

An Open Letter to Guido Pichini  
by Angelo Armenti, Jr.  
June 25, 2012

Dear Mr. Pichini,

I read with growing disbelief your open letter to the California University community on the Cal U homepage back on May 25, 2012. Had you submitted it to the Fact Checker at *The Washington Post*, it would surely have garnered four Pinocchio's for lack of truthfulness.

1. Take this quote for example: “To all campus staff, faculty and administration, know that your dedication to the university is truly appreciated.”

Who—at Cal U or anywhere else in PASSHE—would now believe such a statement from you, Mr. Pichini, after you fired a 20-year president with five minutes' verbal notice, locking him out of his office, confining him to virtual house arrest, issuing an “Audit” filled with misrepresentations, half-truths and lies—to draw attention away from the true reasons for his firing—while suppressing his detailed rebuttal of the “Audit,” and then shamelessly trying to intimidate and humiliate him and his wife in front of the entire campus community with a police show of force featuring in-your-face, round-the-clock surveillance, as if they were criminals?

2. Consider this quote: “As an alumnus of Kutztown University, one of your sister institutions, I understand and appreciate the feelings you have for your alma mater.”

How can you possibly suggest that you know how Cal U alumni might feel about their alma mater when you and the Board of Governors totally ignored their opinion—as conveyed to you by the Cal U Council of Trustees in their glowing evaluation of my performance as president this past year? Have you forgotten, Mr. Pichini, that the Board of Governors' policy on presidential evaluations (Policy 2002-03-A) requires every Council of Trustees to provide “constituent feedback and evaluation of the President's performance?” The Cal U Trustees received very positive feedback from the Alumni Association regarding my performance, conveyed that to you and the Board of Governors—and you simply ignored it. If that counts as “appreciation” in Kutztown, please know that it doesn't quite work that way anywhere else in the world.

3. Consider this quote: “There is no more important responsibility for us as a Board than to help ensure that you [students] have an outstanding educational experience that leads to your ultimate success.”

The above statement is true, as far as your obligations—but not your actions—is concerned. And since you have failed miserably to meet your obligation to follow your own BOG Policy 2002-03-A on how to evaluate this president, who but a fool would believe that you can be trusted to deliver on the much more difficult obligation to Cal U students quoted above?

May I remind you, Mr. Pichini, that you lacked the courage to face the Council of Trustees at Cal U—after stating that you would—and still, many weeks after the event, you refuse to provide public reasons for my firing? You continue to deny me the reasons for my firing, even

though your excuse to the media that “It’s a personnel matter,” clearly doesn’t apply to me, the person whose “privacy” you are pretending to protect but, actually, trying to hide behind.

Everyone by now knows or suspects why you refuse to answer questions about my firing. Based on what’s in the public domain so far—and despite your efforts to keep the rest from getting out by stalling on my RTK requests—it is pretty clear already that, for you to answer questions about my firing, would risk exposing your key role in the web of lies cooked up to facilitate my firing—without any cause that will withstand public scrutiny—as I told you after you fired me.

I think I know, Mr. Pichini, exactly what your plans are for Cal U students, and it’s certainly not to provide them with an outstanding educational experience—they were already getting that before you fired me—and that, I suspect, is one of the real reasons for why you fired me. Rather, I’m quite certain that you plan to do just the opposite—that is, to make the experience of Cal U students virtually indistinguishable from that of students at every other PASSHE school and that, by definition, would make the Cal U experience average, the very opposite of outstanding.

If I am right, Mr. Pichini, and I believe that I am, very soon—under pressure from you, applied by Chancellor Cavanaugh and others—Cal U, will begin moving to eliminate virtually every distinctive program or initiative that made a Cal U student experience exceptional, world class or—in a word—deserving of the adjective “outstanding.”

I am also certain, Mr. Pichini, that your attack on all things distinctive about a Cal U student experience, will be done on the pretext of “needing to save money” when, in fact, Cal U’s financial position on the day you fired me, was much stronger in terms of fundamentals like “personnel productivity” and “student demand” than most of the other PASSHE schools—despite the many lies spread by the Office of the Chancellor in the “Audit” and elsewhere.

Notice that I did not say Cal U was strong in terms of having an enormous fund balance—yet that is the standard PASSHE has secretly encouraged over the years. Cal U did not hoard money and deny “high quality” amenities to our students, like so many of our sister institutions have done over the years—with the example and complicity of the Office of the Chancellor.

By the way, if hoarding money was such a great idea for so many years, why did the Board of Governors recently restrict PASSHE schools’ fund balances to just 5% to 10% of the previous year’s revenue? And, since Cal U is the only PASSHE school in that range—both before and since the new restriction was put in, why wasn’t Cal U recognized for being ahead of the pack, instead of being falsely targeted and vilified with lies, as mentioned above?

Once the other PASSHE schools have “burned” their fund balances—which won’t be hard to do with what the Corbett administration has been doing to public higher education in Pennsylvania, they will either have to emulate Cal U’s productivity model, or become less than average, which as we know, means to be ‘outstanding’ in a different, and much less desirable, way.

4. And now, Mr. Pichini, for your best quote of all: “Students, please know that your interests always come first in every decision we make and every action we take.”

The same BOG policy referred to above with regard to alumni also calls for constituent feedback from students. Student feedback was provided by the Council of Trustees in their evaluation report to you and the Board of Governors and, once again, it was extremely positive—but since it apparently did not quite fit in with your secret agenda as far as my continuing employment was concerned, you simply ignored it, apparently—as you did with the positive feedback from Cal U Alumni.

That you and the Board of Governors would so easily ignore, not just your own policy, but more importantly, the opinion of Cal U students and alumni, shows that you and the Board of Governors acted with an almost unimaginable level of arrogance. Have you forgotten, Mr. Pichini, that those same Cal U students and alumni whose opinion you and the BOG ignored now pay more than 70% of Cal U’s operating budget each year? That same figure applies to the students and alumni at the other 13 PASSHE schools as well.

Cal U students and Cal U donors (primarily alumni), are the majority stakeholders of the University; the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—represented by various elected officials, and political appointees like you and your fellow BOG members, are minority stakeholders.

How dare you and the Board of Governors ignore the input of the majority stakeholders and substitute your own political, i.e., minority judgment of my performance as president?

And what happened to me and my wife is a minor matter—actually just a symptom—of what is really wrong with PASSHE’s current governance arrangement. Any objective, non-partisan and truthful observer of the way PASSHE has been run over the last 20 years will be forced to admit that—regardless of party affiliation—the elected and appointed officials making key decisions during that time often made them, not really for the benefit of students and alumni—the majority stakeholders—but for the benefit of the elected and appointed officials themselves.

I will be happy to provide examples to you or the media upon request.

By going public with this open letter, Mr. Pichini, I am declaring to you, the Board of Governors and the world, that the time of 100% political control of these PASSHE universities must come to an end, and I ask all Pennsylvanians, to join me in making that happen.

In any rational world, the stakeholders providing 30% of the funds should be able to appoint only 30%, and not 100%, of the Board members. And the stakeholders providing 70% of the funds—students and alumni—should be appointing 70% of the Board members.

Any other arrangement would be un-American.

During our meeting in your office in November of 2011, Mr. Pichini, I told you that the current PASSHE governance arrangement in which the majority stakeholders—students and

alumni—have little say, because all the members of the Board of Governors are appointed by the minority stakeholders—had to end, and that I intended to be one of the many voices for change.

As our meeting ended that day, I thought you were supportive of my idea. It seems clear now, however, that you and others in Harrisburg, found my idea so threatening and dangerous that only my firing—by your flawed logic—could prevent the idea from taking hold.

I regret to inform you, Mr. Pichini, that your firing of me without any cause that will withstand public scrutiny, has given me not only the time, but the public stature, to make my case for change directly to the people of Pennsylvania.

Rather than stopping the idea in its tracks, as you and others may have hoped, your firing of me has inspired and invigorated me and—unless I miss my guess—will soon inspire and invigorate more than 120,000 PASSHE students, their parents and families, some 750,000 PASSHE alumni and their families, and some 11,000 PASSHE employees and their families.

I look forward very much to adding my voice to theirs in the weeks, months and years ahead.

Thank you for all the opportunities you have given me.

Angelo Armenti, Jr.