



Wright State University  
Office of the Faculty President  
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To: Susan Edwards, President, Wright State University  
Tom Gunlock, Chair, Wright State University Board of Trustees  
Shari Mickey-Boggs, Vice President/Chief Human Resources Officer, and  
Secretary to the Wright State University Board of Trustees  
Members of the Wright State University Faculty Senate

Cc: Members of the Wright State University Board of Trustees

From: Laura Luehrmann, Faculty President, Wright State University *Laura M. Luehrmann*

Subject: Vote of confidence / no confidence in Wright State University President Susan Edwards

Date: April 23, 2021

Wright State University (WSU) Faculty members held a vote of confidence / no confidence in University President Susan Edwards. Responsibility for overseeing the process for votes of confidence / no confidence in University Administrators falls to the Faculty Office as described in <https://www.wright.edu/faculty-senate/about/faculty-senate-procedures>.

During its regularly scheduled meeting on March 22, 2021, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate reviewed a petition (attached) calling for a vote of confidence / no confidence in University President Susan Edwards. The process required a minimum of 50 signatures. At the time of review, the Faculty Office had received 53 signatures in support of the petition and announced on March 23 that a vote of confidence / no confidence would be held.

The policy allowed a 10-day rebuttal period for President Edwards, who responded in a timely fashion (attached). Both the petition and rebuttal documents are publicly available on-line (<https://www.wright.edu/faculty-senate/about/votes-of-confidence-no-confidence>).

On Friday, April 9th, the Faculty Office distributed an electronic ballot to all eligible members of the University Faculty. Each member was provided the opportunity to view the petition and rebuttal and could choose to vote either “confidence” or “no confidence.” The ballot remained open until 5 p.m. on Thursday, April 22nd.

The results of the vote are as follows:

Total number of full-time, fully-affiliated Faculty eligible to vote:	651
Total number of Faculty who voted:	258
Faculty voting “confidence” in University President Susan Edwards:	121
Faculty voting “no confidence” in University President Susan Edwards:	137

## **Faculty Petition to Conduct a Vote of No Confidence in Wright State University President Susan Edwards**

President Edwards is the chief executive officer of Wright State University. As such, President Edwards is entrusted with promoting the interests of the entire Wright State University Community. This includes faculty, staff, administrators, and students. Notably, the most important aspect of President Edwards's position is upholding the primary mission of the University: education.

The University Faculty has lost confidence in President Edwards's ability to effectively lead Wright State University for the following reasons:

1. Enrollment at Wright State University, while it had declined some prior to her appointment as provost, not only continued to significantly decline, but has accelerated under her direction. She has not only shown the inability to effectively lead in the area of enrollment management, as the following examples demonstrate, but there is reason to believe that the recent acceleration of enrollment decline can be directly attributed to actions (or lack thereof) that Dr. Edwards has taken while in positions of leadership at the university:

a. Under her direction when Dr. Edwards was provost, Dr. Paul Carney, who was hired to oversee enrollment management, failed to create a comprehensive enrollment management plan for the university. President Edwards noted this would be an outcome when he was hired.<sup>1</sup>

b. As president, Dr. Edwards temporarily replaced Dr. Carney with Mr. Craig Woolley, the university's Chief Information Officer (CIO). Mr. Woolley was not qualified for this duty, notwithstanding his significant primary responsibilities in his role as the university's CIO. The lack of a qualified, dedicated enrollment manager put additional stress on Wright State's efforts to recruit students. Moreover, the lack of qualified personnel with the requisite training and experience to lead our enrollment management efforts, most notably Mr. Woolley, led WSU to substantially overestimate the Fall 2020 enrollment decline by nearly double its actual amount. This was due to overreliance upon reports on higher education blogs, and a nearly complete lack of any professional analysis of local conditions.<sup>2</sup>

c. Despite President Edwards's "three Rs" of Recruiting, Retention, and Relationships, President Edwards refused to provide a copy of the university's written enrollment management plan to faculty who requested the document. University officials described it as a "trade secret,"<sup>3</sup> when many other public universities post their enrollment management plans online, consistent with state-mandated open records requirements. When pressed to explain, President Edwards claimed that she had presented the enrollment management plan previously. This was not a written enrollment management plan, and those who recall the presentation noted it lacked any evidence or documentation as it was delivered in oral form. This gave rise to doubt that a formal written enrollment management plan actually existed.

d. It was not until January 2021 that President Edwards announced plans to form a working group tasked with improving recruitment and retention strategies at the university.<sup>4</sup> This demonstrated her negligence and failure to swiftly act upon the most important issue facing the university.

2. Despite claiming to promote a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion, President Edwards promoted Mr. Greg Sample to the position of Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer in the Office of the President in a letter dated January 14, 2020.<sup>5</sup> It is troubling enough that this position was filled without external or even internal competition, but it also occurred even after the troubling circumstances by which Mr. Sample became an employee of the university, as noted below:

a. Mr. Sample was initially hired into his position through a “named in grant” process, without going through a formal job posting, vetting of candidates using Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines, and a competitive interview process in which internal stakeholders may further evaluate candidates’ qualifications. Although the original circumventing of hiring procedures was not the fault of either Mr. Sample nor President Edwards, it is the responsibility of the university president to make every attempt to mitigate the problems engendered in a problematic hiring process by a previous administration by giving Mr. Sample’s promotion the legal cover of an open search following federal and state hiring guidelines.

b. The Ohio Inspector General’s investigation of WSU’s affiliated entity, Double Bowler Properties Corp, which was led by Mr. Sample, found that it “violated state law and improperly paid a former congressman for lobbying.”<sup>6</sup> While this is not specifically a vote of no confidence in Mr. Sample, the university president should have more carefully considered the promotion of Mr. Sample, whose previous actions garnered the attention of the Office of Inspector General.

3. Further, despite President Edwards’s previous comments as provost, where she claimed that the Raj Soin College of Business Dean’s search needed to be national in scope in order to externally validate the university’s selection, she later selected Dr. Brian Rigling as Dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science with only an *internal* search. He was the sole applicant, and once again, the formal search and hiring process was circumvented.

4. The current Dean of CoLA, Dr. Linda Caron, was appointed by the previous provost, Dr. Thomas Sudkamp, despite the fact that the CoLA faculty twice rejected her as a candidate in open searches in 2012 and 2013. Then-Provost Sudkamp also appointed Dr. Carol Loranger as associate dean, even though she was an associate professor and thus less academically qualified compared to other potential candidates within CoLA. In 2019, the CoLA faculty held a vote of no confidence in Dean Caron and Associate Dean Loranger. Dr. Edwards ignored these votes of No Confidence in College of Liberal Arts Dean Linda Caron, as well as votes of No Confidence in Department of History Chair Dr. Jonathan Winkler and several other department chairs throughout the college.

5. President Edwards used deceptive language to announce temporary reductions in compensation for members of university management. In an April 20, 2020 letter to the campus community, President Edwards stated university management “has voluntarily agreed to take a 20 percent reduction in salary.”<sup>7</sup> This reduction was not voluntary for many of the impacted employees. Further, the 20 percent reduction applied to stipends, rather than salary, which is an important distinction. In fact, many impacted by the reduction privately expressed their displeasure with President Edwards’s mischaracterization of the manner in which compensation was reduced.

6. President Edwards attempted to ignore the collective bargaining agreement between the university and AAUP-WSU, telling a meeting of the Faculty Senate the university did not need to negotiate a Faculty Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program (F-VRIP) with AAUP-WSU. This statement was contrary to the principles of collective bargaining, and indeed, President Edwards and the university were required to negotiate the F-VRIP with AAUP-WSU.

7. In a June 2, 2020 letter to the campus community, President Edwards wrote that “the current pandemic has disrupted Wright State University’s underlying financial condition,” and that “additional reorganization and reduction is necessary.”<sup>8</sup> On that same day, Interim Provost Leaman released a “preliminary” plan to “consolidate seven of our existing colleges into four and reorganize many existing academic departments.”<sup>9</sup>

The release of this “preliminary” plan to develop “a new, refocused and vibrant Wright State” was hasty and haphazard. The “preliminary” plan was created without an analysis of the potential savings and/or costs, without a guiding vision for curricular changes, without an analysis of the potential impact on current students, and without a completed 5-year strategic plan for the university. Furthermore, Wright State Social Media posted the proposed reorganization on the university’s Facebook site,<sup>10</sup> garnering confusion from students, some of whom thought programs were eliminated and/or courses would no longer be available. The hastiness with which the “preliminary” plan was produced is illustrated by the fact that on July 10, 2020, less than one month before the deadline for campus feedback, a “revised draft” plan was distributed.<sup>11</sup> While the two draft reorganization plans were released due to a stated need to “take immediate and decisive action to ensure that we can continue to fulfill our mission,” the plan was never finalized and was eventually abandoned. The uncertainty and chaos caused by these incomplete, and ultimately unnecessary plans, contributed to lower faculty and student morale, further injuring the university’s public image and contributing to declining enrollment.

8. Following a series of brainstorming sessions with AAUP-WSU in May 2020 that focused on soliciting ideas to address budgetary issues, President Edwards, acting in bad faith, led an attempt to mislead the AAUP-WSU into midterm negotiations without acknowledging the current contract as the default and with intention of imposing a new contract that would have allowed the university to terminate faculty if undisclosed voluntary separation targets were not reached. This single action, under the façade of friendly talks and under President Edwards’s direction, destroyed the morale of many bargaining unit faculty members, all during a time when faculty were preparing and delivering their courses in a remote learning environment due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, these actions eroded any trust that was beginning to be rebuilt between the bargaining unit faculty and administration after the strike. These actions effectively set back faculty/administration relationships and trust to the point just prior to the strike when the administration imposed a contract.

9. After claiming in informal meetings with AAUP-WSU in May 2020 that “retrenchment is off the table,” President Edwards invoked Article 17 (Retrenchment) in November 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, thus causing enormous stress and further distrust in President Edwards.

10. President of the Faculty Dr. Laura Luehrmann described morale as the lowest it has ever been during her comments to the Board of Trustees in December 2020, even prior to the 2019 AAUP-WSU strike.

11. Due to President Edwards’s evasive answers concerning possible faculty layoffs during the November 2020 Faculty Senate meeting, a Special Faculty Senate Meeting was convened on January 15, 2021. President Edwards used this opportunity to deceive and attempt to blame faculty for the university’s problems.<sup>12</sup> For example, Dr. Edwards cited a survey that claimed “constant protests in the news” as a primary reason prospective students did not attend the university. In terms of retention, “faculty” was cited as a reason students did not return to WSU. When pressed, Dr. Edwards admitted the survey response rate was approximately 10%. Other comments about faculty included “retain the good ones,” “current in the subject matter,” and “less core classes.” Finally, Dr. Edwards said that members of “our internal community” should “refrain from continual negative...comments” yet once the BoT made the retrenchment decision, all of the negative press was due to their decision and Dr. Edwards’s endorsement.

12. President Edwards failed to consider the livelihoods of 113 faculty members and the damage to academic programs when she accepted former Interim Provost Leaman’s retrenchment recommendations. In her letter to the Board of Trustees dated February 15, 2021,<sup>13</sup> she purposefully embraced Provost Leaman’s recommendations while selectively including only the information from the Joint Committee on Retrenchment that agreed with her narrative. She discounted faculty expertise in organizational restructuring and layoffs, such as not laying off faculty during a time of budget surpluses and instead allowing voluntary

attrition to reduce staffing.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, recommendations from academic program review committees, including chairs and deans, were not considered. Academic program review was a months-long process, and the recommendations were ignored. This is important because retrenchment will likely damage academic programs. Most reprehensible of all was that that former Interim Provost Leaman did not make recommendations regarding academic program review. In fact, the Higher Learning Commission noted, “An example of a completed review was not provided in the assurance argument,” and was “not accessible by the reviewers.”<sup>15</sup>

13. On February 17, 2021, President Edwards notified campus that she utilized the Registry to select an interim provost.<sup>16</sup> Notably, President Edwards failed to disclose a prior vote of no confidence from faculty at the interim provost’s former institution. Further, the new interim provost knows nothing about Wright State, has no relationships with Wright State’s deans, chairs, nor faculty. It is clear that the new interim provost was hired to execute retrenchment without any knowledge of implications to the Miami Valley region. The selection also adds to the evidence that diversity, equity, and inclusion is routinely ignored, especially through the selective use of interim appointments.

14. Finally, since her arrival at Wright State, Dr. Edwards has degraded our academic mission. She has defended athletics while continuing to slash the academic budget. The “spectre” of planning the addition of three NCAA teams<sup>17</sup> while retrenching faculty is further evidence of her misplaced priorities. In fact, her letter to the NCAA claims the Division I programs are “important to all of us – it helps give Wright State our identity.”<sup>18</sup> She has assaulted faculty rights regarding intellectual property. She has failed to retain internationally prominent faculty (and their students). She has failed to make changes in academic unit leadership despite input from faculty. She has failed to appoint a permanent Vice Provost for Research and Innovation, a key indicator of her misplaced priorities. Importantly, she has no turnaround plan for Wright State University and has ignored numerous suggestions from faculty. Last, Dr. Edwards’s statements about diversity, equity, and inclusion are at strong odds with her record on diversity, equity, and inclusion as evidenced by the excessive use of interim appointments to circumvent the normal search process.

Collectively, this list of grievances speaks to the lack of integrity and leadership ability of President Edwards. Therefore, I hereby petition the Faculty Senate to call for a No Confidence vote in Wright State University President Susan Edwards.

[1] Retrieved from: <https://webapp2.wright.edu/web1/newsroom/2018/08/20/paul-carney-selected-to-oversee-enrollment-management-at-wright-state-on-interim-basis/>

[2] Wright State University Budget Presentation, June 19, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2020/Sep/meeting/Minutes%20Budget%20Meeting%20June%2019%2C%202020.pdf>

[3] Letter from Interim Provost Leaman dated November 30, 2020

[4] Email from President Edwards dated January 25, 2021

[5] Retrieved from: <https://esrati.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Greg-Sample-Pay-and-Promotion.pdf>

[6] Retrieved from: <https://www.daytondailynews.com/business/ohio-inspector-general-finds-wrongdoing-wright-state-real-estate-nonprofit/CwCeRTG8caD4G4rIYZLxM/>

[7] Email from President Edwards dated April 20, 2020

[8] Email from President Edwards dated June 2, 2020

[9] Email from Interim Provost Leaman dated June 2, 2020

[10] <https://www.facebook.com/WrightStateUniversity/posts/10157562933817736>

[11] <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/page/attachments/academic-reorganization-committee-report-2-2020-08-17.pdf> (Appendix C)

[12] [https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2021/Jan/meeting/FacultySenate\\_PresidentSlides\\_2020-01-15.pdf](https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2021/Jan/meeting/FacultySenate_PresidentSlides_2020-01-15.pdf)

[13] <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2021/Feb/meeting/President%20BOT%20Recommendation.pdf>

[14] <https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2021/Feb/meeting/FINAL%20Committee%20R%20Report%202-7-2021%20Signed.pdf>

[15] Higher Learning Commission Mid-Cycle Review final report dated August 17, 2020

[16] Email from President Edwards dated February 17, 2021

[17] Wright State University's Request to the Division 1 Council for a Waiver of NCAA Division I Bylaw 20.9.6 dated July 14, 2020

[18] President Edwards's letter to NCAA dated July 4, 2020



# WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

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Susan Edwards, Ph.D.  
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April 7, 2021

Faculty of Wright State University  
c/o Wright State University Faculty Senate  
3640 Colonel Glenn Highway  
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Re: Faculty Senate Vote of Confidence / No-Confidence

Dear Colleagues,

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, I was informed by Faculty Senate President Luehrmann that the Faculty Office had received the required number of signatures calling for a for a vote of confidence/no confidence. I understand the vote to be not binding and reported to the Board of Trustees.

Let me start by acknowledging and respecting the right of Faculty to initiate this process and the role the faculty senate plays in conducting the vote. I have read the petition and have been granted the opportunity to offer my rebuttal.

I will begin by saying I see a great deal of similarities between the information shared as justification for this vote and the criticisms levied directly against me by the AAUP-WSU leadership. I've made every effort to address those criticisms head on in numerous faculty senate meetings and my repeated WebEx sessions. Let me say again the allegations are inaccurate and while they may make great theater the information is purposely misstated and I see no productive value in again legitimizing them any further through this Faculty Senate process. Frankly, I see this action as another attempt to perpetuate the Union leadership's divisive and adversarial approach to its relationship with administration.

To echo the comments of the Board Chair, we need to hit reset and build a mature, productive working relationship among all university constituencies. I've been told that in the past, union leadership would meet with administration and have respectful conversations in private to reach agreement on issues. Then, the union leadership would criticize the administration in its public comments for political expediency. That behavior started us down the path of creating an inherent distrust in administration. The mistakes then made by prior administrations further solidified this distrust.

It now seems to me that vilifying the administration by attacking the professional and personal integrity of University leadership continues to be the modus operandi of AAUP-WSU leadership. The circulation of a petition which is the summary document of the unfounded criticisms made by several members of AAUP-WSU executive committee at multiple public forums is evidence of this behavior. This needs to stop for us to have a healthy and positive environment at this university. It is my utmost hope that the new

AAUP-WSU leadership will lead in a different way and value a mutually respectful relationship.

Having said that there is one thing in the petition I will strongly rebut. It is an accusation that I lied about a salary reduction. At the onset of COVID leadership, which included myself, Mr. Sample, Ms. Mickey-Boggs, Mr. Woolley, etc., volunteered to take a 20% reduction in pay. I am proud of the team for taking that cut. For deans and others who are primarily employed in faculty positions the reduction was 20% of their administrative stipend due to their faculty base salaries being protected by the CBA. This is a point I have stated in many forums previously. I am highlighting this point because the implication is I lied and misrepresented the compensation reduction I took. I take offense to that as it is an attack on my personal and professional integrity. Throughout my time here at Wright State, I have always been truthful and transparent, and I will continue to be so moving forward and I admonish those who continue to perpetuate this misrepresentation.

I joined Wright State in 2018 as executive vice president for academic affairs and provost. On a personal level I was drawn to Wright State because of the university's core values and dedication to students and was impressed how Wright State was serving its students and the region.

A faculty strike greeted me when I arrived and in October 2019, less than a year into my service at Wright State I received an unexpected call from the Chair of the Board of Trustees of WSU asking me to assume the operational duties of President of the University as the Board worked through a separation agreement with the incumbent President. In my conversation with the Board of Trustees at that time I said that the university had been damaged and needed to heal. It was my belief we needed to focus on recruitment, retention, and relationships. And in that light, it was important for them to understand just how personally committed I was to student success, especially in terms of retention, experiential learning, and high-quality classroom education.

The Board then installed me as the eighth President of the University in January 2020.

Well before my joining the Wright State family it is undeniable that the University had experienced a series of serious setbacks, which resulted in a damaged image and declining enrollment. That trend began in 2015 and unfortunately continues. As we all know enrollment is the lifeblood of an institution of higher education. Many of you have been here longer than I have and understand what contributed to the decline in enrollment. A federal investigation into H1-B Visa fraud, a failed Presidential debate, the removal of a president, the faculty strike, another presidential change and the resulting negative local media coverage are just some of the issues.

In March 2020, a short three months into my presidency, the entire world was faced with a global pandemic, one that was on a scale not faced in modern times. We had a great amount of uncertainty and anxiety on what the impact COVID would have on the country let alone the institution. We had at the onset no idea of the financial impact or support we might receive. We made difficult budgetary decisions and prepared for the worst, all the while hoping for the best. We also made the decision to focus on what we could control and that was the safety and well-being of our students, faculty and staff. We did see an impact of COVID through further decline in our enrollments in fall of 2020, having the smallest



incoming freshman class in recent history. COVID uncertainty did further impact our enrollment. Acknowledging that does not mean we are accepting defeat. It is merely another a challenge we will meet in our efforts to recruit every student we can to Wright State and then support them in every way we can so they will graduate and continue on toward professional success.

I walked into the presidency with a cabinet composed of many individuals with interim titles. University leadership searches have been conducted appropriately and we will continue to ensure that the right leadership will be appointed. As I have stated repeatedly, I have full faith and confidence in all members of the leadership team, I truly value all of their dedication and service to Wright State. Their entire focus is on our mission to educate and support our students and they are firmly committed to getting Wright State back on solid financial footing.

One of those interims was in the area of enrollment management. Dr. Paul Carney, the interim VP of Enrollment Management, had developed an enrollment management plan that I presented the executive summary of to the Board of Trustees at their April 2019 meeting. That's a date I'll never forget because it was the same day of my cancer surgery. That plan laid the foundation to which we've added additional efforts such as supporting the student driven Retain the Nine initiative, where we created 4 new student success coach positions to support retention. Since their appointment in late 2019 they have been instrumental in proactive interventions with struggling students. In an effort to bring permanence to the division we conducted a national search and appointed Mr. Rob Durkle, a life-long Daytonian who was overseeing enrollment at the University of Dayton. Sadly, Mr. Durkle suffered a severe injury that resulted in him stepping down from the position in October of 2020. Jen McCamis has stepped up and into the role on an interim basis and I assure my colleagues that stabilizing enrollment remains her and my top priority. I have and will continue to seek faculty cooperation in increasing recruitment and retention and in the 2020 budget had set aside funding to support faculty driven initiatives. In addition, as I highlighted at the March Faculty senate meeting, we have created a collaborative working group that will ensure cross campus coordination of all recruitment and retention initiatives with key objectives and metrics. I encourage individuals to review the actual efforts of our admissions team and to get involved. The more all of us understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of Wright State's position in an extremely competitive market and collectively work together toward a common goal, the greater the chances of our success.

I will make one comment about retrenchment. It is not triggered by the budget and the university's difficult decision to invoke retrenchment followed the AAUP-WSU's repeated refusal to meet and written statement that administration should follow the collective bargaining agreement. Having said that, it is clear enrollment declines are without dispute. Those of you teaching see first-hand the smaller class sizes we have today and it is understandable that faculty have concerns. I have been committed from the outset to ask the board to allow for alternate mitigation options and the separation incentive just approved by the board is a reflection of their willingness to acknowledge those requests. No leader desires to be at the helm of an organization that must reduce its employee ranks, whether staff or faculty. Yet, we must remind ourselves that many our problems are the

result of avoiding difficult decisions and kicking the proverbial can down the road. I am not that president and this is not that administration. We are committed to ensuring Wright State finds stability from which to grow and is here for many generations to come.

Wright State sits at the crossroad. This is an opportunity to remind ourselves why we are here, and that the true center of our collective universe is our students. We will not succeed without students who seek access to an exceptionally high quality affordable education here at Wright State. Like many of you, I will continue to focus on that and move forward.

In the mean time we have much heavy lifting to do with respect to getting this institution stabilized and operating successfully. I am committed to working with all those who share my passion for our students and who have an underlying love for Wright State to succeed.