



October 8, 2020

Memorandum For: Saint Augustine's University Board of Trustees, Faculty, and Friends

From: John T. Larkins, PhD., President, National Alumni Association of Saint Augustine's University

Subject: Response to Letter from Trustees Joseph Cheshire and Rodrick Miller of September 29, 2020

After substantial deliberations and discussions with members of the National Alumni Association of Saint Augustine's University and former SAU staff, I decided the overarching issues of accreditation, sustainability, and integrity, were too important to leave your letter unanswered. Board of Trustee's Chairman James Perry and Trustees Cheshire and Miller, are pushing a false narrative of recent history, and would have alumni, faculty, staff and friends of the Saint Augustine's University believe that the violation of SACSCOC Standards was the results of complaints by disgruntled staff, procedural problems of Interim President Gaddis Faulcon and a failed Presidential Search Committee that I co-chaired. To show credibility and truthfulness, I need to expose information that I would not ordinarily make public, but the Board has allowed its members to publish incorrect information that should be corrected.

It should be noted that there were complaints against the Chairman and other Board members prior to my joining the Board in late March 2019. This is evidenced by the complaint to SACSCOC by Attorney Charles Francis regarding the departure of former President Everett Ward and another complaint concerning potential recruitment violations. As a point of interest, there have been more complaints filed over the last twelve months (12) months than any comparable time in the school's history. Trustees Cheshire and Miller presented a false narrative of the basis for the problems with SACSCOC to deflect the real causes for the cited thirteen (13) violations of SACSCOC Standards. They would have you believe that anyone raising a legitimate complaint is deliberately out to harm the University. This idea is certainly not true, especially when one considers the integrity of the individuals making the complaints

and clearly seeing that they had nothing to gain personally or professionally in filing a complaint. They were complaints given to then Vice Chairman Cheshire, that if handled in a timely and consistent manner, might have precluded SACSCOC involvement, and potentially a lawsuit. As evidence, I would note that: A) complaints from Dr. Ronald Brown and Coach George “Pup” Williams were given to Trustee Cheshire in January 2020; B) their complaints were not presented to the Board for disposition until March 2020; C) the complaints were subsequently presented to the SAU General Counsel for review; and D) in April 2020, the General Counsel disclosed his findings in an extensive report to Trustee Cheshire, who only discussed its content with the Board’s Chairman and a select number of other Trustees. This protracted process was clearly different from the timeline for complaints against another former Trustee. What was the basis for the disparity in process? Also, shortly after drafting his report, the SAU General Counsel was released from his position, purportedly as a cost-savings measure. This precipitated another lawsuit.

Although I can, will not endeavor to cover every issue or ‘fact’ presented in Trustees Cheshire and Miller’s letter. A few facts check of their narrative will clearly illustrate the letter’s lack of creditability.

FACT: I, along with Trustee Silver Parker, chaired the first Presidential Search Committee. Five (5) members of the Board of Trustees (the entire BOT Personnel Committee) and eight (8) other members were, all selected and appointed by Chairman Perry. (Ref. 1), with the assistance of the former Chief of Staff. I was permitted to select the two alumni representatives on the Committee. I was asked by and appointed by the Chairman (Ref. 2), presumably because of my experience staffing Senior Advisory Committees for Congress and other federal agencies. After an extensive search, Committee assessments and initial vetting, the Presidential Search Committee, unanimously sent a memorandum to the BOT seeking approval to move forward with two candidates. On October 30, 2019, the BOT approved the recommendation of the Search Committee (Ref. 3). (As a matter of information, the Search Committee reviewed and interviewed several outstanding candidates, three (3) of whom are now college presidents.) In November 2019, the Board of Trustees was notified that we, the Search Committee, had lost one of our candidates but wanted to proceed with the Board interview of the finalist in the search process. Again, the Board voted and approved proceeding with the one (1) candidate for an interview (Ref. 4), which occurred in January 2020. The candidate did an exceptional job. The sitting Board did not reject the candidate at that time, yet it decided to seek additional candidates. It is worth noting that the membership on the Board of Trustees changed between November 2019 and January 2020, which impacted the selection process. Trustees Cheshire and Miller claim, I started a vendetta after this process transpired. They could not be further from the truth, as I continued to work on BOT committee activities and raised substantial money (especially if you compare my results with other Board members) for the University and supported alumni recruiting activities all across the east coast. Interestingly they claim my “antagonistic actions ramped up in December 2019”, I had no idea of how the BOT might vote until after December 2019.

FACT: It is true that only a few students had been enrolled in March 2019, due to limited SAU resources being spent on recruitment. Pointedly, at the beginning of 2019, the University was down to only one (1) full time recruiter and was totally dependent on the coverage of recruitment fairs and college day activities by alumni. I am amazed and disappointed by the fact that the BOT refuses to acknowledge the herculean performance of Dr. Gaddis Faulcon and Dr. Ronald Brown in solidifying in the number of students the University enrolled in the fall of 2019. They came up with a recruitment strategy and implemented it in a manner to be commended. This was truly outstanding, especially when you consider that several of our sister HBCU institutions experienced decreases in enrollment. The Board reviewed the recommendations of Dr. Brown (Ref. 5) for resources to support his recruitment strategy and approved the requested funding. (The FTE for the Fall of 2019 was 935, substantially exceeding the budget number and most people's expectations (Ref. 6)).

(B) Dormitory Issues: The narrative presented regarding the repair work on the dormitories during late spring/ early summer 2019 is a bit misleading to keep it simple. There were no real cost comparisons for the repairs to be done on the Latham and Weston dormitories, as there was no real cost basis for what needed to be done to make them acceptable for use in the Fall of 2019. The actual cost would vary depending on the number of repairs and renovations to be performed. The SAU staff's original plan was to shut down two (2) dormitories for the fall semester and start repairs after funds became available from enrollment and donations in the fall. The upper classmen would be housed off campus in student housing (not a Motel). The repairs of the dormitories were led by Trustee Brian Boulware, who brought in a business partner Hughes Construction Company, from Atlanta, Georgia. Unfortunately, a cost proposal was not forwarded for the SAU Business Office to negotiate and a formal contract was never prepared for BOT approval, as required by the University Bylaws. The cost for phase one of the work was approximately \$384,703.43, with about \$285,443.00 worth of additional work needed (Ref. 7). During that fiscal year, additional work was required beyond the monies cited above, which means the cost for repairs was significantly higher.

(C) Yes, I did want Dr. Faulcon to stay on as Interim President until a permanent President could be hired by the BOT. Dr. Faulcon's performance as Interim President justified retaining him until a permanent replacement could be brought on board. He did an outstanding job increasing the enrollment numbers beyond the budget mark. Dr. Falcon was bringing in monies at reasonable rate for an Interim President. He worked with former Trustee Frankie Jones and Dr. Brown, Dr. Sauls and architect Andre Johnson to prepare an EAI Proposal to the Department of Education (DOE) (Ref. 8) that was funded for 3.5 million dollars. Former Trustee Frankie Jones played a significant role in introducing the university administrators to grantors at the DOE. Dr. Faulcon had made inroads in garnering additional donations prior to his departure. It is worth noting that he was well liked and respected by the SAU staff/faculty, alumni, and members of the greater SAU community.

(4) Yes, I do blame the BOTs for not acting on the complaints filed against Chairman James Perry and Trustee Brian Boulware, that led to thirteen (13) violations of the SACSCOC standards and a WARNING Status for Saint Augustine's University. I wrote the BOTs early in 2019 (Ref 9) about the high probability of a SACSCOC investigation. Included in that memorandum was a concern about accountability of government funding, something I know quite a bit about. My comments were not taken seriously by the Board leadership, who discounted my comments as a vendetta against the Chairman. Trustees Cheshire and Miller wrote: "Given the complaints, it is no wonder SACSCOC had to investigate", which is a non sequitur. Who were the complaints against? For the record, the complaints were certainly not against me, and I had no affiliation with the complainants. The complaints were against Chairman James Perry, Trustee Brian Boulware and Dr. Maria Arvelo Lumpkin. Trustees Cheshire and Miller would like to tie me to the complaints, to redirect the blame for all these issues, but their ploy is without merit. The truth of the matter is that if the two Trustees, former Vice Chairman and current Vice Chairman had acted early, we might not be confronted with the WARNING Status from SACSCOC and could have precluded these costly lawsuits, which really hurts fundraising and recruitment efforts. **Additionally, what was the outcome of the BOT's independent investigation led by Trustee Miller? We were assured that this would be a transparent process and stakeholders would be notified of the results? (Ref. 10)**

Regarding minority control of the BOT, occurred during my tenure on the Board, was quite often the Chairman would only share critical information with his inner circle or those in "the huddle", he would say. Evidence of this is clearly demonstrated in response to the SASCOC inquires, wherein only Chairman Perry, Trustee Cheshire, Brian Boulware and maybe one other could review the responses back to SACSCOC. Obviously, this was the plan so other Trustees would not have an opportunity to comment on the accuracy or veracity of the response. This scheme did not work, as SACSCOC questioned the veracity of the information submitted. Significant reports or responses to SACSCOC should have been shared with the whole Board as each member has equal standing. This happens during the accreditation and reaffirmation processes. Other information pertaining to the operations of the University should have been shared equally with the whole BOT, including critical budget information and information pertaining to the potential sale or lease of University property.

How credible is it for the BOTs to say that Interim President Faulcon was responsible for all the problems and SACSCOC violations while at the same time and with the same breath, stating that it was necessary for the Chairman and his cohorts to be directly involved in day to day University operations and decisions, because of lapses in leadership. It must be either one story or the other. Additionally, how could there be leadership gaps, if Dr. Lumpkin purportedly were there to sure up operations?

Lastly, the Board made public a response to a Resolution of a Vote of No-Confidence, prior to it being issued and not knowing the content?? Why did this happen, as the NAA-SAU document was going directly to the BOT for comment? There was no plan to place anything on the internet, social media or HBCU Digest.

In summary, finger pointing and trying to find someone else to blame for the wrongdoing during the past 18 months is not going to gain creditability with SACSCOC, nor help the University in fundraising, recruitment and promoting the Falcon brand. There is a real opportunity to put the University in a better place and in the discussion when philanthropists discuss giving substantial gifts to HBCUs. With a fully capable President to take our alma mater forward, we need the Board of Trustees to remedy the problems of the past and demonstrate a level of Integrity that is acceptable to SACSCOC.

References:

- (1) Letter of July 31, 2019, from James E.C. Perry, Chairman of the Board of Trustees to Dr. John t. Larkins noting his appointing members of the Search Committee
- (2) Letter of July 31, from James E.C. Perry to Dr. John T. Larkins thanking him for serving as Co-Chairman of the Presidential Search Committee
- (3) Memorandum of October 30, 2019, to the Board of Trustees from John T. Larkins to allow the Search Committee to proceed with vetting of two candidates. Affirmation by Board recorded in minutes of meeting.
- (4) Memorandum of November 15, 2019, to Board of Trustees from John T. Larkins (Search Committee Update—Confidential and Privileged), Board voted on November 19, 2019 for the Presidential Search Committee to proceed)
- (5) Presentation to Board of Trustees by Dr. Ronald Brown in April 2019, seeking approval to contract for Geo-Fencing and Contractor support on the on-line collection of applications for students
- (6) Presentation and documents to Board of Trustees standing Committees on Student Services and Affairs, September 10, 2019
- (7) Renovation Report for Dormitory Repairs,7/1/2019 thru 12/31/ 2019 noting funds paid to Hughes Construction Co. and cost to complete outstanding work on the SAU dormitories
- (8) Draft Proposal to Department of Education for Emergency Assistance to Institutions, October 2019,(Proposal was for \$10 million and subsequently awarded \$3.5 million)
- (9) Memorandum of December 2019, to the James E.C. Perry, Chairman of the Board from Dr. John T. Larkins, Subject Board Over-reach, and Possible Issues with SACSCOC
- (10) Board of Trustees Statement on Pending Investigation (<https://www.st.-aug.edu/board-of-trustee-statement-on-pending-investigation>)