

Auburn University

Edward R. Richardson, Interim President

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Response to Report of the Special Committee
(September 18-20, 2005)

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CS 3.2.1 (Governance and Administration): The governing board of the institution is responsible for the selection and the evaluation of the chief executive officer.

Commission's Request: The institution should provide a report on progress concerning the search for a president.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE OBSERVATIONS:

Although the Special Committee acknowledges that the original request was a suggestion and not a formal recommendation, "the Special Committee encourages the Board of Trustees to provide the Commission on Colleges, prior to the Commission's December 2005 meeting, information concerning the decisions that are made at the October and November Board meetings concerning the plans and schedule of activities for the presidential search" (Report of Special Committee (September 18-20, 2005, p. 4)).

UPDATE AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE:

At the September 16, 2005 meeting, the Board of Trustees appointed Korn/Ferry International as the presidential search firm. On October 5-6, 2005, Dr. John Kuhnle, Managing Director, and his associate, Ms. Elizabeth Dycus, were on the Auburn University campus to interview various constituencies including administration, faculty leadership, professional staff, and students to ascertain their perception of the current state of the University. In addition to the interviews, Dr. Kuhnle requested copies of all University documents related to the SACS Self-Study and reports from the visiting committees.

At the October 28, 2005 meeting of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Kuhnle presented the conclusions of his review and recommended that the University retain an outside consultant to conduct a comprehensive review of the state of the University prior to

proceeding with the search. At the October 28, 2005 meeting, the Board agreed to invite Dr. James L. Fisher, the consultant recommended by Dr. Kuhnle. According to the biography provided to the Board by Dr. Kuhnle, Dr. Fisher has been “a consultant to more than 300 colleges and universities and is the most published writer on leadership and organization in higher education today.” Dr. Fisher is scheduled to attend the November 17-18, 2005 meeting of the Board of Trustees to provide a report outlining the process for the review prior to the Board voting on the resolution to retain his services. Among the Board materials in preparation for the November 17-18, 2005 meeting is a resolution entitled “Proposed Approval of a Nationally Recognized Consultant to Conduct a Comprehensive Review of the State of the University.” Dr. Kuhnle also reported that “If my recommendation is accepted, I will vigorously continue the necessary groundwork for the search while the review is underway. Once a review of the university is completed, its recommendation thoughtfully considered, and a search committee appointed, I will move with all deliberate speed to bring the process to a speedy conclusion” (Memorandum to Auburn University Board of Trustees, October 28, 2005).

Since the filing date for this response is prior to the November 17-18, 2005 meeting of Board of Trustees, no further documentation is available concerning actions taken at the November meeting.

CS 3.2.3 (Governance and Administration)

The institution should provide a report on the results of the review by an external body of possible conflicts of interest in relation to the Code of Ethics and whether the board of trustees has followed its own policies.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE OBSERVATIONS:

After making several advisory comments, the Special Committee finds Auburn University in compliance and concludes that “the above comments do not imply that there is a real problem, in regard to conflict of interest among board members at Auburn University, but only that the matter continues to influence the perception of people in regard to how the University operates” (Report of Special Committee (September 18-20, 2005, p. 5)).

INSTITUTIONAL COMMENT:

Auburn University concurs with the Special Committee’s conclusion quoted above.

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CS 3.2.10 (Governance and Administration)

The institution should provide a report on the periodic evaluation of the president.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE OBSERVATIONS:

Although the Special Committee finds the institution in compliance, “the Special Committee concludes that the presidential assessment completed this year and noted above was, at best, a limited performance assessment of a university president” (Report of the Special Committee (September 18-20, 2005), p. 5). In addition, the Special Committee “strongly encourages the institution also to develop and implement a comprehensive and effective system for the ongoing evaluation of all levels of administrators” (Report of the Special Committee (September 18-20, 2005), p. 6).

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE:

In developing its assessment and evaluation procedure, the Board of Trustees principally used two publications from the Association of Governing Boards: Merrill P. Schwartz, *Annual Presidential Performance Reviews*, Washington, D.C., Association of Governing Boards, 2001 and Richard T. Ingram and William A. Weary, *Presidential & Board Assessment in Higher Education*, Washington, D.C., 2000. The procedure developed by the Association of Governing Boards distinguishes between two types of presidential assessments: the annual review and the comprehensive review. The annual review covers a period of one year whereas the comprehensive review covers a five to seven year period (Schwartz, p. 6). The annual review involves the trustees and the president whereas the comprehensive review includes input from the trustees, president, outside consultant, faculty, staff, students, and other selected constituencies (Schwartz, p. 6). In terms of criteria and evidence, the annual review incorporates “self-assessment statement, goals from previous year, input from selected trustees” whereas the

comprehensive review incorporates “self-assessment statement; all previous reviews; extensive examination of documents and interview data from trustees and a range of constituents regarding the president’s performance, institutional priorities” (Schwartz, p. 6).

Since Dr. Richardson had been in office for only fourteen months and the University was in the process of laying the groundwork for the presidential search for which Dr. Richardson publicly announced that he would not apply, the Board of Trustees conducted an annual review, which by its very nature is more limited in scope and does not involve feedback from various constituencies. Although Mr. McWhorter, President Pro-tempore of the Board, appointed three trustees, Dr. Dwight Carlisle, Mr. Jack Miller, and Ms. Virginia Thompson, to conduct the review, the full Board did have the opportunity to comment upon Dr. Richardson’s performance since Mr. Paul Spina, Chair of the Executive Committee, made a motion to report on the Presidential Assessment at the Regular meeting as reported in the June 17, 2005 Minutes of the Board provided to the Special Committee at the time of the visit.

Following the procedure outlined by the Association of Governing Boards, the Board will also conduct a comprehensive performance assessment as distinguished from the annual presidential performance assessment as reflected in the pertinent excerpts from the Resolution on Proposed Presidential Assessment approved at the April 22, 2005 meeting of the Board of Trustees:

RESOLUTION

PROPOSED PRESIDENTIAL ASSESSMENT

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees of Auburn University will perform annually a Presidential Performance Assessment; and

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WHEREAS, within five years of the appointment of the next President, a comprehensive assessment will be conducted.

In terms of the ongoing evaluation of all levels of administrators, Auburn University did not address this issue in the Second Monitoring Report since it was not requested in the January 6, 2005 letter from the Commission. The institution is in the process of implementing a new performance evaluation system for staff and administrative professionals that should address this observation. For details, see the following website:

http://www.auburn.edu/administration/human_resources/compensation/ccp/pmpilot.htm.

In addition, the institution provided documentation relative to the evaluation of academic administrators in the *Addendum* to the *2003 Self Study for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*.