Developments with University of Arizona Global Campus (UAGC) In Spring 2021

Submitted to Faculty Senate, May 2021
Global Campus Senate Advisory Committee

In the Spring 2021 Semester, in addition to individually consulting with faculty, program directors, heads, and in some cases deans in our respective colleges, Global Campus Senate Advisory Committee members Hudson, Rhoades, Bourget, DiRoberto, Michas, Milbauer, Nadel, and Stephan met with directors of three programs in three academic colleges with considerable overlap with UAGC offerings to conduct a preliminary assessment of how the new arrangement was working. The three were: Jeff Schatzberg of the Dhaliwal-Reidy School of Accountancy in the Eller College of Management, Lee Ryan, head of the Department of Psychology in the College of Science and Sheena Brown, director of Human Services Program in CAST. We also met as a committee with Vice Provost Craig Wilson, head of Arizona Online, after having also met with him in the Fall 2020 semester.

Meaningful Shared Governance

As emphasized in our December 2020 report, "meaningful shared governance depends on shared governance entities (i.e., the Faculty Senate and this committee) receiving timely and sufficient information from central administration to engage in substantive deliberation before decisions are taken, rather than simply being informed on policies or decisions after they have been implemented." We reiterate that point here, and amplify it by emphasizing the need for timely communication and deliberation about substantive matters between the senior leadership team (SLT) of University of Arizona, the faculty, program directors, and deans of the university as well as its shared governance bodies.

Up to this point, too many players who are key to making the arrangement between the University of Arizona (especially Arizona Online), University of Arizona Global Campus, and Zovio work are being left out of deliberations, planning, and implementation of key aspects of the articulation. This is not a matter of people in the University of Arizona wanting to block or oppose the arrangement; it is about allowing colleagues who have a direct stake in these matters to engage and to help optimize the situation for students, programs, faculty, and staff at both the University of Arizona and UAGC.

Moreover, the senior leadership team has been suggesting the idea, in several settings, of "assimilating" UAGC into the University of Arizona. We believe such a move should be the product of considered and extensive deliberation and subject to the policy of the shared governance bodies of the University of Arizona. We particularly believe that the prudent path is to analyze how UAGC is currently affecting University of Arizona programs, and we recommend assessing how UAGC's historical academic, ethical, and financial practices have improved before considering assimilation. We also think it is prudent to assess the financial health of UAGC before assimilation, particularly given that similar ventures have not had positive outcomes. For example, the most recent financial reports for Purdue Global suggest that three years after its formation, it is still losing revenues. We note as well that UAGC has still not received not-for-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service, and thus may still be a for-profit entity as of this report.

Follow through to our December 2020 report

Within Arizona Online, it is clear that there are some important steps that build on principles of our December 2020 report. Two key steps relate to marketing.

First, we applaud Vice Provost Wilson for forming teams within the University of Arizona to address marketing of Arizona Online programs, teams that in some cases include people from units with programs that overlap with UAGC's offerings. That is an important step in following through on our December report's recommendations (see Quality Principle 4). We recommend developing the inclusion of program directors and faculty from the academic units directly in marketing deliberations and planning.

Second, we applaud Vice Provost Wilson for working with UAGC staff to address marketing/recruiting concerns related to students' confusion about the differences between Arizona Online and UAGC. Again, this is a step in the right direction, beginning to address our December report's recommendations (see, for example, Quality Principles 1 & 4). We still have serious concerns, however, that prospective students may often be unclear about the difference between the two institutions and programs, believing that UAGC is simply another University of Arizona unit, no different from the rest of the University of Arizona. We recommend more strenuous, systematic follow-up on these matters, as suggested in our December 2020 report.

It is also clear, however, that the SLT has not acted on the recommendations of the December 2020 report, though at the time they seemed receptive to at least some of the recommendations. It is telling that the Joint Academic Advisory Committee—which several administrators have spoken about in the Fall as being forthcoming—is still "in process." (We nominated a former GCSAC committee member, Mike Staten, Associate Dean, CALS to be on that committee.) Even more telling is the fact that who will be on that committee is not clear to people integral to the situation, even at the level of deans. We also note that in our December 2020 report, we suggested that the JAAC would not be able to address the range of issues that this situation poses, which warrant serious, systematic attention.

Further, it is evident that little progress has been made with regard to the Governance and the Finance and Growth Plans principles and recommendations that were made in the December 2020 report. Neither faculty shared governance bodies nor most college deans are involved. We encourage all players to address the important strategic and synergistic issues surrounding Arizona Online and UAGC now, as recommended in our initial report.

As one final point, we note that when we expressed interest in the fall in meeting with then-interim President Paul Pastorek, Provost Folks discouraged a meeting with him, saying that he was only a temporary president concerned with overseeing the mechanics of the deal. We have since learned that he was reinstated as president of UAGC on February 9, 2021.

We have organized our follow-up report into four themes that consistently emerged in our meetings and conversations. And we emphasize again, our meetings were with program directors very much committed to making this relationship work in a "win-win" way for the University of Arizona and with UAGC. These are people who have invested enormous time in building quality Arizona Online programs and who are also deeply invested in students being optimally served by both entities. All felt largely left in the dark about a range of key policies and developments central to their own unit planning and strategy. In reporting this, we also want to

emphasize that all spoke well of their experiences with Arizona Online generally and were keenly interested in contributing productively to decision making at more senior levels of administration by providing insight, context, experience and relevant data.

Lack of Communication

The program directors we talked with were concerned about a lack of communication from the SLT about the new arrangement, especially its long-term strategy and goals and its day-to-day operations. Inquiries about meetings with UAGC counterparts were met with evasion, deflection and a lack of information, contradictory statements from the Provost's office, and disconcerting advice not to worry. Again, the formation of the Joint Academic Advisory Committee (JAAC) was held out as a forthcoming solution to the information and decision-making vacuum. But these program directors were largely in the dark about matters critical to their program operation, development, and growth in ways that will serve University of Arizona students, faculty/staff, and programs. It is obviously early days yet in the relationship between Arizona Online and UAGC, but this dearth of communication is deeply problematic, and is anything but a recipe for success.

Insular Decision Making

The lack of clear communication about matters important to the programs highlighted the problem of opaque decision making about articulation and coordination of competing programs, and even program development regardless of the UAGC competition. Our interviewees expressed in no uncertain terms their desire to collaborate productively for "win-win" solutions. Each was happy to talk with our committee, reporting that no one else associated with the UAGC articulation had contacted them or demonstrated any sustained interest in their perspectives or concerns. It became clear that program directors, department heads, and even most of the deans they report to and the Vice Provost of Arizona Online are out of the loop on coordination between University of Arizona and UAGC. The insularity of whatever decision making is taking place is hampering, even compromising the ability of people at the college and program level to do the sort of planning, program development, and accreditation work that is so fundamentally important to quality programs.

Confusion About Marketing

We acknowledge again the work of Vice Provost Wilson to address some marketing issues. But each program director was acutely worried about confusion in marketing caused by the use of the University of Arizona name and "block A mark" on UAGC's webpages. They are not afraid of competition, and indeed are used to it. The challenge is competing with "ourselves" (that is, with UAGC, which is perceived by many students and recruits to also be part of University of Arizona). In some cases, that was leading program directors to engage time and money in intensive counter-marketing. But all were concerned about the extensive resources and sometimes misleading marketing messages of UAGC/Zovio. Again, we acknowledge Vice Provost Wilson's efforts to address some of this through a common shared one-page sheet for advisors at UAGC and the University of Arizona to answer certain questions about differential routing for prospective students. But we note again, the need for the sort of oversight we called for in our report. We also note the need for at least some of the monies from the Ashford/UAGC/Zovio deal to go to marketing for Arizona Online and academic units with

overlapping programs. But, we emphasize, this is about more than just supplementing program marketing resources. Quality University of Arizona programs that have won trust, acclaim, high rankings and special accreditations are in danger of being critically undermined by UAGC's infrastructure of recruiters, advisors, and marketing resources (estimated to be at least ten times those of Arizona Online) and in the deploying of the University of Arizona brand in the service of a rival institution and rival programs notably lacking our programs' quality assurances.

Moreover, each of the program directors spoke to quality concerns for UAGC students in regard to particular programs and future employment. The time they had invested in quality Arizona Online programs that effectively prepare, graduate, and place graduates translated into genuine concerns about UAGC students. We believe, as our 2020 report emphasized, that the SLT needs to work in concerted, collaborative, and meaningful ways with academic colleges, departments, programs, and faculty to address these quality concern issues. And we believe as well that any strategic plan for Arizona Online should address its Vice Provost's clear understanding of the need for fuller infrastructure to support measured growth. We see no evidence of such planning by the SLT.

Any Consideration of Assimilating the Two Institutions Should be the Product of Extensive Shared Governance and Financial Analysis

We have heard from various sources of the idea being floated by the President that UAGC may be "assimilated" into the University of Arizona at some point in the future. We have heard no one speak positively about this prospect. While assimilation might ultimately, but not necessarily, benefit many UAGC students, we fear that it would undermine University of Arizona programs, degrees and the students we educate. The opposition of many faculty and administrators is clear. And it is understandable given that the pitch of this arrangement throughout has been that UAGC will be a separate institution with no impact on the University of Arizona. It seems clear such a decision may be in the works. It seems even more clear that it is premature, and that the prudent course would be to analyze over a period of several years the financial and academic viability of UAGC before considering any path to assimilation. We strongly encourage the Faculty Senate to actively take up this issue and possibility as a top priority for 2021-2022.