



FACULTY CENTER

1216 East Mabel Street  
PO Box 210456  
Tucson, AZ 85721

Ofc: 520-621-1342  
Fax: 520-621-8844

[facultygovernance.arizona.edu](http://facultygovernance.arizona.edu)

Jamienne Studley  
President, WASC/WSCUC  
1080 Marina Village Parkway, Suite 500  
Alameda, CA 94501  
Via Email

January 5, 2023

Dear Dr. Studley;

University of Arizona Faculty are asking why, after over a century of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the University of Arizona's senior leadership is suddenly, rapidly, and quietly—without Faculty Senate discussion, let alone approval—seeking to change our accrediting body from HLC to WASC/WSCUC. Neither of Arizona's other public universities is making the change. While both WASC/WSCUC and HLC are respected institutions, the Faculty has been bypassed in this important change.

As elected Chair of the University of Arizona Faculty, I share widespread concern regarding this change which calls into question the integrity of this accreditation process itself. The Faculty of the University of Arizona have come to know WASC/WSCUC primarily as the accreditor of Ashford/University of Arizona Global Campus (UAGC)—“our” highly controversial and demonstrably risk-laden affiliate—currently on WASC/WSCUC's list of institutions of concern. The perception that our institutional accreditation may be opportunistically driven by the UAGC situation is highly problematic.

Arizona is among the states that mandate faculty participation through elected representatives in the management and policy making of public universities. Per Arizona Revised Statute 15-1601B:

*“Subject to the responsibilities and powers of the board and the university presidents, the faculty members of the universities, through their elected faculty representatives, shall share responsibility for academic and educational activities and matters related to faculty personnel. The faculty members of*

*each university, through their elected faculty representatives, shall participate in the governance of their respective universities and shall actively participate in the development of university policy.”*

Over the past several years, the shared governance mandate has been ignored in major academic, educational, and faculty personnel decisions, so much so that in 2021, HLC scheduled a mid-cycle assurance review of the University of Arizona in 2025 in spite of its successful reaccreditation until 2030. Areas of ongoing concern include:

- The COVID furlough—the largest in the nation—and the unambiguous refusal of University administration to consider workforce-developed plans to return \$41M-\$44M unnecessarily swept from employee compensation in anticipation of an unrealized COVID-19 tuition shortfall;
- The 2020 Ashford acquisition and subsequent secretive integration projects of 2021 and 2022, despite the prior promise that Ashford/UAGC would never be integrated into the University of Arizona;
- Curricular and programmatic changes relating to the General Education program, Arizona International, and various restructurings and dual degrees pursued without consultation of the Faculty through its elected representatives;
- Systematic failure to address or resolve numerous personnel and student grievances resulting in federal civil rights, Title IX, and employment discrimination cases.

The pending application to WASC/WSCUC is an example of the failure of the University of Arizona administration to engage in good faith with the Faculty. Specifically, Provost Liesl Folks failed to present her reasoning and decision to apply formally to WASC/WSCUC in time for a Faculty Senate discussion. Provost Folks’s brief written report to the Senate in December 2022 merely mentioned the November 15, 2022 application submitted to your organization. There was no disclosure of the formal application of November 15, 2022 and no discussion with the elected faculty representatives in their shared governance capacity of the decision or the justification. Our only resource has been a set of “Frequently Asked Questions” containing substantive misrepresentations about shared governance participation in the decision and application process. For this reason, the application itself is compromised by a failure to engage in legally mandated shared governance processes. As with the problematic Ashford acquisition, the Faculty Senate was not timely or honestly informed, let alone consulted, and to this day has not heard or seen a substantive rationale for the proposed switch of accreditors, leaving many to speculate that this unprecedented move is driven by the needs of UAGC integration.

The breach of shared governance involved in the current WASC/WSCUC application process is part of a larger history of serious shared governance failures around UAGC which is imperative for WASC/WSCUC to consider. In addition to the exclusion of the Faculty Senate from the decision to change accreditors after over a century of accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission, Faculty concerns include:

1. A concern that WASC/WSCUC may be entangled in a *quid pro quo* or a conflict of interest due to its status as the accreditor for UAGC, currently on WASC’s list of probationary institutions. Clarity about the substantive reasons for and financial ramifications of an accreditation relationship with

the University of Arizona proper will be critical to dispelling this concern, and the administration has not shared that information with the Faculty Senate.

2. Without consulting the Faculty, the Board of Regents has promised President Robbins a \$45,000 incentive to *“complete the transition of the University of Arizona Global Campus (UAGC) as an affiliated partner to its final stage under the full authority and oversight of the University of Arizona by June 30, 2023. For purposes of this goal, the final stage includes **completion of accreditation** and establishment of an organizational structure.”* (emphasis added). This incentive structure constitutes a conflict of interest in itself as it will be perceived in the public eye that the President is guided by personal monetary gain in integrating UAGC into the University of Arizona as opposed to carefully considering and jointly discussing with shared governance bodies what is in the best interest of the institution.
3. To date, planning for this major educational and academic change has not included informing, deliberations with, or approval by the elected faculty governance body, the Faculty Senate. The administration disingenuously attempted to feign shared governance by hand-selecting a few faculty representatives with a history of not questioning administrative decision making to participate in task forces and working groups. The ongoing attempt to elevate individual faculty members who happen to be elected representatives but who do not share information with their constituencies and act only on behalf of the administration is an ongoing problem at the University of Arizona.
4. Blending hundreds of faculty, thousands of students and an estimated 800 staff of an institution whose management and recruitment tactics were recently sanctioned by a California court and whose former owner’s publicly traded stock dramatically declined in value as affiliation gave way to integration with the University of Arizona, is a risky operation to both UAGC and our University requiring enhanced, not streamlined, external oversight.
5. A concern that the timing of the WASC/WSCUC approval is determined by and harmonized to the administration’s undisclosed plans to fully incorporate UAGC as a branch campus by July 1, 2023.
6. A concern that the sudden and rapid switch of accreditors will have the effect of nullifying the Higher Learning Commission’s scheduled 2025 intermediate assurance review which may have been planned to assess progress in shared governance and legal matters concerning federal civil rights violations presented by elected faculty representatives to the HLC review team in 2021. The legitimacy of the accreditation process itself may be questioned if the institution escapes the scheduled reviews of one accreditor by seeking a new accreditor, which, in addition, is potentially “motivated” by being offered the prospect of evaluating the flagship public university in Arizona itself in addition to the troubled UAGC.

Given these antecedents, it is imperative that the Faculty Senate be promptly informed of WASC/WSCUC’s specific protocols for Faculty participation in the accreditation process. We have not been so informed by the President or his delegates. Recognizing that there is insufficient time in the rush to switch accreditors and that no Faculty Senate meeting is scheduled until January 23, 2023, please understand that any participation in a January 17-20th meeting can solely be for the purpose of receiving information on the accreditation process to convey to the Senate and the General Faculty. The

General Faculty is, thus far, not yet fully informed about nor formally represented in this accreditation process through its elected representatives and institutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leila Hudson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Leila Hudson

Chair of the Faculty

University of Arizona