

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY (OHIO)

The investigating committee's report details three drastic steps that the governing board of Wittenberg University took, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, without meaningfully consulting the faculty. The first was its establishment of an ad hoc Academic Program Futures Committee (APFC) consisting of administratively selected faculty members to plan, largely in secret, further academic program reductions than those already approved by the Educational Policies Committee (EPC), an elected faculty body. The second step came in May 2020, two months into the COVID-19 crisis, when the board approved a resolution "suspending any faculty manual provisions that might delay the actions needed to achieve financial sustainability." Finally, in June, the board announced to the faculty its unanimous approval of APFC recommendations to discontinue eight programs and departments and to eliminate two tenured faculty positions in geology and Japanese. The report describes how the faculty and the Wittenberg AAUP chapter protested each step along the way.

The report concluded that the Wittenberg governing board and administration acted unilaterally in initiating a program-review process that circumvented established faculty governance policies and procedures; in suspending unspecified sections of the faculty manual that would have interfered with their plans to close programs and eliminate faculty appointments; and in discontinuing eight programs and terminating two tenured appointments, with devastating consequences for academic governance at the institution. The investigating committee found that, in so acting, the board and the administration contravened fundamental principles and standards of academic governance enunciated in the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*. The committee also found that these same actions severely weakened the institution of tenure at the institution and thus degraded the climate for academic freedom.

The report observed that the actions taken by the board and the administration had severe ramifications for shared governance and academic freedom. Faculty members with whom the committee spoke stated that shared governance was "nonexistent" and that even tenured faculty members—especially those in comparatively low-enrolled programs—feared losing their jobs. In answer to a question about the effects of the terminations of two tenured colleagues' positions, one interviewee simply said: "Tenure doesn't mean anything here. Academic freedom is gone."

The Committee on College and University Governance recommends to the AAUP's governing Council that Wittenberg University be added to the Association's list of institutions sanctioned for substantial non-compliance with standards of academic government.