



FORM

Institutional Response Form

Institution: University of Akron **Institutional ID:** 1599

Evaluation Type: Standard Pathway, Comprehensive Evaluation: Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation. A multi-campus visit will occur in conjunction with the comprehensive evaluation to Wayne College, 1901 Smucker Rd., Orrville, OH 44667.

Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation will include an embedded monitoring report on both shared governance and student learning assessment. Comprehensive evaluation to include a Federal Compliance Reviewer.

Date: 05/25/2017

Printed Name of President or Chancellor*: Mr. Matthew J. Wilson

Phone: (330) 972-7869 **Email:** mjwilson@uakron.edu

Signature of President or Chancellor:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew J. Wilson", written over a greyed-out rectangular area.

(*HLC expects the response from the President, Chancellor, or chief executive officer if a different title is used.)

Instructions for Submitting Response

1. This form, and an additional written response if you choose to include one, must be submitted electronically on the following webpage: http://www.hlcommission.org/document_upload/.

2. If you choose to write an additional written response, it should be in the form of a letter to the Institutional Actions Council, should not exceed five pages, and must be sent electronically with this form within the two-week timeframe.

If a response is not received within the two weeks, HLC will conclude that the institution concurs with the accreditation recommendation.

General Questions

Please indicate ONE:

- The institution concurs with the accreditation recommendations and chooses not to submit a further response.

- The institution concurs with the accreditation recommendations and has enclosed a written response (please return with this form).
- The institution does not concur with the accreditation recommendations and chooses not to submit a further response.
- The institution does not concur with the accreditation recommendations and has enclosed a written response (please return with this form).
- The institution does not concur with the accreditation recommendations and requests an in-person hearing in place of an Institutional Actions Council (IAC) meeting (see definitions below).

In-person hearings are restricted to specific types of evaluation recommendations by HLC policy. These are: reaffirmation of accreditation; biennial visits in candidacy; focused visits; and financial and non-financial indicator monitoring. All decisions regarding substantive change and staff recommended monitoring or changes to the Statement of Affiliation Status are not eligible for in-person hearings. *Pathways designations recommendations are not eligible for in-person hearings.* Contact your HLC staff liaison for more information. Fees for in-person hearings are found in the schedule of *HLC Dues and Fees* at hlcommission.org/dues.

Definitions

Institutional Response. HLC expects a written response from the President or Chancellor of an institution (or chief executive by a different title) within two weeks of receipt of an accreditation report or reaffirmation recommendation and provides the attached response form for this purpose. The institution may choose to include an additional written response in the form of a letter from the President or Chancellor to the Institutional Actions Council. These additional written responses should not be longer than five pages and must be received electronically with this form within the two-week timeframe.

Institutional Actions Council (IAC). The IAC is composed of Board-appointed peer reviewers and public members. The First and Second Committees of IAC conduct electronically mediated meetings and in-person hearings to review and act on accreditation recommendations.

IAC Meeting. IAC meetings consist of five or more members of the First or Second Committee of IAC, who read the full materials of the evaluation, discuss the findings, and act on the accreditation recommendations. IAC committees may agree with the accreditation recommendations they review or offer differing recommendations or decisions. The meetings are electronically mediated and held eight or more times per year. The majority of accreditation recommendations are reviewed at an IAC meeting. Exceptions include recommendations that are required by policy to be reviewed at an in-person hearing and recommendations that institutions request be reviewed at an in-person hearing instead of an IAC meeting.

IAC Hearing. In some circumstances, an institution may request or may be required to attend an IAC Hearing. IAC Hearings consist of five or more members of the First or Second Committee of IAC, who read the full materials of the evaluation, discuss the findings, and act on the accreditation recommendations. Conducted three times per year, IAC Hearings are held in-person and require the presence of institutional staff, HLC staff and evaluation team representatives. There is a fee for requested hearings. An institution that is considering an IAC Hearing should consult with its HLC staff liaison for more information, as not all accreditation decisions are eligible for review and action at a hearing.

IAC First Committee. Members of the IAC First Committee conduct meetings and hearings to act on accreditation recommendations. The First Committee is the initial group to review an institution's case

after an accreditation evaluation; the Committee may agree with the evaluation team's recommendation or it may offer a different recommendation or render a different decision.

IAC Second Committee. In some circumstances, institutions or HLC staff may request that the First Committee's decision be reviewed by the IAC Second Committee. Members of the Second Committee conduct meetings and hearings to act on accreditation recommendations forwarded on request or by policy after the action of the First Committee. The Second Committee may agree with the evaluation team's recommendation or First Committee's decision or it may offer a different recommendation or render a different decision. Institutions should consult with their HLC staff liaison for more information.



Office of Academic Affairs

Akron, OH 44325-4703

June 1, 2017

Dear HLC Institutional Actions Council Members:

The University of Akron (UA) is pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the recommendations made by the comprehensive evaluation team in its report based on our Standard Pathway year-four visit (February 13-15, 2017). First of all, the team members were well-chosen given the type of institution we are, the issues we have had which required HLC monitoring in the past, our more recent leadership issues, and our continuing enrollment and financial challenges. In addition, the team performed its review appropriately, professionally, and thoroughly, for which we are grateful.

Core Component 4.A.

With respect to Core Component 4.A. being met with concerns, we concur. Our previous program review process and committee was dominated by administrators, and due to lack of buy-in and clearly defined goals and outcomes, took many years to complete with little substantive change as a result. Our new program review process developed in Fall 2016 uses a faculty-driven model intentionally delegated to the UA Graduate Council (a body of elected faculty which reports to the Faculty Senate) by the administration in the interest of improved shared governance and to realize substantive results.

The Graduate Council presented its plan to the Council of Deans after review by the Provost. Deans were asked to nominate two individuals from each college, one with an undergraduate teaching emphasis and one with a graduate teaching emphasis. The deans were asked to make suggestions to the five-year cycle timetable if there were ways that it could work better for their colleges (e.g. synchronizing with discipline-specific accreditation cycles). This input led to a new process that also includes materials reflecting units' work in the area of assessment of student learning (not specifically included in the previous process).

The new process launched this semester (Spring 2017) with eleven departments under review. To-date, seven of eleven units in the first round of the process have submitted their materials: Biology bachelors, masters and doctoral (Integrated Biosciences), unaccredited; Chemistry bachelors, masters and doctoral, unaccredited; Math bachelors and masters, unaccredited; Sports Science and Wellness multiple bachelors and masters, CAATE; Social Work bachelors and masters, CSWE; Business and Information Technology multiple associates and bachelors, ACBSP. The submissions are being reviewed by the committee and outstanding reports from the College of Business Administration (bachelors and masters, AACSB) and College of Polymer

Science and Polymer Engineering (masters and doctoral, unaccredited) are being finalized. Reviews will be completed in Fall 2017 (including external reviews of our doctoral programs as required by the State) and eleven other units will prepare their materials for submission in Spring 2018.

Since this is a new process and we did have a hiatus period where no program reviews were ongoing, UA agrees that December 31, 2018 is an appropriate time for an interim report documenting that program review of all of our programs is underway, and in particular providing evidence of the review of undergraduate programs which do not hold specialized accreditation.

Core Component 5.A.

With respect to Core Component 5.A. being met with concerns, we concur. The enrollment declines over the past five years were exacerbated by a large drop in Fall 2016 in response to the public turmoil UA faced under the previous administration. These trends have significantly reduced our revenue while the cost of doing University business has increased and the State of Ohio has continued to freeze tuition and fees.

Nevertheless, within the last calendar year we have managed to completely change how we approach our challenges. Everyone with a stake in the future of UA is involved in our planning, and we have publicly acknowledged our situation and at the same time shared our transformation plan. As part of this plan, we launched the Transitions After Retirement Plan (TARP) in April 2017. This program, jointly crafted by Akron-AAUP and the administration, encourages faculty to retire but to also return on a part-time basis for agreed-upon (and paid) activities (e.g. teaching, running academic centers or institutes, service duties, etc.). In this way, we keep our valued senior faculty engaged with their departments and The University, preserve institutional knowledge and skill sets, and save money. This program has a rolling application window and in the first month seven faculty have applied and been approved. We intend for TARP to be in place on a go-forward basis to facilitate better department/school-level strategic budget and succession planning. It has been agreed that at least 1/3 of the net savings from TARP will be reinvested annually for new faculty hires.

In addition, based on recommendations by the Graduate Council and Faculty Senate in Spring 2017, we have reconfigured the model our Graduate School uses for funding graduate students, moving away from terminal master's programs having many of their students receiving full tuition waivers in addition to stipends. In addition, we are eliminating UA support of research assistants and expecting graduate students to graduate on time by placing a limit on the years of support they can receive from UA general funds. Of course, current students are held harmless, but beginning in Fall 2017 there will be a significant shift of our support for graduate programs aimed at: cost savings/revenue generation; a strategic focus on improving program and student quality; and targeted support of our research mission through doctoral programs.

We have also invested in personnel to grow our international student recruiting efforts and further the globalization of our campus, with the hiring of six personnel in Spring 2017. In addition, two more searches are in progress and two other employees have been reassigned to the effort, bringing the international team to a strength of ten FTE (vs. one FTE less than six months

ago). The renamed International Center has also been moved into the main administrative building, Buchtel Hall, one floor above that of the President and Provost, for both efficiency and symbolic reasons. Additionally, we launched the Akron Guarantee Scholarship (AGS) for undergraduates which takes effect Fall 2017. AGS guarantees scholarships for students as long as they remain in good academic standing, and upon completion of certain milestones the award amount increases – specifically after earning 30, 60 and 90 credit hours, the scholarships go up. This is intended to encourage students to enroll in enough courses each semester so as to finish on time, and to improve retention by incentivizing course completion and progress to degree. Being that our State subsidy for undergraduates is now dependent solely on course and degree completion, AGS will also help us grow revenues via the State allocation process.

Finally, the University Council (UC) Budget and Finance Committee proposed a new model for our budget planning process, also in Spring 2017. This process has been endorsed by UC and approved by the administration. We now have a robust model through which to involve all campus constituents in our financial planning. This, in conjunction with the UC Facilities Planning Committee, should also help us determine how to address our deferred maintenance issues. It should be noted that we anticipated tapping into reserves on the order of \$18 million this fiscal year (FY17) to balance our budget. However, due to the collective efforts of units across the campus to limit or eliminate truly unnecessary expenditures, to strategically eliminate vacant positions and only hire where absolutely critical, and to do more with less in terms of staff and resources, we are now projecting that number to be around \$10 million. We all know that we have a serious challenge in FY18 with enrollments projected to be down by 5%, but we also know that if we adhere to the transformation plan we will stabilize, invest and grow.

Therefore, since we are currently still in the process of addressing our financial challenges via our transformation plan, UA agrees that December 31, 2018 is an appropriate time for an interim report documenting that we have stabilized our on-going financial resource base funding and developed a long term plan for funding maintenance and repair of our facilities.

Core Component 5.B.

The site-visit team finds Core Component 5.B. to be met with concerns, and recommends an interim report documenting that we have continued to rapidly act on our plans for improving shared-governance structures and communication. We concur with this recommendation. As should be clear from our responses above, we are certainly continuing to improve our communication and involve all of our governance groups and at-large constituencies in our collective efforts to improve our situation.

In addition, the Board of Trustees held its second public information session in April 2017, and has officially appointed liaisons to the University Council and Faculty Senate meetings (with alternates) who report out during Board meetings. In actuality, additional Board members have also been attending these meetings so they can better understand campus issues. The June 2017 Board meeting will include a public presentation on the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering – our world class research unit, which is perceived by many campus constituents to be highly subsidized. This presentation will inform and communicate facts about the college, similar to what occurred in February 2017 about Athletics. These and many more activities

aimed at improving shared governance and communication are now institutionalized and will continue.

We do note the comments in the team report about how we form search committees for hiring our President and Provost. For many years our Board of Trustees has served as the search committee for these two important positions, including formally soliciting input from elected representatives of all major governance groups. This process is embodied in our rules and in our AAUP collective bargaining agreement (i.e. the process has been mutually agreed upon with the faculty). The process has worked well for UA, with Dr. Proenza serving 15 years as former President before stepping down, and former Provost Sherman serving six years before he retired. We all know that President Scarborough's tenure as President was disruptive and short-lived, but that does not mean that our mechanism for filling these positions is invalid. We have a process in place in our rules and our collectively-bargained faculty contract to involve all campus constituencies in these important hires, and we follow it.

Sincerely,



Rex D. Ramsier
Senior Vice President and Provost
HLC Accreditation Liaison Officer