

Dear Colleagues,

At his meeting with the faculty this past Tuesday (March 28), Keith Eigel encouraged concerned faculty members to contact Belle Wheelan, the president of SACSCOC, to engage in a conversation about what ordinary faculty members can do to try to contribute to a healthy governance culture. Dr. Wheelan was eager to meet, and yesterday (March 30) Andrew Douglas and I sat down with her for a brief conversation. We wish to share a couple of items learned.

First, we note that Dr. Wheelan has offered to meet with the entire faculty. President Wilson has extended a formal invitation and Dr. Wheelan will be on campus to dialogue with the faculty next Thursday, April 6 (time and location TBA).

This meeting will give every faculty member an opportunity to ask questions and it will give Dr. Wheelan an opportunity to answer any questions about best practices in board governance. We wish to share a couple of revelations, which we hope will initiate a faculty dialogue in preparation for the meeting next Thursday.

Dr. Wheelan revealed to us that she knows a great deal about how our Board operates. And she was quite frank in her assessment of how our Board is and has been in violation of several SACSCOC principles, including “core” principles. She referenced, in particular, what both AGB and Eigel have described as the “insider group” that controls the Board—this practice is a violation of SACSCOC “core” principle 2.2. She also expressed concern about how the Chairman has interfered in the management of the College—a violation of principle 3.2.6. For an explanation of SACSCOC principles, see: <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Resource%20Manual.pdf>. (Though it did not come up in the conversation yesterday, the Board would appear to be in violation of: 3.2.1 (which deals with how the Board evaluates the president); 3.2.3 (which deals with conflict of interest practices and policies); and 3.2.12 (which deals with the Board’s support for the president’s fundraising activities).

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Dr. Wheelan described her own knowledge of what has transpired over the past few years. And she said that recent media attention, as a “significant event,” will trigger a SACS investigation. The College should receive a letter shortly, and will then have 30 days to respond. The point of an investigation, she noted, is not to punish the College but rather to help the College, or in this case the Board, get its practices in line with SACSCOC principles before certification is due in the fall. So, for the sake of the College, it is a good thing to be under this kind of formal scrutiny right now.

It should be noted that if, at the time of our certification next fall, the Board is found to be in violation of any core principles, the College can be put on immediate probation. It should be stressed, too, that the Board must demonstrate not only that its Bylaws are consistent with SACSCOC principles, but also that its practices are, and have been, consistent as well.

It is likely, that the College will be put on probation as a result of the way that our Board has operated over the past few years. This is a critical time for the faculty to step up and pressure the Board to correct itself. To that end, we encourage each of you to attend the meeting next Thursday and ask any questions. The April Board meeting will take place immediately thereafter, on Friday and Saturday (April 7-8).

Thank you and I will update the faculty once the time and location of Dr. Wheelan’s visit has been confirmed. Have a good weekend,