A Beacon for Great Colleges
Advancing Liberal Arts Education
GLCA

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Art Zucker, Chair, Board of Trustees
Antioch University
150 E. South College Street
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Dear Art:

You asked that GLCA respond to two questions regarding the plans for a new Antioch College as described in the *Proposal of the Board Pro Tempore*: what is the prospect of a college of the character described in the proposal achieving accreditation; and does the plan (programmatic and financial) create, in our judgment, a plausibly viable college. I will respond to these questions separately.

<u>Accreditation.</u>

As you know, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association assures and advances the quality of higher education in the Midwest region. When it considers institutions for accreditation it considers institutional mission, allocation of resources and planning, student learning and teaching effectiveness, the institution's culture of learning, and ways in which it serves its key constituents. As it states, the overall purpose is the "assurance to the public, in particular to prospective students, that an organization has been found to meet the agency's clearly stated requirements and criteria and that there are reasonable grounds for believing that it will continue to meet them."

The question posed is whether it is plausible to believe that a new Antioch College is accreditable according to Commission standards. A review of the standards in the light of the plan – educational and financial – suggests that the college is accreditable. While the plans for the new college are innovative, they are also clearly based on the traditional goals of liberal arts education and are consistent with the criteria the Commission uses. Further, the Commission takes pride in its own core values which include not only quality but also innovation, service, and collaboration – very much characteristic of the plans for the new college. The more than 1000 institutions the Commission accredits are of the most diverse character: rich and very poor; religious and Native American and state; liberal arts and specialized. As part of our review, we asked an individual with several years accreditation team experience and specialization in initial accreditation reviews with the Middle States Association to review the educational and financial plan for the new college, and she confirmed that the new college would, based on the norms and practices of accreditation organizations and processes, be a likely candidate for accreditation.

The Board Pro Tem (BPT) has engaged the assistance of a very experienced academic officer from North Central's region – a provost and academic dean with 25 years experience – to work on behalf of the new college with the Commission. Given his expertise and initial conversations, and the fact that the proposed Antioch College fits well within the programmatic and financial parameters of the types of institutions which hold accreditation from the Commission, it is very reasonable to believe that accreditation is achievable.

Educational and Financial Plan.

While the educational plan has remained unchanged, the financial plan was revised based on the new understanding that the College would have to operate, based on its normal procedures, for several years under Commission scrutiny before accreditation would be awarded. As such the fundamental change in assumption is that the new college would have a very small enrollment in its first years of operation. The question is whether a very small institution could be financially viable.

In developing this new plan for a smaller college the BPT retained an experienced higher education financial analyst and management consultant. Realistic financial data was used (IPEDS and GLCA data from small liberal arts colleges) to set levels of expenditure and to scale resource expectations in the various operational and compensation categories.

The GLCA then had two independent financial officers and planners review this work and its relationship to the educational plan. While there are many reasonable ways to allocate or reallocate income and expense, the question of this analysis was not whether these are the “right” or “best” allocations, nor the most accurate dollar amounts, but whether the relative allocation of income and expense by functional area are reasonable, whether the bottom line is plausible, and whether the balance sheet reflects a sustainable institution.

First, it is important to note that the small size of the proposed college has important financial advantages: annual fund receipts per student is higher, as is endowment income per student.

The proposed institution sets some aggressive goals. On the one hand, the cost of attendance (especially after financial aid) is low for a private college, and this should be very attractive in the competitive admissions marketplace. Combine this low tuition with the three year course of study and the cost argument is very much in the favor of the new college. Also aggressive are the fundraising goals – though they are aggressive only in relation to the recent history of the College. While we are not in a position to make a judgment about the fund raising capability of an independent Antioch College, based on national comparative information the fund raising goals are certainly not unreasonable for a private college with 17,000 alumni.

Overall it is our judgment that the educational and financial plan are well articulated, and that they create a clear scenario for a plausibly viable college.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Detweiler

Richard A. Detweiler
President