



# **Student Academic Records Management Consultation Report**

*for*

# **West Virginia University**

**February 2, 2009**

**American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers  
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## I. Project Summary

West Virginia University (WVU) engaged AACRAO Consulting to conduct an analysis of WVU's policies and procedures for the management of student academic records. As stated in the *Consulting Agreement* dated August 14, 2008, subsequent recommendations were to provide guidelines for WVU to implement leading practices in these areas:

1. General university academic records management policies, including records retention policies.
2. Retention by faculty of class records such as grade sheets, exams, homework, reports, and other relevant materials.
3. Procedures for handling and tracking grade and transcript modifications, with the recommended stipulation that all transfer credits be recorded on official WVU transcripts.
4. Basing graduation checks on official university documents held by Admissions and Records and not based on unofficial documents held by the department, school, or college.

In conducting this review, AACRAO Consulting agreed to:

- Involve deans and faculty across all colleges to integrate discipline-specific requirements.
- Involve expertise of staff on campus.
- Explore technology's role in the design of systems and procedures.
- Elucidate standard requirements and state-of-the-art best practices at other universities around the country.
- Identify other potential problems or issues to be resolved related to these processes.
- Recommend responsive actions, policies and practices, and identify responsible academic, administrative, or Faculty Senate units.
- Conduct an intensive review of academic records and degree-granting practices in the College of Business and Economics.

## II. Introduction to AACRAO Consulting

AACRAO Consulting is a service provided by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). AACRAO is a nonprofit, voluntary, professional association of more than 10,000 higher education admissions, registration, and enrollment service professionals who represent approximately 2,500 institutions in the United States and more than 30 countries.

AACRAO's mission is to provide professional development, guidelines, and voluntary standards to be used by higher education officials regarding the best practices in records management, admissions, enrollment management, administrative information technology, and student services. AACRAO also provides a forum for discussion regarding policy initiation and development, interpretation, and implementation at the institutional level and in the global educational community. AACRAO has been in existence for nearly 100 years and is headquartered at One Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C.

Based on AACRAO's extensive knowledge base, AACRAO Consulting works with colleges and universities to address policy and procedural issues related to student enrollment. AACRAO consultants are highly experienced in their profession. When working on a project team they represent AACRAO Consulting, not their present or former employers.

### **III. AACRAO Consulting Team**

The AACRAO consultants for the WVU project were:

- Dr. Wayne Sigler, AACRAO Senior Consultant and Project Director
- Dr. Roger Printup, AACRAO Consultant
- Dr. Jane Sjogren, AACRAO Consultant

### **IV. West Virginia University Project Team**

The primary WVU contacts for the AACRAO Consulting team were Dr. Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President, Graduate Education; Dr. E. Jane Martin, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research; and Dr. Russ Dean, Senior Associate Provost.

The WVU project team was led by Dr. Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education. The WVU project team consisted of deans, faculty members and staff of WVU who informed the work of the AACRAO Consultants. Team members included:

- Nigel Clark, Chair-Elect, Faculty Senate
- Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President, Graduate Education (Team Lead)
- Mary Ellen Mazey, Dean, Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
- Warren Myers, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Engineering and Mineral Resources
- Maryanne Reed, Dean, School of Journalism
- Patricia Chase, Dean, School of Pharmacy
- Dee Hopkins, Dean, College of Human Resources and Education

- Sue Day-Peroots, Dean, Extended Learning
- Marilyn Potts, Interim Director of Admissions and Records
- Mary Jane Smith, Associate Dean for Graduate Academic Affairs, School of Nursing
- Cheryl Torsney, Associate Provost for Academic Programs

## V. Project Structure and Timeline

The project plan consisted of three on-campus consulting visits. The first consulting visit took place September 29 - October 1, 2008. Drs. Sigler, Printup, and Sjogren met with WVU representatives on September 29 - 30. Drs. Printup and Sjogren then met with representatives of the College of Business and Economics on October 1 (see Appendix A).

The AACRAO Consulting team returned to WVU for its second consulting visit on November 12 - 14, 2008. Drs. Sigler, Printup, and Sjogren met with WVU representatives on November 12 - 13, 2008. Drs. Printup and Sjogren then met with representatives of the College of Business and Economics on November 14 (see Appendix B).

The AACRAO Consulting Team returns to WVU on February 2, 2009, to present this report.

## VI. Report Overview and Organization

This was a consulting project and not an investigation/re-investigation of the academic records management issues that WVU has experienced. The AACRAO Consulting Team has not assigned guilt or blame for any deficiencies in records management. The consultants have concentrated on a review of WVU's current student academic records management practices, identified areas of weakness, and recommended best practice solutions.

Our advice to WVU in this report is intended to enable the university to move forward regarding its student academic records management practices.

Therefore, the report essentially focuses on three things:

- What we found in our review.
- What we believe WVU needs to do to address the problems that we identified.
- Assurance that if WVU consistently follows our recommendations, WVU's student academic records management practices will meet current institutional needs and accepted practices.

Although not originally part of the scope of the project, AACRAO Consulting commissioned a legal review of cases in which institutions revoked degrees when students were found to have not met all degree requirements. This information is provided to WVU to inform decision-making regarding any cases that may arise in which it is determined that a student was awarded a degree without having met all degree requirements. The results of this legal review are provided as Appendix C.

## **VII. Observations: General University**

This section of the report is organized around the four project areas identified in the project agreement. (Please see page three.)

### **A. General university academic records management policies, including records retention policies.**

1. The evaluation of student performance (grading) and the awarding of degrees are critical processes unique to educational institutions. The reputation of the institution relies on the belief that these core processes have a high degree of integrity.

#### Academic Records Management

1. Reporting to the Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management (Student Affairs), Admissions and Records (A&R) maintains official grades and earned academic credit on the Banner student information system. These records are used for awarding degrees for all colleges and schools in the university. Records pre-dating implementation of Banner are kept on microfiche. This complies with standard practice.
2. In general, academic record information appears to flow from colleges, schools, and departments to A&R; relatively little appears to flow the other way (from A&R to colleges, schools, and departments). One A&R member noted that “departments keep their own lists.” A&R depends on college, school, and department representatives to delete names of students from their lists of degree-eligible students. Practices are based largely on precedent.
3. A&R has had a very stable staff of long-time employees, many of whom pre-date the introduction of the Banner system in 1997. (Cumulative experience of the four main staff members is 84 years.) One staff member noted that even without a director they function effectively. Staff members expressed their overall satisfaction with current processes and procedures and with the decentralized status quo.

4. The combination of staff stability and reluctance to change long-standing procedures suggest that in many cases, procedures for student academic records management define records-keeping policy, rather than vice versa.
5. Records management varies considerably among colleges, schools, and departments. For example, the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, described as “old fashioned,” accommodates various departmental practices. Departments submit candidates for degrees to the Dean’s office where a long-standing staff member audits records for degree eligibility, using Banner records from A&R and paper or electronic data. The results of this audit are used to modify lists held by A&R. This process is comparable to that in Agriculture, Forestry, and Consumer Sciences, where most records are kept in paper form and another long-standing staff member is responsible for degree audits.
6. Record-keeping practices vary considerably among colleges, schools, and departments; most reflect precedent, especially when staff members are long-time employees. However, some colleges (e.g., Engineering, undergraduate programs in Business and Economics) have developed written policy manuals, while others (e.g., the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences) have not.

#### Use of Banner Student Information System

7. While academic records in Banner are considered the final records, use of Banner by colleges, schools, and departments varies considerably across the university. It was reported that most faculty members enter final course grades into Banner directly and that most colleges and schools, and some departments use Banner to generate course lists, etc. However, in many areas there is a notable reluctance to use Banner extensively or proactively. Many administrators who use student data and records in their daily work expressed dissatisfaction with the formats of Banner reports as well as the difficulty of collecting and reporting data through Banner. Generally, administrators felt more comfortable with long-established individual recordkeeping policies and procedures. They often viewed Banner as a system to be accommodated rather than as a useful tool.
8. Although many departments continue to keep academic records in paper form, issues of storage space and accessibility appear to be leading to increased use of electronic document imaging and storage. Several colleges and schools, including Engineering and Business and Economics, have developed their own databases using Microsoft Access or Sequel.

## Records Retention

9. Overall, the length of record retention appears to equal or exceed AACRAO recommendations (See AACRAO's *Retention of Records: Guide for Retention and Disposal of Student Records*, 2000 Edition).
10. However, academic record retention takes a variety of forms among different colleges, schools and departments, ranging from storage of hard copy individual student folders, many of which hold original documents that may or may not have been "cleaned out," to scanned documents stored on college, school or department shared hard drives. Length of record retention was described as "forever" in one college and eight years in another.
11. Accessibility of retained academic records is often idiosyncratic and, in a number of cases, difficult.
12. A&R uses Banner for student academic records; earlier records that predate Banner's implementation in 1997 are on microfiche.
13. There appears to be no university-wide oversight of college, school, or department-level academic records retention or of records accessibility/availability.

### **B. Retention by faculty of class records such as grade sheets, exams, homework, reports, and other relevant materials.**

1. Faculty members employ a variety of methods for keeping records of student coursework grades. These range from spreadsheets or other documents on faculty members' computers, to the gradebook on eCampus, to handwritten logs. Some faculty keep their records of coursework grades for many years; others do not. Some faculty keep exams or assignments that are not routinely returned to the student for a year or more; others do not. There is an informal expectation that faculty should hand back as much graded work to students as possible.
2. WVU does not have a university-wide policy, nor do most colleges, schools, or departments have articulated policies, for faculty retention of grades or student work. Faculty members typically use individual personal practices for both keeping student work and recording course grades.

3. There appears to be no university, college, school, or departmental policy concerning eCampus course archiving. Faculty members who leave the university do not usually leave course grading records or graded student work with their departments, nor is there articulated expectation that they do so.

**C. Procedures for handling and tracking grade and transcript modifications, with the recommended stipulation that all transfer credits be recorded on official WVU transcripts.**

1. WVU's standard grade modification process appears to have sufficient procedural safeguards to ensure an appropriate level of academic control.
2. The process for changing grades (e.g., from B to B+ or Incomplete to a letter grade) is standard across the university:
  - The Grade Modification Form (in paper format) is initially completed and signed by the faculty member who taught the class. A reason for changing the grade must be provided by the faculty member.
  - The form is then submitted to the department or program chair for review and approval. The Chair can return the form to the faculty member if the reason for the change is deemed insufficient. If approved, the form is then sent to the Dean of the school or college for the Dean's approval. (In some cases, the Deans have designated Associate Deans to approve grade changes on their behalf). The Dean may send the form back to the Department or Program Chair or to the faculty member if the reason for the change is deemed insufficient.
  - If the Dean approves the grade change, the form is sent to A&R and the revised grade is entered into the student's academic record in Banner. Thus, there are two levels of review of grade changes requested by faculty members prior to entry of the new grades onto students' records.
3. WVU has a policy that prohibits the sharing of IDs and passwords. The purpose of this policy is to protect the integrity of WVU's data systems and to provide appropriate audit trails for the entering of mission critical information into the university's databases.
4. In practice, some faculty members use teaching assistants and administrative staff to enter grades into Banner using the faculty member's ID and password. It is impossible to track who has entered a grade if the IDs and passwords are shared with TAs and staff. The integrity of the grading system is at risk when faculty members share their IDs and passwords with other staff. However, there are cases when it would be reasonable to have faculty designate proxies to enter grades on their

behalf. These cases would include courses with large enrollments or instances when faculty members are not able to have access to a computer to enter grades themselves.

5. There is considerable variation among colleges, schools, and departments regarding documentation of processes for implementing critical academic policies such as grading and degree certification.
6. WVU is heavily dependent on dedicated, long-term employees who hold the institutional memory of many critical policies and processes. When long-term employees retire, important information about policies and procedures is lost and needs to be recreated through trial and error.
7. Some academic units have documented their procedures (e.g., Engineering and undergraduate programs in Business and Economics). These guides could be used as models to create similar procedures for colleges and departments that currently do not have them.
8. WVU's Internal Audit department does not periodically review the grading and degree certification processes used in the colleges, schools, departments, and A&R.
9. College and university internal audit departments often focus primarily on financial processes, not wanting to infringe on areas of academic judgment or academic freedom. Any audits of the grading and degree certification processes should focus on ensuring that the proper system security is in place to safeguard the integrity of the Banner database and that the appropriate academic authorizations have been secured for recording grades, changing grades, and awarding degrees.

**D. Basing graduation checks on official university documents held by Admissions and Records and not based on unofficial documents held by the department, school, or college.**

1. There are no comprehensive finalized degree certification lists that are approved by an academic official.
2. A *Tentative Graduation List Form* is submitted by each department to Admissions and Records a few months before each degree conferral date. For example, the *Tentative Graduation List Form* for the May commencement is submitted by colleges, schools, and departments to A&R in February. These lists are commonly signed by administrative staff, not deans, associate deans, or faculty members. Additional names can be added to the tentative list and names can be removed from the list by submitting additional *Tentative Graduation List Forms* to A&R.
3. Degree candidate information is entered, changed, and removed from Banner by A&R as the forms are received. Diplomas are ordered and

given to students based on the most recent information that has been submitted to A&R via the *Tentative Graduation List Form*; degrees are posted on students' transcripts based on these same forms. No final, complete list of all students expected to receive degrees is produced that can be reviewed by an appropriate academic authority.

4. WVU lacks a single, computer-supported degree audit system that would store all degree requirements and provide an automated means of tracking student degree progress and eligibility for degree conferral.
5. Colleges, schools and departments currently use a variety of means to track degree progress and to certify students for degrees. Tracking systems include completely manual systems, Excel and Sequel spreadsheets, and departmentally-created degree audits that draw information from Banner.
6. Not all academic units' tracking systems rely exclusively on information that is stored in the university's official student information database (Banner). Information stored in departmentally-created systems (whether manual or computerized) can contain information that has not been submitted to A&R following the standard procedures of the university.

### **VIII. Observations: College of Business and Economics**

- A. During October and November, 2008, the College of Business and Economics and the WVU administration conducted an internal review of MBA degrees awarded through its eMBA Program during the period of May 1997 to August 2008.
  1. Senior staff in the College of Business and Economics initially reported to AACRAO Consulting that they had identified 80 awarded degrees that appeared to be short of meeting degree requirements. After extensive research and review, the WVU College of Business and Economics senior staff found that 53 students had in fact met the degree requirements and 27 appeared to have not.
  2. On December 17, 2008, AACRAO Consulting received a report from WVU indicating that subsequent to the visits by AACRAO Consulting, the College of Business and Economics continued to review the academic records of those students who appeared to be short of meeting degree requirements. As of that date, they reported that there remained 27 students who received MBA degrees through the eMBA program who did not appear to meet degree requirements.
- B. AACRAO Consulting did not conduct an internal review of the degrees awarded by the eMBA Program. The consultants did, however, review with the College of Business and Economics staff the degree requirement

summaries of those students who appeared to be short of meeting degree requirements. AACRAO Consulting concurred with the assessment of the College of Business and Economics staff that these students did indeed appear to be short of meeting degree requirements.

- C. AACRAO Consulting concludes that the problems with the degrees that were awarded and were subsequently found to be short of meeting degree requirements appear to be the result of not following industry best practices in student academic records management. The most egregious aspect of this problem is the failure of the College of Business and Economics to base its assessment of whether students have met degree requirements on either adequate records in the college or on official university transcripts maintained in A&R.
- D. Other failures in the College of Business and Economics to follow industry best practices regarding student academic records management include:
  - Failure to articulate and follow records retention standards.
  - Inconsistent recording of transfer credit on official university transcripts.
  - Lack of definition for applying experiential credit toward degrees in the College of Business and Economics.
- E. AACRAO Consulting strongly believes that if the College of Business and Economics consistently follows the best practice recommendations outlined in this report, as well as the policies and procedures they have developed in written form, the college should not again experience problems with student academic records management.
- F. The College of Business and Economics should look to its undergraduate degree audit process as a model for implementing greater accountability in its graduate degree audits.

## **IX. Undergraduate Degree Discrepancies**

- A. On October 30, 2008, subsequent to the first consulting visit, WVU notified AACRAO Consulting that an internal review of undergraduate degrees awarded from May 1997 to August 2008 revealed that a number of undergraduate degrees had been awarded for which the associated student academic records did not indicate sufficient hours to meet the credit requirements stated in the university catalog.
  - 1. On December 16, 2008, WVU informed AACRAO Consulting that their internal review had initially identified 272 degrees that appeared short of meeting degree credit requirements. After additional review of program-specific requirements, WVU staff found that some degrees had been appropriately awarded in programs that had lower credit requirements.

2. As of December 18, 2008, WVU staff had determined that there were 261 degrees that appeared to be short of meeting degree credit requirements.
- B. As it fell outside the scope of this project, AACRAO Consulting did not conduct an internal review of records for the undergraduate degrees awarded with fewer than the required credit hours. The consultants did, however, review the report prepared by A&R and Dr. Jonathan Cumming that provided data on a sample of those students who appeared to be short of meeting degree requirements.

From the available information, AACRAO Consulting believes that the problems with the degrees that were awarded and were subsequently found to be short of meeting degree requirements appear to be the result of not following industry best practices in student academic records management. The primary problem is the practice of duplicate or “shadow” record keeping systems in the various colleges and departments, and the failure to rely on the official records maintained by A&R. There is also a failure to ensure that official records are complete and accurate at the time of degree conferral.

It is clear that the WVU staff involved in the review of these undergraduate records were well intentioned and careful in their work. At the same time, their review was based on a records management system that has been fundamentally flawed for a number of years in the ways described in this report. Given this reality, it seems prudent for WVU to consider having a thorough review conducted of undergraduate degrees awarded, with the review to be done by personnel from outside WVU with expertise in academic records management.

## **X. Recommendations**

### Summary Comments

AACRAO Consulting’s recommendations focus on the overall objective of enhancing WVU’s student academic records management at the university, college, school, and academic department levels with respect to:

- Integrating accountability into the process of student academic records management.
- Taking a highly proactive, stakeholder-focused, and outcome-oriented approach to the leadership and management of the process.
- Staying more current with best practices in student academic records management and, where appropriate, implementing these best practices in a timely manner.
- Developing an organizational structure that achieves and assures integrity and reliability of student academic records management.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An Office of the University Registrar should be created, headed by a new position of University Registrar, which reports to the Office of the Provost.
  - a. While there are a variety of reporting structures for University Registrars at various institutions, AACRAO Consulting recommends that since the issues under consideration in this review are largely academic in nature, the University Registrar should report to the office of WVU's chief academic officer.
  - b. The Office of the University Registrar should be the official custodian of all WVU's student academic records. This includes maintenance of WVU student academic records in perpetuity.
  - c. The responsibility for the production and maintenance of WVU's catalogs (in paper and/or electronic format) should be centralized in the Office of the University Registrar.
  - d. All university catalogs should undergo a detailed and extensive review for consistency and accuracy of degree requirements for every degree program in every department, school or college. This recommendation should be implemented as soon as possible and definitely before new catalogs are printed.
  - e. The University Registrar should be highly stakeholder-focused, outcome-oriented, and proactive in supporting the work of WVU's colleges, schools and academic departments. For example, the University Registrar must communicate regularly with the colleges and academic departments regarding policies, procedures, and enhancements of service to the academic units.
  - f. The University Registrar should appoint an active and collaborative advisory group to:
    - Provide advice on the work of the Office of the University Registrar.
    - Facilitate communication.
    - Observe best practices.
  - g. The staff of the Office of the University Registrar should include a specialist in the Banner system. This person should also serve as the office's liaison with WVU's Student Systems Management (SSM) group and serve as a resource for the colleges.
2. The final authority and accountability for awarding a WVU degree should rest with the Dean of each college or school. This should include

certification of all aspects of the degree requirements including general education, college or school, and academic department requirements. This authority does not supplant WVU's governance structure and process.

3. Admissions and Records, or if and when applicable the newly-formed Office of the University Registrar, should produce a report of all students who are expected to receive a degree for each commencement period. The report should include each student's name, degree, major, minor, academic honors (if any), and units earned toward the degree. The report should be signed by the dean of the college or school awarding the degree. The signed report should be returned to the Office of the University Registrar where it should be retained permanently as part of the university's official records.
4. To assure accountability for the integrity of academic records, each college, school and academic department should designate an individual who is responsible for oversight of undergraduate and graduate academic records management. The University Registrar should meet on a regular basis with these individuals.
5. The university must take a proactive approach to its academic records management and degree certification processes. The University should:
  - a. Establish a university-wide policy on the form and method of academic records retention. Such a policy should clarify which components of academic records should be retained after graduation.
  - b. Regularly review and, as appropriate, update and distribute its academic record-keeping policies.
  - c. Provide training and periodic refresher training for faculty and staff.
  - d. Conduct university-wide audits of academic records on an established schedule to ensure compliance at all levels of the university with its policies and procedures.
  - e. Implement computer-based audits on a frequent and regular basis to detect unusual or significant variations from the university's academic records policies and procedures. The audits should be conducted by the Office of the University Registrar.
6. The official university document for *certifying* a student's academic record and any degrees awarded should be the university transcript maintained in the Banner system and issued by the University Registrar.
7. WVU should implement improved, extended, and consistent use of Banner in order to standardize academic records management across the institution. This is likely to require improved understanding and training in Banner for a number of staff members as well as closer working

relationships among the Office of Information Technology, Admissions and Records, Student Systems Management, and deans and department staff members.

8. The staff of A&R and the new Office of the University Registrar should become much more proactive participants in the development and implementation of articulated policies and procedures and to extend use of Banner capabilities. This may require additional staffing. A closer working relationship with Institutional Research may improve the ability of A&R/Office of the University Registrar to be proactive in determining and addressing the information needs of colleges and departments related to academic records.
9. A permanent audit trail of who enters each grade into the Banner system should be maintained in perpetuity. Given the nature of faculty schedules and the large size of some classes, it is understandable that a faculty member may delegate the actual data entry of grades into the Banner system to a teaching assistant or administrative staff member. In such instances a permanent audit trail must be developed and maintained.
10. All credit accepted for transfer to the university should be recorded on the official transcript by the Office of the University Registrar.
  - a. Transfer credit decisions should continue to reflect:
    - Eligibility of credit for a WVU degree and
    - Applicability of the credit to the student's degree program.
  - b. Admissions personnel should coordinate the transfer credit process for undergraduates. Once an applicant enrolls and transferability of credit is established, the responsibility for the maintenance of the records should move to the new Office of the University Registrar.
  - c. The colleges should coordinate the transfer credit process for graduate and professional school students. Once an applicant enrolls and transferability of credit is established, the responsibility for the maintenance of the records should move to the Office of the University Registrar.
  - d. The official transcripts from which the transfer credit decision was made should be maintained in the Office of the University Registrar once a student is enrolled.
11. A computer-supported degree audit system should be implemented and maintained by the University Registrar.
  - a. The degree audit system should be fully integrated with WVU's Banner system.
  - b. The degree audit system should be available to colleges, schools, and academic advisors, in addition to WVU students.

12. Clear and consistent policies for when and how long a “NR” or “I” grade designation can remain in place should be established and strictly enforced.
  - a. The University Registrar should automatically change these grade designations to an “F” if they have not been resolved by the specified time.
  - b. These policies should be strictly enforced at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.
  - c. Any student receiving an “I” or “NR” must sign a contract specifying the steps and timetable to be followed to resolve these grade designations.
13. WVU should develop a standard university-wide approach for assigning and recording credit for experiential learning and for courses that do not follow the university’s standard academic calendar.
14. Imaged documents and databases maintained by some academic departments and colleges should NOT be considered official university records. Only those in the university’s official, formal record keeping systems overseen by the Office of the University Registrar may be considered official.
15. From a public relations perspective, it is preferable to hand out official diplomas at the annual May graduation ceremonies. It reinforces the real “meaning” of the ceremony.
  - a. AACRAO Consulting considers the time between WVU’s finals and graduation to be adequate for the institution to fully employ best practice degree audit and clearance procedures in time for graduation.
  - b. However, if WVU is not able to fully meet this standard, it should stop handing out diplomas at any graduation ceremony until it is absolutely certain that appropriate policies and procedures are in place and being followed. It should be noted that many colleges and universities around the United States distribute substitute documents at graduation and send official degree documents later.
16. The entire university should, at a minimum, adhere to the guidelines outlined in *AACRAO’s Retention of Records, Guide for Retention and Disposal of Student Records*. This document outlines best practices in academic records management and is periodically updated by AACRAO to assist college and university records managers in their work. *Note:* AACRAO Consulting has provided two copies of this publication to WVU. Additional copies of the publication are available at [www.aacrao.org](http://www.aacrao.org).
17. The university, through the Office of the University Registrar, should establish articulated university-wide policy on form and method of

academic records retention. Such a policy should clarify which components of academic records should be retained.

18. WVU's Internal Audit department should periodically review the grading and degree certification processes to ensure that appropriate institutional controls are being followed.
19. Academic units that use "shadow" systems for their own record-keeping must follow standard WVU policies and procedures for ensuring data security.
20. All academic units should be required, at minimum, to adhere to the university's central academic records management and degree certification policies and procedures. Any policies or procedures developed by a college, school, or department to reflect the special needs of that unit must be secondary to WVU's central policies and procedures, not a replacement for them.
21. Individual faculty members should retain copies of undistributed class tests and student papers, as well as class grade rosters for at least one year following the date grades were assigned. It is imperative that faculty retain copies of these items for the period of time for which WVU policy allows students to appeal their grades.
22. The official copy of the class grade roster should be maintained by the Office of the University Registrar in perpetuity.
23. The current procedure of faculty member initiation of grade changes with review by two higher levels of academic authority should be continued to ensure the integrity of the University's grading system.
24. To further improve its academic records management, WVU should consider:
  - a. Providing faculty with a standard format gradebook in electronic form that is accessible to departmental administrators and can be retained by the department in non-amendable form.
  - b. Requiring departing faculty members to provide copies of their grading records to the department (perhaps in conjunction with the above recommendation).
25. Each college and school should develop and keep current academic records policies and articulate them in procedures manuals. The manuals should be reviewed annually to ensure their accuracy. These manuals should address the issues of grade reporting, grade modifications, awarding of experiential and transfer credit, and the recording of all credit on the official academic record.

AACRAO Consulting saw several model examples of college, school, or departmental academic record keeping that could be shared through the recommended University Registrar's Advisory Group as best practices. Some examples are the College of Engineering and Mineral Resources, the College of Human Resources and Education, and the undergraduate programs in the College of Business and Economics.

26. The guidelines outlined in *AACRAO's Retention of Records, Guide for Retention and Disposal of Student Records* and AACRAO Consulting's recommendations in this report should be reviewed by WVU's General Counsel to ensure WVU's compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations. In addition, the recommended University Registrar should maintain a close working relationship with WVU's Office of General Counsel since many aspects of records management have direct legal implications.
27. In addition to enhanced utilization of the Banner student information system, WVU should adopt current best practices in the use of technology to support academic records management such as:
  - a. Computer-supported transfer credit and degree audit systems.
  - b. Imaging and storing all academic records via a computer-supported document imaging and retrieval system. Given that the Morgantown campus is spread out over several locations and multiple academic units, document imaging and retrieval could be a significant boost to the effectiveness and efficiency of records management. WVU should take full advantage of options such as work flow design to improve the productivity of its academic record-keeping system.
  - c. Client relationship management system to facilitate the tracking and coordination of communications with current students among WVU offices.
  - d. User-friendly data warehouses to facilitate report production and data analysis.
  - e. Computer-supported process mapping of key university functions such as its undergraduate and graduate transfer credit processes.
28. WVU should expand the use of both on-campus and off-campus strategic partners to facilitate the implementation of best practice technology.
  - a. Because of the expense of new technology and its implementation, every effort should be made to implement major new systems at the enterprise level.
  - b. WVU must make certain that it maintains full control of any system that is outsourced. While WVU can delegate operational control for certain aspects of its academic record-keeping processes, it must maintain ultimate responsibility for its academic and data security policies and the administration of these policies.

29. WVU must make a decision regarding any degrees awarded in cases where students' academic records reflect fewer credit hours than the number required for the degree, as indicated in the university catalog. This appears to have been the case in the eMBA program and with some undergraduate degrees. Legal and professional precedence suggests that such decisions are at the discretion of the institution conferring the degree; therefore it would be inappropriate for AACRAO Consulting to recommend specific action in those cases.

As WVU considers the cases in which degrees may have been awarded with insufficient credits, AACRAO Consulting recommends that WVU consider factors such as:

- Legal implications of challenging a degree after it has been awarded, as informed by the legal review provided as Appendix C of this report.
- Fairness to the students who have received degrees but whose records appear to not meet degree requirements.
- Appropriate means of restoring the confidence of the university's stakeholders, including state taxpayers, alumni, employers, and state government officials, about the integrity of its student academic records management.

It is further recommended that a thorough review be conducted of undergraduate degrees awarded, with the review to be done by personnel from outside WVU with expertise in academic records management. *Note: WVU is extending the work of AACRAO Consulting to conduct such a review.*

## **XI. Conclusion**

AACRAO Consulting wishes to thank the faculty, staff, and administration of WVU with whom we met during our visits. We very much appreciate and respect your candor in working with us and your receptivity to our efforts to assist the university in improving its academic records management.

## Appendix A

### **Persons met with during first consulting visit**

#### *West Virginia University On-Site Project Team*

- Patricia Chase, Dean, School of Pharmacy
- Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President, Graduate Education (Team Lead)
- Sue Day-Perroots, Dean, Extended Learning
- Mary Ellen Mazey, Dean, Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
- Marilyn Potts, Interim Director, Admissions and Records
- Maryanne Reed, Dean, School of Journalism
- Cheryl Torsney, Associate Provost for Academic Programs

#### *Admissions and Records Staff*

- Kenton Colvin, Assistant Director
- Marilyn Potts, Interim Director
- Deborah Stone, Supervisor Student Records
- Steve Taylor, Associate Director of Admissions and Records

#### *Faculty Senate*

- Nigel Clark, Chair Elect
- Steve Kite, Past Faculty Senate Chair
- Virginia F. Kleist, Chair

#### *Agriculture, Forestry, and Consumer Sciences*

- Rita Dudley, Undergraduate Admissions Officer
- Denny Smith, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
- Linda Tolka, Records Officer

#### *Eberly College of Arts and Sciences – Chairs*

- Lori Britton, Academic Advisor, Forensic and Investigative Sciences Program
- Trevor Harris, Chair, Geology and Geography
- Jonna Huffman, Academic Advisor, Biology
- Debbie Koon, Administrative Associate, Public Administration
- Vee Lewis, Administrative Assistant, Student Records Office, Psychology
- Matt Martin, Chair, Communication Studies
- Keith Morris, Director, Forensic and Investigative Sciences Program
- Michael Perone, Chair, Psychology
- Chris Plein, Chair, Division of Public Administration, Assistant Dean, School of Applied Social Sciences
- Debra Swinney, Student Records Assistant, Psychology
- Jeffrey Wells, Chair, Biology

#### *Eberly College of Arts and Sciences – Records Administration*

- Kimberly Dixon, Academic Advisor

- Rose Eavenson, Student Records Assistant
- Fred King, Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies
- Katherine Karraker, Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies

*College of Human Resources and Education*

- Judy A. Abbott, Assistant Dean for Teacher Education
- Char Allen, Academic Advisor

*College of Engineering and Mineral Resources – Chairs*

- Lucy Freed, LCSEE Administrative Secretary
- Wafik Iskander, IMSE Chair
- Kasandra Kasten, IMSE Chair
- Brian Woerner, LCSEE Chair

*College of Business and Economics*

- Bonnie Anderson, Associate Director, Graduate Programs
- Gerald Blakely, Director, EMBA Program
- Brian Cushing, Associate Professor, Economics
- Jeff Houghton, Associate Professor, Economics
- Bob Maust, Professor, Accounting, B&E
- Bill Trumbull, Interim Dean B&E
- Liz Vitullo, Program Coordinator, B&E

*West Virginia University Leadership Team*

- Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President, Graduate Education (Team Lead)
- Russ Dean, Senior Associate Provost
- E. Jane Martin, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research

*Enrollment Management*

- Brenda Thompson, Assistant Vice President, Student Affairs and Enrollment Services

## **Appendix B**

### **Persons met with during second consulting visit**

#### *West Virginia University Leadership Team*

- Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President, Graduate Education (Team Lead)
- Russ Dean, Senior Associate Provost
- E. Jane Martin, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research

#### *College of Engineering and Mineral Resources*

- Gene Cilento, Dean
- Linda Fredrick, Coordinator, Student Services

#### *College of Law*

- John W. Fisher, II, former Dean
- Jackie Bennett, Registrar

#### *School of Pharmacy – Chairs and Records Administration*

- Kathy Areford, Finance and Business Administrator
- Patrick Callery, Chair, Basic Pharmacy Sciences
- Jennifer Clutter, Program Coordinator
- Suresh Madhavan, Chair, Pharmaceutical Systems and Policy
- Rae Matsumoto, Associate Dean for Graduate and Research Affairs
- Claire Noel, Assistant Director, HSC Grad Program
- Clarke Ridgeway, Assistant Dean, Student Services

#### *School of Dentistry*

- Cathy Boyce, Academic Program Coordinator
- Christina De Biase, Academic Dean

#### *School of Medicine*

- Toni Burbridge, Senior Program Coordinator
- Pam Carico, Academic Advisor
- Anne Cather, Associate Dean, Student Services, M.D. Programs
- Mary Beth Mandich, Associate Dean, Professional Programs
- Fred L. Minnear, Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies
- Brenda Wolfe, Academic Advisor

#### *School of Nursing*

- Terry Shaeiwitz, Student Program Advisor, Student Services
- Elizabeth Shelton, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs
- Mary Jane Smith, Associate Dean for Graduate Academic Affairs
- Stuart Wells, Assistant Dean, Student Services

#### *School of Journalism*

- Jan Boyles, Director of Advising
- Chad Mezera, IMC Program Director
- Steve Urbanski, Director of Graduate Studies

*West Virginia University On-Site Project Team*

- Patricia Chase, Dean, Pharmacy
- Nigel Clark, Chair Elect, Faculty Senate
- Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President, Graduate Education (Team Lead)
- Robin Hensel, Assistant Dean, Engineering and Mineral Resources (substitute)
- Dee Hopkins, Dean, Human Resources and Education
- Sue Day-Perroots, Dean, Extended Learning
- Marilyn Potts, Interim Director, Admissions and Records
- Mary Jane Smith, Associate Dean for Graduate Academic Affairs, Nursing

*College of Business and Economics*

- Bonnie Anderson, Associate Director, Graduate Programs
- Joe Seiaman, Director of Undergraduate Programs and Advising
- Jerry Blakely, Director, EMBA Program
- Jonathan Cumming, Assistant Vice President, Graduate Education
- Bill Trumbull, Dean

## **Appendix C**

### **WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION**

#### **Legal Review: Degree Revocation Saundra K. Schuster, Esq. December 16, 2008**

You have requested that I provide a legal analysis of the rights of the West Virginia University to implement a degree revocation process and to identify the framework for such an action as well as discuss the potential liabilities for conducting this action.

The precedence for an institution's authority to revoke a degree was established in 1334 in England in a case titled *King v. University of Cambridge*<sup>1</sup>. Although in this case the student prevailed in his action to restore his degree, based on the failure of the University to provide adequate due process, the Court clearly recognized the right of the University to "revoke a degree for a reasonable cause"<sup>2</sup>. Generally, public higher education institutions have the authority to rescind a degree previously awarded, consistent with the authority to award such a degree<sup>3</sup>. Such authority has been articulated through the courts as a result of a legal challenge by a former student upon revocation of his degree. The court in *Waliga v. Board of Trustees of Kent State University* stated, "*Academic degrees are a university's certification to the world at large of the recipient's educational achievement and the fulfillment of the institution's standards. To hold that a university may never withdraw a degree, effectively requires the university to continue making a false certification to the public at large of the accomplishment of persons who in fact lack the very qualifications that are certified.*"<sup>4</sup>

The genesis for degree revocation resides with the institutional authority to establish academic standards for degree attainment and articulating to students, through course catalogs and handbooks, their obligation to comply with both the course requirements as well as specified personal and academic behavior requirements. The courts provide great deference to institutions of higher education to establish these standards.<sup>5</sup> In the event that a degree is procured through fraud, or a degree is awarded erroneously, it is well within the implied authority of the university to revoke it.<sup>6</sup> Although the court's analysis of institutional authority support an institution's right to revoke a previously awarded degree, such authority is not without constraints. The courts have clearly established that within the institution's inherent power to revoke a degree are the important considerations that there is proper cause for such an action, and that students are provided with

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<sup>1</sup> 8 Mod. Rep. 148 (1334)

<sup>2</sup> *Students Right to Compel School Officials to Issue Degree, Diploma, or the Like*, 11 A.L.R. 4<sup>th</sup> 1182(1982 & 2004)

<sup>3</sup> See generally, 3 Rapp, EDUCATION LAW § 8.06 [1]

<sup>4</sup> *Waliga v. Board of Trustees of Kent State University*, 488 N.E. 850, 852(Ohio 1986)

<sup>5</sup> *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234, 263 (1957) (establishing four essential freedoms of a university: to determine, based on academic grounds, who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught and who may be admitted to study.

<sup>6</sup> *Waliga at 7*, citing to *State, ex rel. Corrigan, v. Seminatore* (1981) 66 Ohio St. 2d 459

appropriate due process.<sup>7</sup> Students at the West Virginia University have both a contract right<sup>8</sup> as well as a constitutional right<sup>9</sup> to their education.

Although the courts have clearly established the right of the institution to revoke a degree, there are essential next steps for analysis. The first consideration in the analysis of the process for degree revocation is who holds the authority to authorize the revocation of a degree. The court in *Crook v. Baker*<sup>10</sup> articulated that the power to revoke a degree is a clear question of state law, thus this analysis will examine the laws of the state of West Virginia in order to identify the legislatively imposed authority to award a degree and, thus by the authority established through contract law, the converse, the authority to revoke a previously awarded degree. The next issue is what procedural protections must be in place to insure appropriate due process for the affected individual. Because the West Virginia University is a public institution, students have a constitutionally established property right to their education, and thus, to their degree. Therefore, before a previously awarded degree can be rescinded, the student is entitled, by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, to due process appropriate to that right being revoked.

In *Hand v. Mitchell*<sup>11</sup> the court awarded summary judgment to the student who challenged the revocation of his degree. The court stated that the board of regents of Mexico State University, who held the authority to award degrees, could not delegate its authority to revoke a degree to a subordinate individual or body; in this case, the degree revocation had been delegated to a graduate dean and appealed to an executive vice president.

In the state of West Virginia, provisions relating to the governance of the university are found in The West Virginia Code §18-11-1, “The business and educational affairs of the university shall be under the control, supervision and management of the board of governors, which shall be a corporation, and as such may contract and be contracted with, sue and be sued, plead and be impleaded and have and use a common seal...The board of governors shall have general control, supervision and management of the business and educational affairs of the university.” Additionally §18-11-5 states, “The rules and regulations made by the president and faculties of the university governing the admission of students to the university, the standards of scholarship to be maintained, the conferring of degrees and the granting of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of work done by student of the university, shall be submitted to the board of governors for its approval. The rules and regulations made by the president and faculties for the general government of the university shall

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<sup>7</sup> See *Hand v. Mitchell*, 957 F. 2d 791, 794-95 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1992); *Crook v. Baker*, 813 F. 2d 88, 92-94 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1987); *Crook v. Baker* 813 F. 2d 88, 92-94 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1987); *Waliga v. Board of Trustees of Kent State University*, 22 Ohio St. 3d 55, 488 N.E. 2d 850, 852-53 (Ohio 1986)

<sup>8</sup> *University of Miami v. Militana*, 184 So. 2d 704 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1966) and *Anthony v. Syracuse University*, 224 A.D. 487, 489-90, 231 N.Y.S. 435 (N.Y. App. Div 1928) stating “under ordinary circumstances and conditions a person matriculating at a university establishes a contractual relationship.”

<sup>9</sup> *Cleveland Bd. of Edn. V. Loudermill*, U.S. 84 L. Ed 2d 494, 503 (1985) stating: “A degree holder possesses a property rights in and to his degree and that substantial right cannot be taken away except pursuant to constitutionally adequate procedures.”

<sup>10</sup> *Crook v. Baker*, 813 F. 2d 88 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir 1987)

<sup>11</sup> *Hand v. Mitchell*, 957 F. 2d 791, 794-95 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1992)

in like manner be submitted to said board for its approval.” Finally West Virginia Code §18B-4-7 states, “An institution of higher education may not confer any degree on any basis of work or merit below the minimum standards prescribed by the Council, Commission or the governing boards....With the approval of the Commission, governing boards of institutions which currently offer substantial undergraduate course offerings and a master’s degree in a discipline are authorized to grant baccalaureate degrees in that discipline.”

In order to comport with basic procedural due process, the institution must, at a minimum, provide the individual for whom the institution is seeking to revoke a diploma the notice of the consideration of revocation and an opportunity for the affected individual to present information at a fair hearing in order to protect his/her interests. The institution may in addition provide an opportunity for the affected individual to be accompanied by legal counsel to provide advice, but not provide representation; to present witnesses on his/her behalf; provide supporting documentation on his/her behalf; and ask questions of witnesses called by the institution. In addition to ensuring procedural due process, the institution must ensure that substantive due process standards are met, in that the process is not conducted with malice, or in an arbitrary or capricious manner.

While courts have generally upheld the right of an institution to revoke an academic degree, such actions were based upon issues of fraud, deceit, or error, or because the student failed to meet academic requirements or was subsequently found to have engaged in academic dishonesty in order to meet the required standards. Because there are a limited number of court decisions that address the legal foundation for revoking a degree, the legal “good faith” basis for such revocation must be approached cautiously. If the basis for the degree revocation is not a result of misrepresentation or a fraudulent or dishonest action on the part of the student, but rather a result of institutional error or malfeasance on the part of a university employee, the student may have a strong basis to challenge the revocation under the legal theory of promissory estoppel (that is, asking the university to stop the action because the student, in good faith, fulfilled his/her contract with the university and relied on the university to perform their duties in good faith) or breach of contract.

In summary, the West Virginia University has the inherent authority to revoke a previously awarded academic degree under the same authority that the degree is awarded. Under West Virginia state law, the power to authorize awarding of a degree is held by the governing board. Thus, only the governing board would have the authority to authorize revocation of a previously awarded degree. Any individual threatened with degree revocation is entitled to a procedural due process hearing that substantially comports with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment due process standards. Additionally, any hearing process must reflect appropriate substantive due process standards. Finally, the basis for the recommendation of degree revocation must be made for “good cause” such as fraud, deceit or

error.<sup>12</sup> The burden will fall on the institution to demonstrate the foundation for the “good cause” basis.

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<sup>12</sup> *Id. Waliga*