacher Education Master of Science in Teaching and Training Technical Professionals Internet

Bachelor 51.3801 Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse Nursing RN/BSN Internet

Master 13.0604 Educational Assessment, Testing, and Measurement Master of Arts in Assessment and Evaluation Internet

Certificate 13.0604 Educational Assessment, Testing, and Measurement Certificate in Assessment and Evaluation Internet

Recommended Change:

Correspondence Education Programs:
Present Offerings:
None.

Recommended Change:

Contractual Relationships:
Present Offerings:
None.

Recommended Change:

Consortial Relationships:
Present Offerings:
Master 44.07 Social Work Master - 44.07 Social Work (Masters in Social Work)

Doctor 51.0202 Audiology/Audiologist Doctor - 51.0202 Audiology/Audiologist (Doctorate of Audiology)

Doctor 44.04 Public Administration Doctor - 44.04 Public Administration (Doctorate in Philosophy in Urban Studies and Public Affairs)

Master 51.0203 Speech-Language Pathology/Pathologist Master - 51.0203 Speech-Language Pathology/Pathologist (Master of Arts in Speech-Language Pathology)

Bachelor 52.0301 Accounting Bachelor - 52.0301 Accounting (Bachelor of Science in Accounting)

Bachelor 51.38 Registered Nursing, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research and Clinical Nursing Bachelor - 51.38 Registered Nursing, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research and Clinical Nursing (RN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing)

Master 51.38 Registered Nursing, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research and Clinical Nursing Master - 51.38 Registered Nursing, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research and Clinical Nursing (RN to Master of Science in Nursing)

Doctor 51.38 Registered Nursing, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research and Clinical Nursing Doctor - 51.38 Registered Nursing, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research and Clinical Nursing (Doctor of Nursing)

Master 23.1302 Creative Writing Master - 23.1302 Creative Writing (Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing)

Doctor 45.11 Sociology Doctor - 45.11 Sociology (Doctorate of Philosophy in Sociology)

Master 44. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONS Master - 44. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONS (Master of Public Health)

Recommended Change: