

**Clarion University of Pennsylvania**  
**President Karen Whitney**  
**Review of President by Trustee Evaluation Committee**  
**2/20/2014**

**Review Committee Preface**

The Presidential Evaluation Committee is comprised of Council of Trustees Chair Jim Kifer, Immediate Past Chair Trustee R. Lee James, Vice-Chair JD Dunbar (Chair of Review Committee), Secretary Milissa Bauer; Trustees Syed Ali-Zaidi, Jeff Szumigale and Darren Young, Student Trustee. We considered the evaluation of the President relative to annual scope of work as well as structured constituent forums with approximately 40 individuals, including a committee meeting with the President.

**Executive Summary**

Selected to lead Clarion University in July of 2010, Dr. Whitney was heralded as a "change maker." She immediately began to address, "data driven decisions relative to economic indicators."

What was characterized as, "perilous economic shifts," was underlined by a devastating decrease in funding. Her earliest public profile chronicled her, as "Personable President," and subsequently, "Listener-In-Chief." The descriptor that surfaced most recently and in several reports was "courageous in the face of tough challenges." Clearly, challenge and change, "the perfect storm of sagging economies and declining enrollment," can contribute to low morale but we did not hear this across all levels of CUP audiences. Community as well as some university representatives noted that the Workforce Plan, "is necessary and overdue" and is being used as a model. Reviews of the Rural Development Conference, the PACT conference (hosted by Clarion University) and President Whitney's positive public profile as an "earnest, visionary leader" in PASSHE groups and committees all contribute to this evaluation.

There are many points of pride that may not often surface during what Dr. Whitney characterized as a "watershed year of challenge, planning and change." But they did. Hosting the Fall 2013 PACT conference was a special engagement of PASSHE staff, chancellor and trustees across the state system. It is clear to our Council of Trustees who were largely engaged during this process that Dr. Whitney is a respected leader and is highly regarded by other state system trustees and PASSHE leadership. In recognition of the need for increased effort relative to the retention rates of African American male students, a new CUP initiative was launched. The Golden Eagle Men's Success (GEMS) program had a measureable impact for the Fall Semester of 2013, with a retention rate of 95%.

There were other areas of achievement detailed in the System Accountability Report as well as areas that need attention.

## **2012-2013 System Accountability Results (SARS)**

Clarion University met targets in 16 out of 23 measures. This earned \$2 million dollars in performance funding (an increase of 9.34% over previous year.)

### **Accomplishments (SARS)**

- Number of degrees awarded that were STEM and Health Degrees
- Percent of Full-Time Tenure/Tenure Track Faculty Who Are Female
- Faculty and Staff Productivity (student credit hours to fulltime faculty and staff)
- Amount of Annual Private/Philanthropic Support

### **Measures to Address (SARS)**

- Student Enrollment
  - degrees conferred
  - Freshman achievement
  - student retention

## **Constituent Input**

The triennial review for President Whitney from February of 2013 indicated, "Work remains to be done to bring some of the academic community to the level of excitement needed to be successful in Clarion's academic initiatives. Disagreement with the new funding model RCM and 'retrenchment' are the root of this tension." A year later, RCM is now an accepted model for some and a platform of contention for others. Dr. Whitney's lauded tributes of, "energy and analytical intelligence" are certainly in evidence. The Workforce Plan <http://www.clarion.edu/423592/> intended to guide university planning, assessment and improvement is a line in the sand for some. The common thread among most of the audiences who addressed us was the need for, "clarifying communication."

The **community leader groups** were sympathetic with the fiscal concerns of the university and with Dr. Whitney's "vision for success." They indicated her honesty and approachability

and unflappable demeanor, "even in difficult environments." Her presence in the community is again commended. The Venango community leader groups stated that community outreach by college leaders at the campus was "outstanding and accessible." They would like to see the President more often. This forum has, in the past, raised issues over student behavior but the expressed wish was for more student involvement in the community, such as volunteers for organizations. The summary comment was a positive harbinger, "We can grow again." They seemed to appreciate that President Whitney "meets problems head on."

The **President's Executive Council** talked about the President's skill to, "focus on what's going to happen next." They reported that Dr. Whitney is a "determined communicator and has a defined area of growth for the future." They seemed to be in solidarity relative to the Workforce Plan and RCM. We appreciate that the initial workforce plan was re-addressed when disproportionate population impacts were discovered. "She acknowledges her mistakes and looks for ways things can be done better."

The **Presidential Commission Chairs** were confused about priorities and goals. A concern was expressed over accessibility to on-line courses for an unsighted student relative to qualifying for financial aid. They asked for, "a better dashboard to monitor cost effectiveness." They expressed a concern about delivering on, "expectations without tools." They also demonstrated their abiding commitment to the University. "We love Clarion and we would do anything to save it."

The **Alumni Association and Foundation Board Leadership** expressed appreciation for President Whitney's leadership saying she is, "forthright," and, "meets challenges head on." They noted, "She makes you feel comfortable and makes departments accountable." It was indicated, "Not all alumni are in favor of Workforce Plan." One member said, "We needed better communication on Workforce Plan and she came around." They were supportive of Main Street project with caution for changing student demographics. President Whitney has, "a positive attitude in trying times," one member recounted. "She is transparent and insightful on updating the housing to ensure that Clarion is offering students what they want when they choose a university."

The **APSCUF, Clarion Faculty Senate, and Venango Forum Leadership** indicate an, "all time, pervasive morale low." They extended their willingness to work with Admissions in recruiting and suggested to shorten response times to 48 hours to be competitive. They requested, "robust and ongoing dialogue." One faculty member circulated a survey. This same member designed it using Survey Monkey for confidentiality. To the best of this committee's knowledge, this is the first time a survey has been conducted, and was not a direct request of the committee. There was a response of 196 from a sample of 369. Words that reappeared in responses included, "fear, and anxiety, deep concern." Though it was acknowledged that faculty, "expect disagreements," one member felt, "Good communication can help address and resolve difficult issues." They want a forum for discussion of, "mutual respect." One faculty member said, "Not all blame is on the President."

**Clarion and Venango Student Senate Leadership** reported that the President is very visible and talks to prospective students. "She does a great job and has courage in difficult times." In discussing the Workforce Plan, these student leaders remarked they knew about it but didn't know any students who would leave the University because of it. They embraced the focus on, "Health, STEM and business as the way to go for the future of the University." Dr. Ali-Zaidi asked if they knew about the electron microscope and they agreed it was a recruiting tool for specialized sciences. They would like to hear from more alumni, specifically in their classes. They want to know about alumni career paths and success. Venango College would like to see President Whitney more, but noted that campus Dean Chris Reber was very visible and supportive.

**The Non-Faculty Bargaining Unit Leadership of AFSCME and SCUPA** reinforced their intentions to, "help keep the University running and keeping the grounds visibly pleasant to attract and retain as many students as possible." They felt that more communication was needed relative to new positions created at time of retrenchment. "The President does a great job of trying to get everyone on the same team." They like the President's focus on personal relationships. "She knows so many names and personal circumstances." This group would likewise warm to seeing the President in their work areas.

## Synthesis

A President who has been everywhere is missed when she isn't there. "President Whitney stepped out in front of the workforce plan so others had space to get their work done," one employee said. As a Council of Trustees, we encourage the President to continue to share fiscal information so that we can make advised Council decisions. We talked about a model that could team up faculty with admissions for recruitment tools. Students suggested hearing from alumni in the field which we accept as a win/win retention tool. More communication is likely better in the current climate. It seems that many constituents feel ownership of recruitment and retention and are eager for integrating options in their work area. We need to harness this broad-based intent. Complimented as a President that is, "present for student spirit as active role model," and recognized by leaders outside of the CUP community as an "academic economist," Dr. Karen Whitney is commended for her strength and courage. She has literally created blueprints for the future of Clarion University.

We are proud to recommend the retention of Dr. Karen Whitney as Clarion University's President.

Respectfully Submitted on Behalf of the Committee,



James Kifer  
Chair - Clarion University Council of Trustees