

**Clarion University of Pennsylvania**  
**President Karen Whitney**  
**Triennial Review – February, 2013**

**Review Committee Preface**

This Presidential Triennial Evaluation Committee is comprised of Council of Trustee Chair R. Lee James, Student Trustee Darren Young, and Trustees JD Dunbar (Committee Chair), Jim Kifer, and Syed Ali-Zaidi. The Chancellor's office was represented by Gary Dent. Approximately 40 people participated in constituent interviews. A consultant provided prodigious notes and structure for this collaborative document.

**Executive Summary**

Upon retirement of its last President, Karen Whitney was appointed as Clarion University's new leader in 7/2010. President Whitney's credits, included in her last evaluation cycle, described her as the "Personable President," and she has continued as "Listener-In-Chief" to promote ownership among all constituencies. She is responsible for a refreshed statement of institutional mission, vision and values which she followed with strategic direction and publication of Strategic Goals for 2012-2017 [see [www.clarion.edu/planning](http://www.clarion.edu/planning) or [www.clarion.edu/183723](http://www.clarion.edu/183723)]. President Whitney is deeply engaged in this leadership direction and emphasizes individual responsibility, accountability, measures and assessments in meeting expected results. A summary of Clarion University and President Whitney's progress on this plan may be seen in the 500 Day Plan V.1 and V.2 where the reader will discover priorities in student, faculty and staff success, creation of equitable and diverse environments, civic engagement, assurance of confidence building, leadership performance, and financial sustainability. The PASSHE presidential process incorporates campus strategic plans and accomplishments referred to above, conclusions from the Systems Accountability Report, recent accreditation feedback and constituent comments as follow.

System Accountability Report: Clarion's results are evaluated as measured against its established targets. Overall System Accountability results for Clarion are positive. Highlights from the 2011-2012 statistical report indicated needed focus on:

- Enrollment, persistence and graduation rates of students particularly at the undergraduate level. Specifically, attention is needed to accomplish the target six (6) year undergraduate graduation rate. The African American retention goal was not met.
- Employee diversity; hiring of female faculty as targeted was unmet as was the goal for tenure/tenure track terminal degreed faculty. Hiring of female and minority non-faculty should receive extra attention as vacancies occur and are funded.
- Fund raising is an important target for additional effort and financial sustainability.

Middle States Accreditation: Clarion University was reaffirmed in its accreditation mid-year 2012 with only two recommendations for University follow up. These are:

- Assessment of student learning, and
- Institutional effectiveness measurement.

## **Constituent Input**

**Summary of the Constituent Input Process:** President Whitney is highly regarded by the great majority of those providing input to this report. Many perceive her impact on the image and real quality of the University as transformative. Most constituent participants who spoke were able to name specific positive examples of the President's leadership. They report that Whitney brings a sense of continued quality and stability to the University including personal attributes of engagement, energy and analytical intelligence. Her processes for renewing Clarion's mission and vision are viewed as deliberate, clarifying and encouraging. She emphasizes the need to expand enrollment, invest in strategic academic programming while stabilizing and diversifying finances. Work remains to be done to bring some in the academic community to the level of excitement needed to be successful in Clarion's academic initiatives. Disagreement with the new funding model – RCM (responsibility center management) and "retrenchment" discussions are the root of this tension. President Whitney will need to work with the Provost to expand efforts and contact with the deans, chairs and faculty to develop the academic platform needed for transformation.

President Whitney enjoys substantial constituent support with consistent agreement on institutional successes. These successes and a few opportunities for growth are congruent with those reflected in the Systems Accountability Report, the recent accreditation report, and the President's own reflections. This summary, drawn from constituent input, has been organized into responses to formally posed questions. Each summarized question is followed by related accomplishments and opportunities for growth. Quotations from constituent feedback are included to enhance meaning.

Summarized questions and comments given by constituents during this review follow:

---

**Question #1: Does Clarion University under the leadership of President Whitney have a well-communicated vision for, commitment to, and achievement of academic and organizational excellence? What are the greatest advances identified for Clarion University and President Karen Whitney during this evaluation period?**

***Strengths and accomplishments:***

- Refreshed and formally communicated University mission, vision, and strategy.
- Implemented departmental funding structure (RCM) in troubling economic times.
- Moderated the impact of reduced State funding thereby reducing needed retrenchment.
- Completed Middle States Commission on Higher Education re-accreditation review.
- Most constituents report being confident in Clarion's ability to succeed with renewed strategies and budgeting approach assuming these are well articulated.
- Implemented micro-project funding.
- Obtained an electron microscope supporting the sciences from a \$353,530 grant from the National Science Foundation. This brings a new era of science and technology evaluation, work force development, and implementation research to the university. This is the first of PASSHE schools to trumpet such a development and will likely impact student recruitment.
- Investment for facilities: building, maintenance and student residence.
- Improved community and state relations.
- Refreshed web presence and strengthened the marketing plan.
- Engaged "Presidential Commissions" to address important University initiatives.

- Re-branded the Venango Campus to Venango College.
- Promoted community and civic involvement by university constituencies with herself as prime example.
- Engaged students and campus in blue and gold eagle "spirit."

***Opportunities for the future:***

- Collaborate with the Provost to maximize Deans, Chairs and faculty roles in positive contribution to shared leadership.
- Evaluate and address current concerns about RCM and Budget Review Implementation Committee (BRIC). Examine the effectiveness of structure and minimize resulting negative competition in funding.
- Define areas of expansion and contraction; clarify their fit to the strategic plan.
- Provide resource support for important initiatives.
- Help to ensure that campus based retail outlets compliment rather than compete with local merchants.
- Employ consultation, communication, and change planning to address fears. There is consternation about new hires and promotions which may be addressed through more effective communication channels.

***Related quotations:***

- The faculty state concern about "retrenchment" and the related RCM "formula."
- "Absolutely the right leader for Clarion."
- "She is our 'hub.'"

**Question #2: To what degree does President Whitney set the leadership tone for Clarion University? How does she demonstrate commitment to public higher education in the region and state? How well does President Whitney meet Council of Trustees' expectations?**

***Strengths and accomplishments:***

- She is very visible, earnest and genuine, and demonstrates strong people skills. She is by most, trusted and trusting; appreciated and appreciative; thoughtful and responsive.
- Pres. Whitney is viewed as hard working, open, welcoming, comfortable, unflappable, issue driven and willing to listen.
- Whitney seeks to be transparent and approachable.
- She is data driven and focuses on measurability.
- A scorecard for measuring University effectiveness has been developed and implemented.
- She emphasizes and attempts to equally value faculty, staff and students.
- President Whitney implemented week-end activities for students improving their on-campus presence.
- Holds high expectations for the University, herself and Clarion colleagues.
- Faculty attending evaluation expressed concern that the new budgeting model applied to academic priorities is, in some instances, destructive to current programs.
- President Whitney is very visible in the community, PASSHE and at the state level.
- Builds the town gown relationship and attends Borough meetings and local events.
- Those stakeholders external to the University, as well as most internal constituents, are exceptionally pleased with her availability, presence at their meetings and contributions to their efforts.

***Opportunities for the future:***

- With the Provost, build a strengthened relationship to the faculty.
- Examine course utility for low enrollment or high demand [i.e., Speech Pathology].
- Increase risk acceptance for disagreement and debate.
- Examine ratios of staff to those served to ensure appropriate staff loads in Admissions and Financial Aid.

***Related quotations:***

- "She hit the ground running."
- "She is a fearless optimist." "Stellar." "Tremendous." "Fantastic."
- "I love her leadership style; she addresses us by name; she knows who we are."
- "She is entrepreneurial in the best sense of the word."
- "Her goals are our goals."
- "Avoid surprising a Trustee member."

**Question #3: Describe the effectiveness of President Whitney's internal and external communication and her effectiveness in building relationships.**

***Accomplishments:***

- Communicated, through a new brochure, mission, vision and strategic plan for Clarion.
- Values broad input. All evaluation input groups except for faculty report highly effective communications.
- Staff, students and community experience Whitney as high impact, having great vision, focused on advancement of the University, hopeful about high quality programs, open minded and solution oriented.
- Sets strong example of Clarion spirit; refreshed campus branding and established the Eagle's Nest.
- Seeks brevity, transparency and responsiveness.

***Opportunities for the future:***

- Increase communication effectiveness with the faculty through and with the Provost and individually.

***Related quotations:***

- "She clearly communicates messages she wants to reach every level of the University."
- "Shares information from PASSHE and the Chancellor to all related audiences."
- "Transparent," "she keeps us informed." "Posted documents we've never seen before on the web."
- She asks, "What can we do together?" "A true community partner."
- "Demonstrates "spirit." "Inspiring – role model." "Visibly joyful."
- "Some of her executives do not carry her message well."
- "We should hear 'what' and 'why' from the President, not read it in the paper first."
- "We are not sure the multiple surveys we receive are confidential."

**Question #4: What would you like to see President Whitney emphasize as achievable University goals during the next review period?**

*Opportunities for the future:*

- Ensure executives and deans adoption of defined strategy and oversee they integrate their leadership and communication to those purposes.
- Incorporate results of the re-accreditation regarding assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness in the strategic plan and initiatives. [See Middle States Commission on Higher Education reaffirmation of accreditation dated 6/29/12 and received by the University on 07/02/2012].
- Research disciplinary curriculum needs and plan with the Provost, deans and faculty to close gaps and prioritize academic investments.
- Clarify the RCM role in creating investment funds and flexibility.
- Increase student applications, enrollment, retention and graduation rates.
- Stabilize institutional revenues.
- As tuition rises over time, be vigilant as to the affordability of education at Clarion.
- Strengthen student advising; consider student advisors under tutelage of senior faculty.
- Consider adding "certificate" programs and expanded internship opportunities for the advantage of students and employers.
- Clarify her role with the Foundation and become a partner in fund raising efforts.
- Continue to build the leadership team.

*Related quotations:*

- "We need financial support for our academic curricula."
- "The funding formula is just wrong." "What are our funding priorities?"
- "Budget Review Implementation Committee (BRIC) is neither uniformly applied, nor applied based on the defined rules."
- "Why are we replacing one person with two when we are in financial trouble?"

**Notes:** Work remains to be done to bring some in the academic community to the level of acceptance needed to be successful in Clarion's academic initiatives. Disagreement with the new funding model – RCM (responsibility center management) and "retrenchment" discussions are the root of this tension. President Whitney will need to work with the Provost to expand efforts and contact with the deans, chairs and faculty to develop the academic platform needed for transformation.

**Question #5: What might you hope to see President Whitney develop further in her own leadership style or effectiveness over the next review period?**

*Opportunities for the future:*

- Build and maintain a personal relationship to the faculty without weakening the Provost's role.
- Plan and develop personal fund raising skills and relationship with potential donors.
- Visit the academic colleges, attend faculty events and invite related meetings.
- Build understanding and trust between faculty and University leadership.
- Develop partnership and common objectives with the Council of Trustees with the purpose of becoming highly effective mutual partners at the macro level. Minutes of the Council of Trustees already give evidence of strong mutual contribution to guidance of the University and focus on highest priority agenda items.

- There is an expressed concern that in President Whitney's zeal and velocity for her work that she also nurtures professional development and personal life/work balance.

### **Synthesis**

A university president lauded as "unburdened by ego" and a standard bearer for being "all about deliverables" accelerates Clarion's Mission, Vision, and Values. As in the last evaluation period and related to the climate of change, there is "rust in the trust pipes" relative to RCM and the cabinet level administrative communication channels as appearing "not to match." Dr. Whitney is to be commended for common levels of community citizenship that create uncommon currents of respect based on her outreach. Her "spirit" example of enthusiasm is contagious and empowers employees. Students especially embrace a leader unafraid to wear the University's colors and logo regularly, literally "wearing her heart on her sleeve." Her presentations target her audiences with commensurate vigor.

### **Conclusion**

President Karen Whitney is well on her way to being a highly effective and respected leader of Clarion University. She is admired and asked to lead within PASSHE and its presidents. She has been particularly effective in building student, staff and community relationships, establishing a clear mission, vision and strategic plan and instilling refreshed "spirit." Whitney has work to do in building an engaging and productive relationship with some faculty in partnership with the Provost. The Council of Trustees wishes to recognize her successes to date with contract renewal and positive salary consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "R. Lee James", written over a horizontal line.

R. Lee James  
Chairman, Clarion University Council of Trustees

2/19/2013