

A More Complete Assessment of UA's Accreditation Report

You may recall that last spring the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association (the University's accrediting body) visited our campus to investigate concerns regarding shared governance. In the August 12 Email Digest, the UA administration shared the results of the final report issued by the review team. They wrote:

"University receives favorable report from accrediting team: UA has demonstrated progress in the area of shared leadership and governance."

[Akron-AAUP would like to give you a fuller picture of the HLC's concerns and recommendations.](#) The site visitors require the University to prepare an interim report on their progress towards shared governance by 2011 - prior to the next regularly scheduled comprehensive evaluation in 2012-2013.

Why are the HLC evaluators still so concerned with shared governance at UA that our administration must prepare yet another report in three years? Quoting from the HLC report, the site visit team observed that

"the institution has made some progress with respect to resolving the uncertainty that characterized shared governance at the time of the last visit, but it has not yet secured that progress in the form of stable and ongoing institutional processes and structures that support shared governance" (Advancement Section, p.4). And again, "there remains a need to develop structures and processes that support systematic and sustained shared governance that includes faculty" (Assurance Section, p.10).

In short, the administration is still working at shared governance, but has yet to achieve it. The site visit team notes that UA's progress on this issue may affect our accreditation in our next comprehensive evaluation in 2012 (ibid.). The evaluators had many concerns, but the most serious are the following:

1. Faculty Senate and University Council. During the collective bargaining campaign a few years ago, the Board of Trustees significantly **reduced shared governance** by stripping the Faculty Senate of long standing committees (e.g., eliminating Senate committees for Planning and Budgeting and for Campus Facilities Planning, revoking Senate participation in construction of the athletic budget and in approving the academic calendar.

In the place of those senate committees, which were comprised of faculty elected by their colleagues to the senate, the Operations Advisory Committee was convened by the administration. This committee is composed of a variety of constituents chosen solely by the administration, which the faculty regards as "a violation of the principle of elected representational shared governance" (Assurance Section, p.8). To be fair, the HLC team found the proposed creation of a **representative and elected University Council** as a promising way to restore a faculty voice in shared governance, but note that this Council, after years of planning, is yet uncreated and its creation does not even appear to be certain and imminent (Assurance Section, p. 9). Therefore, they are giving the administration three more years to realize this promise.

2. Contract Negotiations. Noting the nature of the first contract negotiations, the evaluators had very specific recommendations for the next round of negotiations, since the first contract expires in December 2009.

- a. The HLC team recommends that we **begin negotiations early**, suggesting December 2008 as a starting date, so that the new contract can be finished and implementation can begin on time (i.e., before the old contract expires). They also suggest that we begin preparations *now*.
- b. The team also recommends that “members of the negotiating teams are experienced in the academic environment, familiar with the university, and—perhaps most importantly—empowered as decision-makers to represent their respective constituencies in drafting the content and substance of the next contract” (Advancement Section, p. 5). **They note that this is especially important for the administrative side** (as their negotiating team was composed primarily of lawyers, while the faculty team was composed of five faculty members and one lawyer).
- c. Further they also recommend that in addition to the Provost, the administration **include representation from among Deans and department chairs**, since these individuals can provide “practical insights into issues that have a direct impact on the academic mission of the institution” (ibid.). By the time the interim report is due in 2011, we should know exactly how the negotiations and implementation of the second contract went (or are proceeding).

Throughout their report, the evaluators stress the importance of both sides continuing to work together for the larger good of our institution, and healing past wounds for the sake of our common future. Akron-AAUP is committed to doing just this. UA faculty voted in 2003 to form a collective bargaining unit in order to achieve “**Real Shared Governance**” (that has been our motto from the beginning), and we continue to work every day to achieve that goal.

However, recent actions by the administration, such as their unilateral changes to parking (for which we filed a grievance last week), show that they continue to be slow to learn what real shared governance really means. The HLC’s final report is available online in two sections, and is worth reading for its insight into our institution:

Akron-AAUP
Communications Committee