



WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the President
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Faculty of Wright State University
c/o Wright State University Faculty Senate
3640 Colonel Glenn Highway
Dayton, Ohio 45435

Re: Faculty Senate Vote of Confidence / No-Confidence

Dear Colleagues,

On March 23rd, 2021, I was informed by Faculty Senate President Luehrmann that the Faculty Office had received the required number of signatures calling for a for a vote of confidence/no confidence. I understand the vote to be not binding and reported to the Board of Trustees.

Let me start by acknowledging and respecting the right of Faculty to initiate this process and the role the faculty senate plays in conducting the vote. I have read the petition and have been granted the opportunity to offer my rebuttal.

I will begin by saying I see a great deal of similarities between the information shared as justification for this vote and the criticisms levied directly against me by the AAUP-WSU leadership. I've made every effort to address those criticisms head on in numerous faculty senate meetings and my repeated WebEx sessions. Let me say again the allegations are inaccurate and while they may make great theater the information is purposely misstated and I see no productive value in again legitimizing them any further through this Faculty Senate process. Frankly, I see this action as another attempt to perpetuate the Union leadership's divisive and adversarial approach to its relationship with administration.

To echo the comments of the Board Chair, we need to hit reset and build a mature, productive working relationship among all university constituencies. I've been told that in the past, union leadership would meet with administration and have respectful conversations in private to reach agreement on issues. Then, the union leadership would criticize the administration in its public comments for political expediency. That behavior started us down the path of creating an inherent distrust in administration. The mistakes then made by prior administrations further solidified this distrust.

It now seems to me that vilifying the administration by attacking the professional and personal integrity of University leadership continues to be the modus operandi of AAUP-WSU leadership. The circulation of a petition which is the summary document of the unfounded criticisms made by several members of AAUP-WSU executive committee at multiple public forums is evidence of this behavior. This needs to stop for us to have a healthy and positive environment at this university. It is my utmost hope that the new

AAUP-WSU leadership will lead in a different way and value a mutually respectful relationship.

Having said that there is one thing in the petition I will strongly rebut. It is an accusation that I lied about a salary reduction. At the onset of COVID leadership, which included myself, Mr. Sample, Ms. Mickey-Boggs, Mr. Woolley, etc., volunteered to take a 20% reduction in pay. I am proud of the team for taking that cut. For deans and others who are primarily employed in faculty positions the reduction was 20% of their administrative stipend due to their faculty base salaries being protected by the CBA. This is a point I have stated in many forums previously. I am highlighting this point because the implication is I lied and misrepresented the compensation reduction I took. I take offense to that as it is an attack on my personal and professional integrity. Throughout my time here at Wright State, I have always been truthful and transparent, and I will continue to be so moving forward and I admonish those who continue to perpetuate this misrepresentation.

I joined Wright State in 2018 as executive vice president for academic affairs and provost. On a personal level I was drawn to Wright State because of the university's core values and dedication to students and was impressed how Wright State was serving its students and the region.

A faculty strike greeted me when I arrived and in October 2019, less than a year into my service at Wright State I received an unexpected call from the Chair of the Board of Trustees of WSU asking me to assume the operational duties of President of the University as the Board worked through a separation agreement with the incumbent President. In my conversation with the Board of Trustees at that time I said that the university had been damaged and needed to heal. It was my belief we needed to focus on recruitment, retention, and relationships. And in that light, it was important for them to understand just how personally committed I was to student success, especially in terms of retention, experiential learning, and high-quality classroom education.

The Board then installed me as the eighth President of the University in January 2020.

Well before my joining the Wright State family it is undeniable that the University had experienced a series of serious setbacks, which resulted in a damaged image and declining enrollment. That trend began in 2015 and unfortunately continues. As we all know enrollment is the lifeblood of an institution of higher education. Many of you have been here longer than I have and understand what contributed to the decline in enrollment. A federal investigation into H1-B Visa fraud, a failed Presidential debate, the removal of a president, the faculty strike, another presidential change and the resulting negative local media coverage are just some of the issues.

In March 2020, a short three months into my presidency, the entire world was faced with a global pandemic, one that was on a scale not faced in modern times. We had a great amount of uncertainty and anxiety on what the impact COVID would have on the country let alone the institution. We had at the onset no idea of the financial impact or support we might receive. We made difficult budgetary decisions and prepared for the worst, all the while hoping for the best. We also made the decision to focus on what we could control and that was the safety and well-being of our students, faculty and staff. We did see an impact of COVID through further decline in our enrollments in fall of 2020, having the smallest

incoming freshman class in recent history. COVID uncertainty did further impact our enrollment. Acknowledging that does not mean we are accepting defeat. It is merely another a challenge we will meet in our efforts to recruit every student we can to Wright State and then support them in every way we can so they will graduate and continue on toward professional success.

I walked into the presidency with a cabinet composed of many individuals with interim titles. University leadership searches have been conducted appropriately and we will continue to ensure that the right leadership will be appointed. As I have stated repeatedly, I have full faith and confidence in all members of the leadership team, I truly value all of their dedication and service to Wright State. Their entire focus is on our mission to educate and support our students and they are firmly committed to getting Wright State back on solid financial footing.

One of those interims was in the area of enrollment management. Dr. Paul Carney, the interim VP of Enrollment Management, had developed an enrollment management plan that I presented the executive summary of to the Board of Trustees at their April 2019 meeting. That's a date I'll never forget because it was the same day of my cancer surgery. That plan laid the foundation to which we've added additional efforts such as supporting the student driven Retain the Nine initiative, where we created 4 new student success coach positions to support retention. Since their appointment in late 2019 they have been instrumental in proactive interventions with struggling students. In an effort to bring permanence to the division we conducted a national search and appointed Mr. Rob Durkle, a life-long Daytonian who was overseeing enrollment at the University of Dayton. Sadly, Mr. Durkle suffered a severe injury that resulted in him stepping down from the position in October of 2020. Jen McCamis has stepped up and into the role on an interim basis and I assure my colleagues that stabilizing enrollment remains her and my top priority. I have and will continue to seek faculty cooperation in increasing recruitment and retention and in the 2020 budget had set aside funding to support faculty driven initiatives. In addition, as I highlighted at the March Faculty senate meeting, we have created a collaborative working group that will ensure cross campus coordination of all recruitment and retention initiatives with key objectives and metrics. I encourage individuals to review the actual efforts of our admissions team and to get involved. The more all of us understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of Wright State's position in an extremely competitive market and collectively work together toward a common goal, the greater the chances of our success.

I will make one comment about retrenchment. It is not triggered by the budget and the university's difficult decision to invoke retrenchment followed the AAUP-WSU's repeated refusal to meet and written statement that administration should follow the collective bargaining agreement. Having said that, it is clear enrollment declines are without dispute. Those of you teaching see first-hand the smaller class sizes we have today and it is understandable that faculty have concerns. I have been committed from the outset to ask the board to allow for alternate mitigation options and the separation incentive just approved by the board is a reflection of their willingness to acknowledge those requests. No leader desires to be at the helm of an organization that must reduce its employee ranks, whether staff or faculty. Yet, we must remind ourselves that many our problems are the

result of avoiding difficult decisions and kicking the proverbial can down the road. I am not that president and this is not that administration. We are committed to ensuring Wright State finds stability from which to grow and is here for many generations to come.

Wright State sits at the crossroad. This is an opportunity to remind ourselves why we are here, and that the true center of our collective universe is our students. We will not succeed without students who seek access to an exceptionally high quality affordable education here at Wright State. Like many of you, I will continue to focus on that and move forward.

In the mean time we have much heavy lifting to do with respect to getting this institution stabilized and operating successfully. I am committed to working with all those who share my passion for our students and who have an underlying love for Wright State to succeed.