TRUSTEE COMMUNITY REPORT
To the Wheaton College Family:

The Board of Trustees (“Trustees”) has concluded its review of the Review Task Force findings and recommendations regarding the events leading to Dr. Larycia Hawkins and Wheaton College (“the College”) parting ways in February 2016. This communication is based on the findings of the Review Task Force report, and summarizes the recommendations that we believe will be most productive and critical to learn from this experience. The following recommendations will better equip and strengthen us as a community to fulfill our mission of serving Jesus Christ and His Kingdom through excellence in liberal arts and graduate programs that educate the whole person to build the church and benefit society worldwide.

President Philip Ryken is to be commended for requesting this review of systems, processes and decisions due to the high level of concern and complexity surrounding these difficult events. The Trustees appointed a Review Task Force made up of 15 individuals of varying backgrounds and perspectives, which included eight trustees, three faculty members, one staff member, one student leader, one alumni leader and one external global church leader. The Review Task Force was asked to carefully review the following:

1. Core Beliefs, including the Statement of Faith and how it intersects with academic freedom;
2. Processes, including the effectiveness of administrative and faculty procedures;
3. People, including matters of justice, objectivity and confidentiality;
4. Impartiality, including the role of ethnicity, gender and related factors; and
5. Governance, including organizational oversight and decision-making.

The Review Task Force convened on February 24, 2016 and over the ensuing months prayerfully and diligently collected and reviewed a tremendous amount of written, audio and video data, including: hundreds of emails and social media comments, transcripts, media statements, interviews, impact statements and detailed timelines. This was complemented by 47 face-to-face interviews and many other conversations, all of which were conducted under a strict confidentiality agreement to encourage candor from all participants.

Dr. Hawkins declined the request to be interviewed by the Review Task Force. We humbly acknowledge that without her essential voice to interpret primary source material, the Review Task Force was required to focus its review on actions of the administration, faculty and staff. While diverse in background and perspective, the Review Task Force came together as one in its findings and recommendations.
The Findings and Recommendations outlined below are offered with a spirit of both lament and gratitude. The Trustees lament the painful impact these events have had on our campus community and global alumni family, including Dr. Hawkins. We regret the confusion experienced among our faculty, staff and students while these complex events advanced around them. We also realize that many in our community feel a sense of loss from her absence.

We are grateful to Dr. Hawkins and thankful for her many years of service to the College. We also fully support our faculty and admire their integration of faith and learning in the classroom, their scholarship and expertise in their guilds, and their unwavering care for our students. We are appreciative of our administration and staff, and for their ceaseless efforts on behalf of the College. We are grateful for alumni and supporters of the College who have thoughtfully shared their concerns and have prayed for Wheaton during this review. We especially praise God for the gift of our students, their passion for learning, and their eagerness to serve God and His church wherever that may lead.

This examination was a process of deep personal and shared reflection and humility, and we hope that this report will be received with a similar attitude of Biblical lament, faithful prayer, forgiveness, self-examination and grace. We acknowledge the benefit of hindsight and recognize that rapidly unfolding events and media attention in December 2015 and January 2016 created a chaotic environment in which to respond. And we confess to being as fully human as all those involved and accept responsibility for mistakes made as the individuals tasked with stewarding this institution.

The Trustees stand firmly behind President Ryken and his administration. We remain confident he is the person providentially brought to lead Wheaton College in implementing the recommendations that have emerged from this review and in fulfilling its mission for many years to come.

Respectfully,

The Trustees of Wheaton College
Findings

Core Beliefs

The events that were reviewed raised questions about the relationship between the College’s commitment to the Statement of Faith, the Community Covenant and academic freedom. It is important to reaffirm that Wheaton College is a confessional institution in which academic freedom is actively supported within the context of its religious distinctives as described in the Statement of Faith and Community Covenant. These documents are framed and ultimately interpreted by the Board of Trustees. All employees share responsibility for the mission of the College and commitment to the Statement of Faith and Community Covenant, with particular responsibility given to the President.

Given the focus of the College’s mission on the integration of the Christian faith with all areas of learning, faculty (as well as many staff and administrators) are deeply involved in reflecting on the various ways our faith intersects with all dimensions of human life. Such work cannot be pursued without a deep commitment to academic freedom that is rooted in our shared convictions to fulfill our distinctively Christian mission. The College, within the context of its mission, Statement of Faith and Community Covenant, celebrates academic freedom. The College actively supports the academic freedom of faculty in their research, publishing, teaching and public activities tied to their areas of expertise.

We encourage President Ryken and Provost Margaret Diddams to continue fostering a sense of open dialogue between faculty and the administration about ideas and issues in their teaching, writing and public activities where questions might arise about alignment with the Statement of Faith. In a creedal institution, theological boundary conversations related to the intersection of theology, research and scholarship between administrators and faculty are necessary, even critical, and should take place in a respectful manner. Although administrators must be allowed flexibility in pursuing these conversations, faculty well-being would be greatly enhanced by clear and transparent protocols for such discussions. This would go a long way toward encouraging both theological rigor and academic freedom within a vibrant intellectual community. Thoughtfully engaging in conversations about our core theological beliefs must take into account concerns about academic freedom and a clearly understood process.

The Trustees concur with the Review Task Force in finding no evidence that faculty are waver in their commitment to the Statement of Faith, Community Covenant, and mission of the College. Furthermore, faculty are supportive of the primary, but by no means exclusive, responsibility of
the President to ensure theological integrity in our community. The President delegates this oversight to the Provost in relation to the faculty. We acknowledge that these events have raised concerns among some faculty about what it means to “model” the Statement of Faith and the interface between academic freedom and the Statement of Faith. For example, the ambiguity present in social media raises both responsibilities and concerns. On one hand, social media provides a tremendous platform for speaking against injustice and for standing up for what is true, worthwhile and good. On the other hand, it makes it more difficult to distinguish one’s voice as a private citizen from that of an institutional representative. New and difficult questions are raised, requiring wise judgment calls.

We also recognize that broad theological statements understood one way within the academy may be understood quite differently in the general public, and can become fractured across a complex social media landscape. As a result, it is no surprise that the Review Task Force found confusion and division within and among our faculty, staff, students and alumni concerning these tensions. Some questioned whether the College had drifted from its faith essentials by embracing a wider, more pluralistic view, while others wondered whether the College had subtly added non-essential doctrines to its core beliefs, becoming narrower in the process. We found neither to be true.

We affirm the President and Provost’s pursuit of theological conversation with Dr. Hawkins concerning her Facebook posts as well as her written theological response to the Provost’s questions. The Review Task Force and the Trustees affirm that the confessional identity of Wheaton College made it necessary to engage Dr. Hawkins about these statements – and especially those about human origins and the relationship between Christianity and Islam. We note that the College did not oppose Dr. Hawkins’ decision to wear a hijab during Advent and commended her gesture of care for Muslims in the face of discrimination. While her Facebook posts and media interviews seemed primarily intended to invite others to join her in this gesture of solidarity with Muslims who were unfairly associated with violent terrorist acts, her theological statements in support of this solidarity could be interpreted in ways that were inconsistent with the College’s Statement of Faith.

While Dr. Hawkins did submit written responses to the Provost's initial questions, she declined to engage in further theological conversation creating an impasse between her and the administration. Furthermore, the mediated agreement between Dr. Hawkins and the College to separate ended the process to determine whether her theological views were consistent with the Statement of Faith.

The Review Task Force was not asked to review Dr. Hawkins’ alignment with the College’s Statement of Faith, and its assessment was limited by lack of opportunity to interview her. The
President has initiated a task force of faculty, staff and students, fully supported by the Trustees, to produce a theological and missiological statement on Christianity and Islam that will engage the Wheaton community in the kind of dialogue in which it serves the church and society.
Processes and People

When reviewing the decisions and events that led to the separation of Dr. Hawkins and the College, we find Provost Jones’ apology offered to Dr. Hawkins on February 3, 2016 identifies many of the actions of the administration that we regret and wish to learn from going forward. President Ryken agrees that as President of the institution, these regrettable actions happened under his leadership. As Provost Jones’ immediate supervisor, more direction of the Provost might have avoided some of these difficulties. The President could have engaged his cabinet more deeply and encouraged the Provost to seek more counsel from his own senior academic leaders and the Director of Human Resources in the early days of the incident. However, President Ryken’s active engagement with Dr. Hawkins following the Notice of Termination effectively facilitated a resolution of the conflict. Following the mediated agreement to part ways, his emphasis on lament in acknowledging the pain experienced by the community set a gracious and appropriate tone for both the reconciliation service at the College and the press conference in Chicago. We affirm the Review Task Force’s commendation of his leadership and integrity during this period.

We agree with Provost Jones when he stated that, although he exercised his position of faculty oversight within the bounds of college employment policies and procedures, initially engaging Dr. Hawkins indirectly through an intermediary lacked wisdom and collegiality. It likely contributed to confusion about the precise nature of the Provost’s concerns.

Placing Dr. Hawkins on administrative leave at the conclusion of their first face-to-face meeting was an error in judgment, especially since she agreed to prepare a written response to his concerns. Publicly announcing the imposition of administrative leave exacerbated the conflict and was distressing to Dr. Hawkins. She should have been informed that the administration believed a public response to the situation was necessary and given adequate notice of the public announcement that she was being placed on administrative leave. We agree with the Provost that he introduced significant confusion regarding possible resolution options in a December 19, 2015 meeting with Dr. Hawkins. Provost Jones is to be commended for his grace and humility in offering an apology for these actions. In spite of the significant missteps described in his apology, we affirm Provost Jones’ decades of outstanding service and long history of promoting racial and gender diversity at the College.

We agree with the Review Task Force that a more appropriate public announcement on December 15, 2015 should have been limited to an affirmation of the College’s commitment to our Statement of Faith, a reminder that all faculty annually affirm the Statement of Faith and Community Covenant, an intent to conduct an internal review under normal protocols, and a statement that no further public comments would be forthcoming until completion of this review.
It would have been advisable for the Provost to reach out to Dr. Hawkins again prior to initiating termination proceedings on January 4, 2016, despite her stated unwillingness to engage in any further theological conversation.

Provost Jones and Dr. Hawkins had a difficult history leading up to this incident and their different backgrounds, personalities, perceptions, and employment positions likely contributed to the challenges of the situation. While acknowledging their strained relationship - and thus the wisdom of inviting others such as her Dean or the President into the conversation with him when issues arose in December 2015 - we also note that Provost Jones was at many times a strong advocate for Dr. Hawkins.

When considering internal processes and communication, this event has raised legitimate questions about the adequacy of shared governance practices and clear mandates for specific faculty committees. We affirm that there is a shared responsibility among the administration, faculty and staff for the public reputation of the College. A lack of guidance from established standard social media policies also caused confusion. Some faculty comments, statements, release of personal correspondence and partial release of personnel documents with incomplete, and thus inaccurate, information hurt institutional and some personal reputations irreparably. The unauthorized dissemination, or leaking, of confidential and internal documents or emails was unethical and unprofessional. The Review Task Force found personal justifications for such actions to be without merit.

Racist and misogynistic comments made throughout social media, many of which were directed at Dr. Hawkins herself, were abhorrent and harmful. We join with Provost Jones in expressing our sorrow for the pain this caused her and affirm such comments have no place in civil or Christian discourse.

The accusations of racial and gender discrimination, resulting from a leaked faculty subcommittee memo, were damaging institutionally to the College and personally to Provost Jones. This document lacked the objectivity and thoroughness of a formal investigation and should have been presented solely as counsel for the Faculty Personnel Committee in its role adjudicating the Notice of Termination for Cause. Also, the Review Task Force found no evidence that decisions were driven by influential donors or specific budget issues.

When considering external processes, the College’s media and communications team put forth extraordinary effort during this incident but was overwhelmed by the magnitude of national media attention and social media reaction by faculty, students, alumni and individuals unrelated to the College. Limited communication from the administration to alumni, faculty, staff and students
during December 2015 and January 2016 led many to feel the need to fill in the gaps with their own perceptions. Tension between the Christian convictions of the College and areas where these beliefs conflict with public priorities will require an ongoing institutional commitment to explaining and living out our mission and unique contribution to higher education in an increasingly pluralistic society.
Impartiality

The Review Task Force found no intentional racial or gender-based discrimination in these events. At the same time, we acknowledge the concern of the Review Task Force that unconscious bias and unintentional partiality may have been present in areas of both race and gender with respect to the interactions between the College and Dr. Hawkins. Therefore, we affirm that the recommendations reflect a commitment to identifying and learning how to overcome unconscious bias wherever it may be in our community.

President Ryken and the Board of Trustees have made deepening ethnic diversity a top strategic priority of the College. We must continue to listen and learn how to differentiate between our core Protestant evangelical convictions and elements of our evangelical and organizational culture that can limit the degree to which those of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds can enter and feel embraced on our campus. We humbly recognize that the worldwide church is currently much more diverse than the College.

At the same time, we also affirm an early heritage of educating both people of color and women. Wheaton’s first president, Jonathan Blanchard, left seminary to join the abolitionist movement. Former slaves were admitted as students. In addition, Wheaton College was among the first schools to advocate for the co-education of women and men. The College must recommit itself to this heritage and learn from these events in order to press on with intentionality to educate mature graduates who will represent Christ and serve the global church in all its diversity.
Governance

Broadly, the role of the Board of Trustees at Wheaton College is to hire the President, set institutional policy, and to audit programs and processes. Our approach to administrative governance is conducted primarily through the President. The Trustees received regular briefings regarding the developing events as part of our oversight and advisory role. We were cautious about engaging more deeply with the President early on during these events due to concerns that both the President and Board of Trustees would have roles to play if the conflict eventually required a Termination for Cause Proceeding.

The Board recognizes that it holds ultimate responsibility for all that proceeded during these events and is determined to learn from it. Accordingly, the Trustee Governance and Nominating Committee has engaged a process to reflect on the Board’s performance, including its level of effectiveness, and adequacy of support and review for the President, with added emphasis on improving governance best practices during times of extraordinary crisis.

While we lament the wounds that remain in our community, the Board of Trustees retains a firm commitment to the mission of Wheaton College, a dedication to theological orthodoxy, a commitment to fair and transparent processes, and an ongoing mandate to deepen ethnic diversity in our institution.
Recommendations

The Trustees of Wheaton College have received the Review Task Force report and reviewed it with President Ryken. As a result, we have approved the following recommendations, with President Ryken’s complete concurrence and the affirmation that his administration will take responsibility for their implementation:

1. The administration should lead the campus through a period of reconciliation and healing by reviewing this report with faculty, staff and students and collaborating with appropriate groups in implementing its recommendations with humility and grace.

2. The administration will collaborate with faculty, staff and students to produce a theological and missiological statement on Christianity and Islam, to be approved by the Board of Trustees.

3. The faculty, in collaboration with the administration, will review and revise the Faculty Handbook to clarify or address the following items, presenting changes or additions to the Board of Trustees for approval.
   a. Clear articulation of the practice of shared governance.
   b. Protocols for the administration to discuss Statement of Faith boundary concerns with tenured and non-tenured faculty. For tenured faculty, such protocols would begin prior to initiating a formal Termination for Cause proceeding.
   c. Expectations for modeling the Statement of Faith.
   d. Development of guidelines with respect to the use of social media, with particular clarification for faculty on issues of academic freedom in this context.
   e. A robust mandate and clear operational guidelines for the Faculty Council, the Faculty Diversity Committee, and all other committees under Faculty Council purview.
   f. Additional guidelines for the administration and Faculty Personnel Committee in conducting a formal Termination for Cause proceedings, giving particular attention to empowering Presidential leadership and addressing conflict of interest considerations.

4. The Board of Trustees and administration should devote time and resources to developing and implementing a plan with specific goals for deepening ethnic diversity. Given the abundant research suggesting that each of us practices some degree of unintentional
partiality, such a plan will include guidance in how to develop skill in identifying, understanding and overcoming unconscious bias for our campus community.

5. The Employee Handbook should be reconciled with the Faculty Handbook and any contradictions resolved in consultation with human resources. These handbooks should include a strong policy statement prohibiting the public release of personnel documents and private e-mail, correspondence and documents between members of the College community without consent.

6. A clear protocol should be put in place for how senior administrators and Deans will conduct or implement all personnel actions related to faculty in the Employee Handbook. Human Resources should be consulted in personnel matters in which policies and procedures in the Employee Handbook are applied to faculty.

7. Meeting the new challenges accompanying social media will require us to develop better communal practices as well as developing a particular social media policy. The administration should encourage campus-wide reflection on character-formation and wise engagement with social media, as well as developing a clear Social Media Policy for faculty, staff and students, in consultation with each of these groups. These policies should reflect principles from the Community Covenant and include periodic education and re-evaluation.

8. The administration should enhance significantly capabilities for timely crisis management and responsive communications with faculty, staff, students, alumni and the general public through traditional and social channels.

9. The administration should ensure that training in effective communication and conflict management skills are available for administrators, faculty and staff.
Conclusion

For the greater part of a year, the Wheaton College Board of Trustees and the Review Task Force have heard the heart cries of our college family about the issues that led to the parting of ways between Dr. Larycia Hawkins and Wheaton College. We grieve over the pain and confusion caused by these events among both our internal and external constituencies. As Trustees, we acknowledge these events have occurred under our watch and regret ways we have contributed to the distress within our global Wheaton family. In particular, as our community is identified around the world with the name of Jesus Christ, we lament any ways that conduct and actions in our college family might have dishonored, rather than glorified, His name.

But the God we worship has revealed himself as being “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love” (Ps 145:8), and He forgives and heals those who turn to him in repentance and faith (Ps 103:3). Indeed, God does much of his perfecting work in his people through lessons in trials (Js 1:4). As Trustees, we are praying humbly and fervently that God will use what some have called a “perfect storm” to do his perfecting work through and among our college community. Our prayerful hope is that these events, and this review, will lead to understanding and growth in the following areas:

- All constituents will know that Wheaton College’s unashamed commitment to orthodox Christian faith, as expressed in our Statement of Faith -- including the nature of the God we worship (article 1), the Book that is our “supreme and final authority” (article 2), and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ who is our Lord (article 3) -- is unequivocal and unambiguous;
- We will become more effective in our mission to serve the world, in all its kingdom breadth and diversity, through the church;
- We will develop improved ways to be unified in adherence to our Statement of Faith, lived out in keeping with our Community Covenant and, at the same time, nurture and encourage freedom in academic inquiry, teaching, research and publishing;
- We will have greater clarity about how to approach and process uncertainties surrounding the relationship of the Statement of Faith and Community Covenant to academic freedom;
- We will implement necessary improvements to our practices and protocols that will benefit the College, including many that will be clarified and strengthened in order to serve our community better in the future;
- Our entire community will gain insight from these events about utilizing ever-changing communication technologies like social media to bring about good rather than harm;
- Relationships that have been broken due to these events might find the kind of reconciliation and restoration both commanded by the Scriptures and made possible by the Holy Spirit who dwells in and among us; and
• Trustees and President will have humility and wisdom to learn from these events to lead more effectively towards God's call upon Wheaton College.

We find courage in the fact that our Father loves to bring broken things in his creation back together. We present this summary praying that it will further His renewing and restorative work among us.

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