



## President of the Faculty Senate

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TO: Dean Kumpuris, Chair, UALR Board of Visitors

FROM: Andrew Wright, President of the UALR Assembly and Faculty Senate

SUBJECT: 12/5/2014 Recommendation of the Faculty Senate regarding eVersity

DATE: December 18, 2014

Cc: J. Anderson, UALR Chancellor, Z. Toro, UALR Provost, Faculty Senate Executive Committee, D. Bobbitt, UA System President

Chair of Faculty Senate

The Faculty Senate of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) unanimously passed the attached recommendation regarding *eVersity* at the December 5, 2014, Faculty Senate meeting. The newspaper reports of the action of the Faculty Senate have been inaccurate, so I wanted to clear up any misunderstandings if at all possible.

The Faculty Senate did *not* vote to oppose *eVersity* as has been reported in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* in a few of their recent stories. It is true that the faculty have concerns about implementation details of *eVersity* and members of the Faculty Senate criticized aspects of the *eVersity* concept, but overall we share the project's commitment to the goal of increased educational access for Arkansans. We asked the University of Arkansas (UA) System to cooperate with us in building on the strengths of UALR and the other UA campuses.

The UALR faculty are committed to the principle of increasing access to higher education in Arkansas. The mission of UALR as a metropolitan university has always included providing alternate delivery methods to adult, working, and other non-traditional students to promote and extend access to higher education. UALR has led the effort in Arkansas to reach students through on-line education going back to the early days of distance education. More than 15% of UALR students take only on-line courses, and more than 40% of UALR students take at least one on-line course.

Higher Education has been exposed to an assault in recent years by providers of on-line, for profit degrees. Under the guise of expanding access to higher education, these businesses often load up their customers with federal student loan debt (tuition can be twice the tuition of a state supported program), while their completion rate, which may be half the completion rate at state supported programs, leaves these students with no means of paying off this debt. Federal financial aid rules, which cap how much debt a student can accumulate, leave these students without

a means of attending a more student-success-centered community college or four year institution to get out of the hole.

The UALR faculty agree with the UA President, Dr. Don Bobbitt, and the UA Board of Trustees that the UA System needs to respond to the predatory for-profits. The goal behind *eVersity* is noble and, if successful, could bring back some of the revenues that are being siphoned off. However, without knowledge of the *eVersity* implementation details, the UALR faculty are worried that, in addition to fighting off the for-profits, as we've been doing for many years, we may have a new internal challenge. The hope of the Faculty Senate is that we can engage in better communication with the UA System as *eVersity* moves toward reality.

A university is a complex system, and the difficulty of creating a new one cannot be dismissed. Creating stand-alone degree programs from scratch is time-consuming and duplicative when there are already complete degree programs, fully accredited, supported, and successful at existing System institutions. For instance, UALR offers a degree in Criminal Justice and a degree in Business fully on-line. The Faculty Senate recommended that the UALR faculty be apprised of expected impact to UALR from the decision for *eVersity* to offer these degrees.

The UALR faculty have been informed that *eVersity* is planning to use UALR's accreditation to get its degrees off the ground. The Faculty Senate recommended that *eVersity* take advantage of UALR's existing systems of curriculum and governance supervision rather than inventing new processes, as an aid to reaching their October 2015 opening date.

Where *eVersity* can have a significant impact is in providing a centralized, streamlined access point for students. As Michael Moore, UA Vice President for Academic Affairs, has said, "College should be hard; going to college should not." The UALR Faculty Senate applauds the on-boarding plans for *eVersity* and the support for students to enroll, secure financial aid, and maintain academic progress. UALR is already helping *eVersity* set up their processes in these areas.

This is one of the places where building from scratch can be more efficient than trying to improve an existing system. The Faculty Senate recommended that these new processes give students access to *all* the on-line courses and programs offered by UA campuses in one simple, seamless, administrative step. This will make it easier and more attractive for on-line students to make the best selection of program for them. The Faculty Senate recommended that some resources should be invested in helping campuses improve access to their on-line programs.

Academia is going through a transformation as we adapt to the possibilities offered by increased internet bandwidth, social media, and easy-to-use multimedia post-processing. We are engaged in a process of differentiating what improves student learning and success from fads and hype. My hope and responsibility is to do everything in my power to see UALR emerge from this transformation stronger, more vibrant, and better prepared to assure our student population of the best possible educational experience.

**Motion FS\_2014\_32:** Executive Committee (Recommendation. Majority vote at one meeting)  
eVersity Recommendations (no second required)

**Whereas** the faculty of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) are committed to the principle of increasing access to higher education in Arkansas; and

**Whereas** the mission of UALR as a metropolitan university has always included providing alternate delivery methods to adult, working, and other non-traditional students to promote and extend access to higher education; and

**Whereas** UALR has led the effort in Arkansas to reach students through on-line education going back to the early days of distance education; and

**Whereas** more than 15% of UALR students take only on-line courses; and

**Whereas** more than 40% of UALR students take at least one on-line course; and

**Whereas** University of Arkansas campuses offer a variety of online courses and programs; and

**Whereas** the model being adopted for eVersity governance, curriculum development, and teaching will divert faculty time and energy from their home institutions; and

**Whereas** both the state of Arkansas and the UA system have always discouraged duplication of efforts when approving new programs, both on the grounds of efficiency and of cost; and

**Whereas** communication on eVersity has restricted participation, debate, and discussion; and

**Whereas** the arrangements for UALR temporarily “loaning” eVersity its Higher Learning Commission accreditation are vague; and

**Whereas** curricular and governance processes that are not “consistent with the principles of sound democratic government” and whose “governmental structure” does not include an organization that is “predominantly faculty,” as stated in UA Board policy, may negatively impact this accreditation;

**Therefore be it resolved** that the Faculty Senate recommends that

1. eVersity continue to explore alternative models, such as a portal (where students can access *all* online courses and programs offered by UA campuses in one simple, seamless, administrative step); and
2. the UA Board of Trustees invest its resources in helping its campuses develop state-of-the-art online programs; and
3. eVersity take advantage of UALR's existing systems of curriculum and governance supervision rather than inventing new processes; and

**Whereas** 90 institutions outside of Arkansas are currently authorized to offer courses and programs to Arkansas students through online delivery methods; and

**Whereas** over 14,000 Arkansas students are currently enrolled in such out-of-state institutions; and

**Whereas** the UA System intends eVersity to offer an in-state alternative to these out-of-state competitors; and

**Whereas,** given the similarity of mission and student demographic between UALR and eVersity, it may be likely that eVersity will draw students from UALR rather than from out-of-state competitors; and

**Whereas** the programs under development by eVersity include the general education core, Business Administration, and Criminal Justice, all programs available fully online at UALR; and

**Whereas** the purpose of a university system should be to support its constituent campuses;

**Therefore be it further resolved** that the Faculty Senate recommends that the Board of Trustees assess the impact on enrollment and funding of its constituent campuses due to eVersity and share these findings with its constituent campuses.