April 11, 2014

Ms. Amy Driscoll, Consulting Scholar
The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
51 Vista Lane
Stanford, CA 94305

I am pleased, Ms. Driscoll . . .

. . . to submit for your consideration The University of Akron’s application for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2015 Elective Community Engagement Classification. In 2008, we received classification for both Curricular Engagement and Outreach Partnerships; we are submitting the attached documentation for Reclassification.

My colleagues at the University have sought to demonstrate throughout the materials provided in support of this application the excellent work that has occurred since we first received this designation. While I shared with you in 2008 that engagement and reciprocity have been part of the University since its founding in 1870, the last 7-8 years have seen remarkable growth in community engagement and outreach within each of the colleges and units that comprise The University of Akron.

Community engagement is central to the University and to my role as president. As I have often said, “We are The University in, of and for Akron.” I have worked with the Mayor of the City of Akron, Don Plusquellec, the CEOs of Summa, Akron General and Akron Children’s Hospitals, the Austen BioInnovation Institute, and other key stakeholders to develop community partnerships which enhance economic growth and opportunity through neighborhood revitalization, the promotion of STEM initiatives, the enrichment of P-16 pathways—particularly with first-generation college students, and improvement in public health and well being. Since the last report, the University has worked vigorously to expand the concept of “community” from neighborhoods and cities to a regional identity for Northeast Ohio. The growth of the physical campus in metropolitan Akron was paralleled by a growing network of alliances, centers, and other initiatives intended to create and facilitate new opportunities for students, businesses, and institutions throughout the region.

The Akron Model, about which I have spoken many times in the United States and abroad, is a framework to engage the entire community in productive partnerships. The University of Akron works closely with major institutions throughout the NE Ohio, as well as with hundreds of local organizations and groups, to spark economic and community development progress and strengthen the interconnectedness of the University with the communities it serves.
In the period since our first application, The University of Akron has hired individuals whose responsibility has been to develop opportunities for partnerships with agencies and non-profits so that our students, faculty and staff can learn from the community while sharing our expertise with them. The report details numerous examples the substantive work that faculty and staff are accomplishing in cooperation with our community partners.

I am pleased to share with you that in 2013, The University of Akron was awarded a new federal distinction as an Innovation Corps (I-Corps) Site by the National Science Foundation, joining only two other universities in the nation to receive $300,000 to help cultivate the next generation of successful student entrepreneurs. Undergraduate and graduate students as well as professors have been working to develop viable commercial products from federally-funded research. We are very proud of how this program has helped our students and faculty quickly turn innovative research into a commercially viable product or service, and how students have been involved in this research.

As the campus community worked to develop our strategic plan—Vision 2020—which was approved by the Board of Trustees in 2012, and prepared our self-study which was submitted to the Higher Learning Commission of North Central Association of Schools and Colleges, it was clear that community engagement and partnerships contributed to the vibrancy of The University of Akron. This engagement drives the research that is conducted, the teaching that occurs not only in classrooms and laboratories, but in hospitals, community centers, schools, and other facilities in the Greater Akron area. We have aligned our budget priorities such that this work can be sustained into the future.

We are grateful for the opportunity to apply for the Carnegie Engagement Reclassification; this has provided UA an occasion to reflect upon and recognize the exceptional community engagement which we know is occurring on an on-going basis. Further, my colleagues have reflected upon what still must be accomplished as we benchmark our programs and practices. We will continue to build upon our work as we work to achieve the goals of Vision 2020. The programs, policies, projects, and initiatives included within this application are illustrative of the philosophy of engagement, reciprocity, and partnership which has characterized The University of Akron and its communities for almost 150 years.

With every good wish,

Sincerely,

[Signature]