

Faculty Petition to Conduct a Vote of No Confidence in Wright State University President Susan Edwards

President Edwards is the chief executive officer of Wright State University. As such, President Edwards is entrusted with promoting the interests of the entire Wright State University Community. This includes faculty, staff, administrators, and students. Notably, the most important aspect of President Edwards's position is upholding the primary mission of the University: education.

The University Faculty has lost confidence in President Edwards's ability to effectively lead Wright State University for the following reasons:

1. Enrollment at Wright State University, while it had declined some prior to her appointment as provost, not only continued to significantly decline, but has accelerated under her direction. She has not only shown the inability to effectively lead in the area of enrollment management, as the following examples demonstrate, but there is reason to believe that the recent acceleration of enrollment decline can be directly attributed to actions (or lack thereof) that Dr. Edwards has taken while in positions of leadership at the university:

a. Under her direction when Dr. Edwards was provost, Dr. Paul Carney, who was hired to oversee enrollment management, failed to create a comprehensive enrollment management plan for the university. President Edwards noted this would be an outcome when he was hired.¹

b. As president, Dr. Edwards temporarily replaced Dr. Carney with Mr. Craig Woolley, the university's Chief Information Officer (CIO). Mr. Woolley was not qualified for this duty, notwithstanding his significant primary responsibilities in his role as the university's CIO. The lack of a qualified, dedicated enrollment manager put additional stress on Wright State's efforts to recruit students. Moreover, the lack of qualified personnel with the requisite training and experience to lead our enrollment management efforts, most notably Mr. Woolley, led WSU to substantially overestimate the Fall 2020 enrollment decline by nearly double its actual amount. This was due to overreliance upon reports on higher education blogs, and a nearly complete lack of any professional analysis of local conditions.²

c. Despite President Edwards's "three Rs" of Recruiting, Retention, and Relationships, President Edwards refused to provide a copy of the university's written enrollment management plan to faculty who requested the document. University officials described it as a "trade secret,"³ when many other public universities post their enrollment management plans online, consistent with state-mandated open records requirements. When pressed to explain, President Edwards claimed that she had presented the enrollment management plan previously. This was not a written enrollment management plan, and those who recall the presentation noted it lacked any evidence or documentation as it was delivered in oral form. This gave rise to doubt that a formal written enrollment management plan actually existed.

d. It was not until January 2021 that President Edwards announced plans to form a working group tasked with improving recruitment and retention strategies at the university.⁴ This demonstrated her negligence and failure to swiftly act upon the most important issue facing the university.

2. Despite claiming to promote a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion, President Edwards promoted Mr. Greg Sample to the position of Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer in the Office of the President in a letter dated January 14, 2020.⁵ It is troubling enough that this position was filled without external or even internal competition, but it also occurred even after the troubling circumstances by which Mr. Sample became an employee of the university, as noted below:

a. Mr. Sample was initially hired into his position through a “named in grant” process, without going through a formal job posting, vetting of candidates using Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines, and a competitive interview process in which internal stakeholders may further evaluate candidates’ qualifications. Although the original circumventing of hiring procedures was not the fault of either Mr. Sample nor President Edwards, it is the responsibility of the university president to make every attempt to mitigate the problems engendered in a problematic hiring process by a previous administration by giving Mr. Sample’s promotion the legal cover of an open search following federal and state hiring guidelines.

b. The Ohio Inspector General’s investigation of WSU’s affiliated entity, Double Bowler Properties Corp, which was led by Mr. Sample, found that it “violated state law and improperly paid a former congressman for lobbying.”⁶ While this is not specifically a vote of no confidence in Mr. Sample, the university president should have more carefully considered the promotion of Mr. Sample, whose previous actions garnered the attention of the Office of Inspector General.

3. Further, despite President Edwards’s previous comments as provost, where she claimed that the Raj Soin College of Business Dean’s search needed to be national in scope in order to externally validate the university’s selection, she later selected Dr. Brian Rigling as Dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science with only an *internal* search. He was the sole applicant, and once again, the formal search and hiring process was circumvented.

4. The current Dean of CoLA, Dr. Linda Caron, was appointed by the previous provost, Dr. Thomas Sudkamp, despite the fact that the CoLA faculty twice rejected her as a candidate in open searches in 2012 and 2013. Then-Provost Sudkamp also appointed Dr. Carol Loranger as associate dean, even though she was an associate professor and thus less academically qualified compared to other potential candidates within CoLA. In 2019, the CoLA faculty held a vote of no confidence in Dean Caron and Associate Dean Loranger. Dr. Edwards ignored these votes of No Confidence in College of Liberal Arts Dean Linda Caron, as well as votes of No Confidence in Department of History Chair Dr. Jonathan Winkler and several other department chairs throughout the college.

5. President Edwards used deceptive language to announce temporary reductions in compensation for members of university management. In an April 20, 2020 letter to the campus community, President Edwards stated university management “has voluntarily agreed to take a 20 percent reduction in salary.”⁷ This reduction was not voluntary for many of the impacted employees. Further, the 20 percent reduction applied to stipends, rather than salary, which is an important distinction. In fact, many impacted by the reduction privately expressed their displeasure with President Edwards’s mischaracterization of the manner in which compensation was reduced.

6. President Edwards attempted to ignore the collective bargaining agreement between the university and AAUP-WSU, telling a meeting of the Faculty Senate the university did not need to negotiate a Faculty Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program (F-VRIP) with AAUP-WSU. This statement was contrary to the principles of collective bargaining, and indeed, President Edwards and the university were required to negotiate the F-VRIP with AAUP-WSU.

7. In a June 2, 2020 letter to the campus community, President Edwards wrote that “the current pandemic has disrupted Wright State University’s underlying financial condition,” and that “additional reorganization and reduction is necessary.”⁸ On that same day, Interim Provost Leaman released a “preliminary” plan to “consolidate seven of our existing colleges into four and reorganize many existing academic departments.”⁹

The release of this “preliminary” plan to develop “a new, refocused and vibrant Wright State” was hasty and haphazard. The “preliminary” plan was created without an analysis of the potential savings and/or costs, without a guiding vision for curricular changes, without an analysis of the potential impact on current students, and without a completed 5-year strategic plan for the university. Furthermore, Wright State Social Media posted the proposed reorganization on the university’s Facebook site,¹⁰ garnering confusion from students, some of whom thought programs were eliminated and/or courses would no longer be available. The hastiness with which the “preliminary” plan was produced is illustrated by the fact that on July 10, 2020, less than one month before the deadline for campus feedback, a “revised draft” plan was distributed.¹¹ While the two draft reorganization plans were released due to a stated need to “take immediate and decisive action to ensure that we can continue to fulfill our mission,” the plan was never finalized and was eventually abandoned. The uncertainty and chaos caused by these incomplete, and ultimately unnecessary plans, contributed to lower faculty and student morale, further injuring the university’s public image and contributing to declining enrollment.

8. Following a series of brainstorming sessions with AAUP-WSU in May 2020 that focused on soliciting ideas to address budgetary issues, President Edwards, acting in bad faith, led an attempt to mislead the AAUP-WSU into midterm negotiations without acknowledging the current contract as the default and with intention of imposing a new contract that would have allowed the university to terminate faculty if undisclosed voluntary separation targets were not reached. This single action, under the façade of friendly talks and under President Edwards’s direction, destroyed the morale of many bargaining unit faculty members, all during a time when faculty were preparing and delivering their courses in a remote learning environment due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, these actions eroded any trust that was beginning to be rebuilt between the bargaining unit faculty and administration after the strike. These actions effectively set back faculty/administration relationships and trust to the point just prior to the strike when the administration imposed a contract.

9. After claiming in informal meetings with AAUP-WSU in May 2020 that “retrenchment is off the table,” President Edwards invoked Article 17 (Retrenchment) in November 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, thus causing enormous stress and further distrust in President Edwards.

10. President of the Faculty Dr. Laura Luehrmann described morale as the lowest it has ever been during her comments to the Board of Trustees in December 2020, even prior to the 2019 AAUP-WSU strike.

11. Due to President Edwards’s evasive answers concerning possible faculty layoffs during the November 2020 Faculty Senate meeting, a Special Faculty Senate Meeting was convened on January 15, 2021. President Edwards used this opportunity to deceive and attempt to blame faculty for the university’s problems.¹² For example, Dr. Edwards cited a survey that claimed “constant protests in the news” as a primary reason prospective students did not attend the university. In terms of retention, “faculty” was cited as a reason students did not return to WSU. When pressed, Dr. Edwards admitted the survey response rate was approximately 10%. Other comments about faculty included “retain the good ones,” “current in the subject matter,” and “less core classes.” Finally, Dr. Edwards said that members of “our internal community” should “refrain from continual negative...comments” yet once the BoT made the retrenchment decision, all of the negative press was due to their decision and Dr. Edwards’s endorsement.

12. President Edwards failed to consider the livelihoods of 113 faculty members and the damage to academic programs when she accepted former Interim Provost Leaman’s retrenchment recommendations. In her letter to the Board of Trustees dated February 15, 2021,¹³ she purposefully embraced Provost Leaman’s recommendations while selectively including only the information from the Joint Committee on Retrenchment that agreed with her narrative. She discounted faculty expertise in organizational restructuring and layoffs, such as not laying off faculty during a time of budget surpluses and instead allowing voluntary

attrition to reduce staffing.¹⁴ Additionally, recommendations from academic program review committees, including chairs and deans, were not considered. Academic program review was a months-long process, and the recommendations were ignored. This is important because retrenchment will likely damage academic programs. Most reprehensible of all was that that former Interim Provost Leaman did not make recommendations regarding academic program review. In fact, the Higher Learning Commission noted, “An example of a completed review was not provided in the assurance argument,” and was “not accessible by the reviewers.”¹⁵

13. On February 17, 2021, President Edwards notified campus that she utilized the Registry to select an interim provost.¹⁶ Notably, President Edwards failed to disclose a prior vote of no confidence from faculty at the interim provost’s former institution. Further, the new interim provost knows nothing about Wright State, has no relationships with Wright State’s deans, chairs, nor faculty. It is clear that the new interim provost was hired to execute retrenchment without any knowledge of implications to the Miami Valley region. The selection also adds to the evidence that diversity, equity, and inclusion is routinely ignored, especially through the selective use of interim appointments.

14. Finally, since her arrival at Wright State, Dr. Edwards has degraded our academic mission. She has defended athletics while continuing to slash the academic budget. The “spectre” of planning the addition of three NCAA teams¹⁷ while retrenching faculty is further evidence of her misplaced priorities. In fact, her letter to the NCAA claims the Division I programs are “important to all of us – it helps give Wright State our identity.”¹⁸ She has assaulted faculty rights regarding intellectual property. She has failed to retain internationally prominent faculty (and their students). She has failed to make changes in academic unit leadership despite input from faculty. She has failed to appoint a permanent Vice Provost for Research and Innovation, a key indicator of her misplaced priorities. Importantly, she has no turnaround plan for Wright State University and has ignored numerous suggestions from faculty. Last, Dr. Edwards’s statements about diversity, equity, and inclusion are at strong odds with her record on diversity, equity, and inclusion as evidenced by the excessive use of interim appointments to circumvent the normal search process.

Collectively, this list of grievances speaks to the lack of integrity and leadership ability of President Edwards. Therefore, I hereby petition the Faculty Senate to call for a No Confidence vote in Wright State University President Susan Edwards.

[1] Retrieved from: <https://webapp2.wright.edu/web1/newsroom/2018/08/20/paul-carney-selected-to-oversee-enrollment-management-at-wright-state-on-interim-basis/>

[2] Wright State University Budget Presentation, June 19, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2020/Sep/meeting/Minutes%20Budget%20Meeting%20June%2019%2C%202020.pdf>

[3] Letter from Interim Provost Leaman dated November 30, 2020

[4] Email from President Edwards dated January 25, 2021

[5] Retrieved from: <https://esrati.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Greg-Sample-Pay-and-Promotion.pdf>

[6] Retrieved from: <https://www.daytondailynews.com/business/ohio-inspector-general-finds-wrongdoing-wright-state-real-estate-nonprofit/CwCeRTG8caD4G4rIYZLxM/>

[7] Email from President Edwards dated April 20, 2020

[8] Email from President Edwards dated June 2, 2020

[9] Email from Interim Provost Leaman dated June 2, 2020

[10] <https://www.facebook.com/WrightStateUniversity/posts/10157562933817736>

[11] <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/page/attachments/academic-reorganization-committee-report-2-2020-08-17.pdf> (Appendix C)

[12] https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2021/Jan/meeting/FacultySenate_PresidentSlides_2020-01-15.pdf

[13] <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2021/Feb/meeting/President%20BOT%20Recommendation.pdf>

[14] <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2021/Feb/meeting/FINAL%20Committee%20R%20Report%202-7-2021%20Signed.pdf>

[15] Higher Learning Commission Mid-Cycle Review final report dated August 17, 2020

[16] Email from President Edwards dated February 17, 2021

[17] Wright State University's Request to the Division 1 Council for a Waiver of NCAA Division I Bylaw 20.9.6 dated July 14, 2020

[18] President Edwards's letter to NCAA dated July 4, 2020