

# FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

12-15-08

## Executive Summary

### Brief Background:

On August 29, 2008, President Jared Cohon and Provost Mark Kamlet appointed a Review Committee to make findings and recommendations on a situation at the Heinz School involving the alleged improper awarding of a degree. The Committee members, the charge to the Committee, a description of the methodology followed by the Committee, and a summary of the Committee's findings and recommendations are set forth below.

### Committee Members

- Dr. Joel Tarr, (Committee chair) Richard S. Caliguiri University Professor of History and Policy and former acting Dean of the Heinz School
- Dr. Alfred Blumstein, J. Erik Jonsson University Professor of Urban Systems and Operations Research and former Dean of the Heinz School
- Richard Stafford, Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy and Heinz School alumnus
- Dr. Richard Tucker, Interim Dean of Student Affairs and the Paul Mellon University Professor of Applied Linguistics

### Committee Charge

The Review Committee was charged with three tasks:

*\*Task 1: Collecting information pertaining to the granting of the degree in question and making recommendations about what should be done about the degree granted to the student, taking into account both relevant Heinz School academic procedures, University rules, and the rights of the student involved;*

*\* Task 2: Assessing if this failure was an isolated incident (utilizing the results of the preliminary review done by Vice President of Campus Affairs Michael Murphy, and requesting or gathering additional information to the extent necessary); and*

*\* Task 3: Determining to the extent possible the facts surrounding the matter and the events that led to any indicated process failure, and recommending any enhancements to decision rights and/or processes necessary going forward.*

## **Methodology**

The Committee investigated the chronology of events and the facts related to its three charges. We conducted interviews with the individuals involved in the awarding of the degree in question, in bringing it to the attention of the President, and in the subsequent decisions and public announcements addressing the issue. We worked with Heinz School and University administrators in exploring whether similar errors had occurred with other recipients of degrees from the Heinz School during the tenure of Dean Wessel. Finally, we examined CMU policies related to the matters raised. The Committee unanimously makes the following findings and recommendations:

## **Summary Findings and Recommendations:**

- The transfer and independent study credits awarded toward the degree far exceeded the number authorized by Heinz School policy, and, accordingly, the degree granted to the student (hereinafter “Doe”) was improperly awarded.
- Dean Wessel directed that the necessary credits be entered in the student’s record. No other Heinz School faculty or superiors of the Dean in University administration were involved in the improper award of the degree.
- The improper awarding of the degree was a singular event, with no other similar case during the Dean’s tenure in which a Heinz School degree was inappropriately awarded. Although misguided, the Dean genuinely believed at the time that his actions were in the best interests of the Heinz School. The sole reason the Dean took this action was that he believed that Doe’s experience and qualifications could be valuable to the Heinz School in its expansion efforts at a time of fiscal stress in the School. Indeed, the Dean understood that the degree was proposed by Doe because Doe felt it would enhance Doe’s credibility in Doe’s endeavors to market the Heinz School. There is no evidence of any pressure to award the degree from parties inside or outside the university. There is no evidence of any personal benefit received by the Dean or any other person at the University.

- In light of the seriousness of his actions, the Dean's resignation was understandably proffered and accepted.
- The process of degree granting by the Heinz College needs improvements in terms of faculty oversight to highlight inconsistencies compared to requirements so that faculty can judge whether exceptions are justified.
- The University's policies for reporting and responding to ethical breaches are not widely understood throughout the University community. These policies need to be strengthened, and widely communicated.

### **Recommendations to the Heinz College**

- The degree granted to Doe should be rescinded, offering Doe the opportunity to earn the credit necessary for the proper awarding of the degree.
- Consistent with the University's 2008 Strategic Plan, the Heinz College should initiate efforts to encourage and promote a culture of mutual responsibility and respect so that in the future staff and faculty understand that it is appropriate to challenge decisions that appear to be in violation of College rules.
- The process of degree granting by the Heinz College should be improved in terms of faculty oversight to highlight inconsistencies compared to requirements so that faculty can judge whether exceptions are justified.
- In consideration of his considerable leadership and contributions to the strength and viability of the Heinz School leading to the establishment of the Heinz College, his strong support by its faculty and staff, and the Committee's conclusion that this was a singular error by a person of otherwise strong integrity, Mark Wessel should remain a member of the Heinz College faculty and continue to serve as a valued member of the University community.

### **Recommendations to the University**

- University policies for dealing with ethical breaches should be strengthened in order to ensure that they are structured to anticipate and remedy any misconduct or ethical breaches, while providing an

appropriate process and time for full and fair consideration. Appropriate process distinctions should be considered for various categories of breaches, including ongoing breaches and historical ones. The resulting improved policies and processes should be widely communicated throughout the University community.