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May 8, 2015

Janet V. Smith, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness
Pittsburgh State University
1701 S. Broadway Street
Pittsburgh, KS 66762

Dear Dr. Smith:

Since your visit in mid-February, two major issues regarding shared governance have arisen at The University of Akron about which we believe you need to be aware. When you visited, the University was only eight months into the tenure of a new president, Dr. Scott Scarborough. The early signs were that President Scarborough had a new interest in sharing his ideas with faculty and listening to their concerns. Thus, during your February visit, it is likely that your committee heard that the University had "turned a corner" and was entering a more positive time for shared governance.

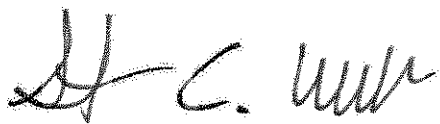
Unfortunately, only a short time after your visit, two major initiatives were undertaken with minimal to no faculty involvement. The first is a "disruptive pricing" of many of our general education courses, in order to draw students away from regional community colleges. The program will be a major change for UA, and yet the faculty has been minimally involved in the development of the ideas or even in the discussion of how this program will work. For example, there was an initial announcement of a list of low-cost courses that would be offered online, at our branch campus, a list that included many courses that have never been approved for online delivery at the University, and some that are not even offered at all. Less than two weeks before students are expecting to start registering for these low-cost classes, it has not been determined how many sections will be available or who will teach them, problems that could have been avoided if faculty had been involved in the planning. There has been no general vetting of the pedagogical ramifications of moving these courses to our branch campus or of shifting many students into these new information delivery formats. Here a lack of true shared governance in crucial curricular issues could be very harmful to our students.

Dr. Janet V. Smith
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The second initiative being undertaken without faculty input is to "rebrand" The University of Akron as a "Polytechnic" university. President Scarborough is poised to start a media campaign in mid-May for this rebranding, though insisting that an actual name change is not imminent. This initiative has been moved forward in secret, without any support from any faculty governance bodies. Nonetheless, rumors have spread across campus, leaving many faculty feeling marginalized and frankly threatened that they will not fit into this "new and improved" vision. Recently students and alumni who have heard the rumors have begun a vociferous campaign against the rebranding. If all constituencies had been consulted from the beginning, the University could have avoided the current turmoil.

Thus, we propose to you that the role of the faculty in the governance of The University of Akron has been shrunk rapidly since your visit. We urge you to please revisit this important issue for the University and re-open this portion of the HLC's accreditation process for UA.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Weeks". The signature is stylized with a large "S" and "W".

Steve Weeks
President



The Higher Learning Commission Complaints Permission Form

I, _____ John Zipp _____,
give my permission for The Higher Learning Commission to send a copy of my complaint
regarding
_____ The University of Akron _____.

including the following specific documents (identified by format and date):

_____ May 8, 2015 letter from Steve Weeks to Janet V. Smith

_____ June 8, 2015 _____
Signature Date

Please mail this completed form to the Higher Learning Commission, 230 South LaSalle Street,
Suite 7-500, Chicago, IL 60604.



HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500

Chicago, IL 60604-1411

312.263.0456 | 800.621.7440

Fax: 312.263.7462 | hlcommission.org

June 15, 2015

Scott Scarborough
President
University of Akron
301 Buchtel Commons
Akron OH 44325

Dear President Scarborough:

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) received a complaint about the University of Akron (UA) from the University's American Association of University Professors (AAUP) chapter. Janet Smith forwarded the complaint to HLC. Dr. Smith received the complaint after her team completed a comprehensive evaluation of the University. Enclosed is a copy of the complaint for your review and response. Since the complaint was received after the team's visit, Dr. Smith and her will receive your response for their review before completing their report. The complaint and your response may be material to the team's report and additional steps may take place prior to the completion of the team's report. Also, HLC's policy on complaints expects that we will conduct a follow-up inquiry regarding a complaint that raises questions about the compliance of accredited institutions with the Criteria for Accreditation. I will inform you of any needed actions as the process moves forward.

The complainant alleges that problems with shared governance arose after the team's visit in February prompting the UA AAUP to send a letter of complaint to Dr. Smith. While the chapter represents the concerns of a particular group of stakeholders at the University, the concerns raised warrant consideration in relation to HLC standards. The UA AAUP cites two concerns. The first concern is with the lack of faculty involvement in the development of a new general education program and the second, rebranding the institution as a polytechnic university. These items raise concerns with the quality of the University's programs and its ability to meet the Criteria and Core Components with regard to Mission, Teaching & Learning, and Resources, Planning, & Institutional Effectiveness. Specifically, the complaint aspects the following Criteria for Accreditation, Core Components, and Subcomponents:

Criterion One, "the institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations."

Criterion Three, Core Component 3.A, Subcomponent 3, "the institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality)."

Criterion Three, Core Component 3.B, Subcomponent 2, "the institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess."

Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C, Subcomponent 1, "the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance;

establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.”

Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, Subcomponent 4, “the institution’s processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.”

Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, Subcomponent 2, “the institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution’s governance.”

Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, Subcomponent 3, “administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.”

Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, Subcomponent 3, “the planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.”

The UA AAUP expressed concerns with the lack of stakeholder involvement in the creation, planning, and implementation process for the new general education program and for rebranding the University as a polytechnic institution. Please explain what the general education program and rebranding campaign are; what process was used to create, design, and implement them; and how faculty will be involved going forward.

Further, the rebranding efforts warrant additional comment from UA with regard to Mission. How does the rebranding of the institution relate to the mission of it? The UA AAUP also expressed concerns with the lack of faculty involvement in the curricular design and delivery of the new general education program offerings as well as the teaching capacity and capability for the same. Please explain how faculty will be involved in the new general education program with its ongoing design, delivery, and assessment. Further, what policies and procedures are in place with regard to faculty involvement in the assessment of student learning as well as with curricular design and pedagogical methods for the new general education program? What plans are in place to involve faculty in quality assurance for the new general education program? Since this is a new general education model, please share what budget planning, marketing campaigns, and enrollment projections are being used to ensure that the program is sustained. Finally, describe the institution’s current model of shared governance and any changes to it over the past year as well as any changes forthcoming.

Please respond to the entirety of the complaint and HLC’s letter in relation to the Criteria and Core Components as described above by July 15, 2015. Once I receive your response, I will send it to Dr. Smith and her team to determine if an additional visit or other review is necessary before completing their report. The HLC Legal & Governmental Affairs Team and your HLC liaison, Mary Vanis, will also review the case. We appreciate your cooperation. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Zach Waymer
Coordinator for Legal and Governmental Affairs

Enclosure

Scarborough, Monday, June 15, 2015

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cc: Rex Ramsier, Accreditation Liaison Officer, University of Akron
Janet Smith, HLC Evaluation Team Chair
Mary Vanis, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, HLC