

April 4, 2024

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**VIA CERTIFIED MAIL and EMAIL**  
**([kbrandt@avma.org](mailto:kbrandt@avma.org))**

Dear Dr. Brandt:

Please be advised that I have been asked to submit the attached supplemental report regarding the ongoing accreditation review of the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) at Oklahoma State University (OSU) by the Council on Education (COE).

To ensure transparency, others indicated under carbon copy (CC), who are either directly mentioned in the report or hold positions that may be relevant to the issues addressed, are also recipients.

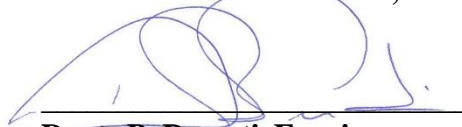
In light of the gravity of issues raised, the decision was made to transmit this report to the COE through my office. As such, our firm is compelled to warn all parties against any forms of retaliatory, discriminatory or adverse treatment directed at individuals presumed to be associated with the report, allegations of which we will monitor very closely.

Should any recipient hereof wish to constructively explore the issues outlined in the report, we may be able to facilitate discussions under appropriate conditions.

This report is submitted pursuant to the AVMA's policy of receiving comments regarding COE site visits and evaluations of veterinary college adherence to standards of accreditation.

Sincerely,

**LAULETTA BIRNBAUM, LLC**

  
**Dante B. Parenti, Esquire**

April 1, 2024

To: Dr. Karen Martens Brandt  
Director - Education and Research Division  
American Veterinary Medical Association  
1931 N. Meacham Road, Suite 100  
Schaumburg, IL 60173-4360

Cc: Board of Regents, Oklahoma A&M Colleges  
Kayse Shrum, DO, President, OSU  
Jeanette Mendez, MA, PhD, Provost and Senior Vice President, OSU  
Jeffrey Stroup, Pharm.D., BCPS, FCCP, Provost & Sr. VP, Center for Health Sciences, OSU  
Christa Louthan, SPHR/SHRM-SCP, Asst. VP & Chief Human Resources Officer, OSU  
Carlos A. Risco, DVM, DACT, Dean, College of Veterinary Medicine, OSU  
Kelly Black, DVM, DACVPM, Director, Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, OSU

From: Stakeholders of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Oklahoma State University, *via counsel*

**Re: Addressing material falsehoods in the Self Study supplied to the Council on Education (COE), American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), by the Dean of the Oklahoma State University (OSU) College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM)**

Dear Dr. Brandt et al,

This report is submitted to address material inaccuracies in the Self Study provided to the Council on Education (COE) by Dean Carlos Risco of the Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine. If left uncorrected, these errors could mislead the COE on critical matters integral to the accreditation process.

Unfortunately, these inaccuracies are of such a nature and magnitude that they are unlikely to be due to clerical error or innocent mistake, the most consequential of which include:

- Size, composition and attrition of faculty and clinical support staff
- Caseload seen by students
- Patient care standards and impact from severe attrition rate
- Workplace culture, College HR mechanisms, and issues of discrimination and harassment

We feel ethically bound to correct these issues in the interest of academic integrity and the preservation of our College's reputation, even as we find no joy in highlighting information that could affect OSU's standing.

The COE is already aware of many issues, having previously identified "major deficiencies" in the program in 2017<sup>1</sup> and received an internal complaint in summer 2021 detailing that the College remained noncompliant with key COE standards.<sup>2</sup> This report introduces substantial new information and analysis, providing an unparalleled level of detail and context about these persistent and worsening challenges faced by the College.

Acknowledging Dean Risco's appropriate declaration of accountability in matters as consequential as College accreditation, indicated by his statement, "as CEO, the dean bears all responsibility for final decisions related to finance, strategic vision, and direction of the College,"<sup>3</sup> we conduct our analysis accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Malinda Larkin, "Oklahoma State cited by accreditor for deficiencies," *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association News*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2018-02-01/oklahoma-state-cited-accreditor-deficiencies>.

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Risco to all students, faculty and staff, "Message from the dean," email message, July 16, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study for the American Veterinary Medical Association*, ed. C. A. Risco (Unpublished report for the American Veterinary Medical Association in support of accreditation review, 2024), sec. Standard 1: Organization, subsec. 1.5, 10, para. 1.

## Summary of findings, sources and purpose

Dean Risco's Self Study presents materially inaccurate information regarding critical aspects of the College, most notably:

- According to published University data, the information regarding size and composition of the College's faculty and clinical staff is falsified. Despite Dean Risco's claim that the College added 23 net new faculty members and 40.5 FTE clinical support staff during the Self Study period, evidence shows that at least 59 non-adjunct faculty and 50 clinical support staff have left the College, including at least 21 Professors, 29 Associate and Assistant Professors, 7 Section Chiefs, 4 Directors, 7 Supervisors and 33 credentialed technicians.
- The Self Study fails to substantively address the catastrophic impact of the aforementioned severe staff attrition on patient care at the Teaching Hospital and the quality of educational opportunities afforded students. According to individuals with direct knowledge of these issues, it is likely that key data provided to the COE, such as caseload seen by students, is materially inaccurate.
- The portrayal of the College's workplace culture is misleadingly benign, and the description of functioning HR and DEI processes and mechanisms is grossly mischaracterized, ignoring a dangerously toxic environment that has precipitated the noted mass departure of faculty and clinical support staff. This culture, plagued by issues of hostility, discrimination, harassment and retaliation, has significantly damaged the College's reputation, impairing recruiting and retention efforts.

As we analyze the foregoing, it is crucial that the COE understand our sources of information and motivations for this report. Our information originates from individuals who possess direct knowledge of the issues and facts discussed herein, but fear reprisal for speaking out. Upon scrutinizing the Self Study that Dean Risco provided,<sup>4</sup> it became difficult to draw any other conclusion but that he was intentionally obscuring the true nature and severity of challenges facing the College in an attempt to mislead the COE that the College has "accomplished major advancements"<sup>5</sup> which have not, in fact, been achieved.

Our analysis is grounded in firsthand accounts, published University data, corroborated documentation, scholarly research, and advanced data analytics. We limit our analysis to areas where evidence enables us to assert conclusions with high confidence. Where we have limited information sufficient to substantiate a conclusion with high confidence, we so note with guidance for the COE to investigate further. Where inconsistencies in source data could cause variations in precision for some specific findings, we also note with additional guidance for investigation.

Considering the comprehensive nature of all evidence collected and analyzed, we can state with high confidence that the overarching narrative and conclusions we have drawn are highly likely to be substantially accurate and reflective of underlying realities.

Regarding the COE's accreditation standards, this report identifies issues that intersect with several, including: Organization, Finances, Clinical Resources, Students, Faculty, and Curriculum. While we delineate these connections to underscore the gravity of the findings within this report, we defer to the COE to determine the extent to which these standards may be implicated. It is not our purpose to prescribe or infer the impact of our findings on the COE's accreditation decision. Our aim is to present a detailed, evidenced account so that the COE can apply its well-established standards of thoroughness and independence in investigating the claims presented in both our report and the Self Study, so that all discrepancies or inaccuracies are fully examined and addressed.

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Shields on behalf of Carlos Risco to all faculty and staff, "Message from the Dean: AVMA COE Site Visit & Completed Self Study," email message, February 15, 2024. This email includes a link to the only Self Study document ever circulated to staff, which is hosted on a restricted access Google Drive: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hxMoluTg3g00MtPxGq61-b1H2iUf12ah/view?usp=sharing> (access restricted).

<sup>5</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Executive Summary, Introduction, 4, para. 2.

## Summary of false claims regarding staff size, composition, recruiting and retention

Dean Risco makes materially false claims regarding the size, composition and status of the College's faculty and clinical staff. Most egregious among these are:

- "In the past 5 years, the College has realized a net gain of 23 faculty positions."<sup>6</sup>
- "The clinical staff in support of teaching has increased from 65.5 FTE to 106 FTE."<sup>7</sup>
- "Recruitment efforts remain strong and promising."<sup>8</sup>

In reality, although omitted entirely from the Self Study, the College has *lost at least 109 faculty and clinical support staff*, a debilitating exodus of talent that includes:

- At least 59 non-adjunct faculty members, including at least 21 professors and 29 assistant professors
- Every practicing specialist in small animal Anesthesia, Cardiology, Critical Care, Dermatology, Internal Medicine, Radiology and Surgery
- At least 50 technical staff, including at least 33 credentialed technicians and 7 supervisors
- At least 7 Service Chiefs (Internal Medicine, Surgery, Emergency and Critical Care (2), Pathobiology, Zoological Medicine and Dermatology), *six of whom are women*
- At least 4 Directors, including for the Teaching Hospital, the Animal Resources Unit, the Oklahoma Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, and the Institute for Translational and Emerging Research in Advanced Comparative Therapy

Dean Risco not only fails to acknowledge this debilitating loss of senior faculty and clinical support staff, he inexplicably claims a net increase of 63.5 (23 faculty and 40.5 FTE clinical support staff). Even factoring the 30 faculty his chart does acknowledge departing (out of an actual count of at least 59), his overall assertion implies an improbable recruitment of at least 142.5 new individuals, calculated as follows:

Loss of ~79 unique faculty and clinical staff (109 actual departures inclusive of 30 acknowledged in the Self Study) + ~79 replacement staff + 23 new faculty + 40.5 new FTE clinical staff = 142.5 total claimed hires.

Even if these numbers are imprecise due to misaligned evaluation periods or overlapping departures and additions, the claimed net staff additions dramatically diverge from documented attrition rates, undermining the reliability of all staffing data in the Self Study and raising concerns about the intent behind presenting misleading information to the COE.

Dean Risco's dissemination of inaccurate information regarding faculty size and composition extends beyond the COE, affecting various stakeholders, with significant ramifications. Testimonies from individuals in key positions at the College and across the University reveal a pattern of data manipulation tailored to his audience. This manipulation often involves inconsistent criteria for calculating hiring, steady-state, and attrition figures, where an expanded list of positions inflates hiring and steady-state numbers but is conspicuously absent in attrition calculations. Moreover, the periods selected for these calculations are often adjusted to skew the data towards the appearance of more favorable outcomes, further compromising the integrity of the information provided.

Here, the discrepancies in faculty and staff numbers presented by Dean Risco are too significant to be mere errors, certainly given that it strains credulity that any dean would be so profoundly confused about the number of faculty and senior staff working for him – particularly in a Self Study document for the COE. As we will now address in greater detail, the College has not hired 63.5 net new faculty and clinical staff members and, in fact, has seen a mass exodus of at least 109 over the period.

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<sup>6</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8: Faculty, subsec. 8.1: Assess the Strengths of the Faculty and Support Staff in Fulfilling the College Emission, 57, para. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, para 4.

<sup>8</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, para 3.

## Analysis of faculty loss crisis

Dean Risco provides a chart outlining his claim of a purported net addition of 23 new faculty, reaching that number by virtue of an apparent addition of 53 against the loss of just 30.<sup>9</sup> This dramatically undercounts actual faculty losses and inexplicably adds phantom gains.

Unclear is whether Dean Risco is attempting a sleight of hand in terminology with the claim to have added “a net gain of 23 faculty *positions*”<sup>10</sup> rather than *members*, the former of which could easily be mistaken for hired individuals versus mere open positions. Regardless, the Self Study substantiates neither possibility.

In reality, at least 59 non-adjunct faculty members have departed during the Self Study period, comprised of:<sup>11</sup>

- 18 Professors
- 3 Clinical Professors
- 4 Associate Professors
- 4 Clinical Associate Professors
- 10 Assistant Professors
- 11 Clinical Assistant Professors
- 5 Lecturers
- 1 Clinical Instructor
- 1 Associate Research Professor
- 2 Assistant Research Professors

Even as Dean Risco omits any substantial analysis of departed faculty, he also claims phantom additions:<sup>12</sup>

- A net +4 in SA Internal Medicine, which ceased operation due to the resignation of every internist on staff. We also note Dean Risco’s irreconcilable claims that the College both added 4 net new internists and also “lost [its] only remaining internal medicine specialists”<sup>13</sup> without hiring new ones.
- A net +3 in SA Emergency and Critical Care, which effectively closed in 2023

Further, it is unclear whether misspelled and seemingly duplicative categories are causing miscounting:<sup>14</sup>

- Anesthesiology is intermittently spelled ‘Anethesiology’
- Bovine Respiratory Disease is misspelled as ‘Respriatory’
- Categories of ‘SA Primary Care’ and ‘Preventative Medicine’ in the same year may be duplicative
- Categories of ‘Curriculum/Assessment’ and ‘Curricular Affairs’ may be duplicative

Regardless of these anomalies, the Self Study chart of net faculty attrition understates faculty departures by nearly 50%, claiming that only 30 left when at least 59 likely did. In reality, the loss by section includes:<sup>15</sup>

- 4 Anesthesiology
- 2 Animal Resources Unit
- 1 Bacteriology
- 1 Clinical Pathology
- 4 Diagnostic Imaging
- 2 Endocrinology
- 2 Equine Internal Medicine
- 1 Food Animal Internal Medicine
- 1 Immunology
- 1 Infectious Diseases (Research)
- 1 LA Emergency
- 5 Parasitology
- 1 Pathobiology
- 6 Pathology
- 1 Pharmacology/Nanomedicine
- 1 Physiology
- 2 Respiratory & Infectious Disease
- 1 SA Cardiology
- 1 SA Dermatology
- 3 SA Emergency & Critical Care
- 4 SA Internal Medicine
- 2 SA Ophthalmology
- 3 SA Surgery
- 1 Shelter Medicine/Junior Surgery
- 3 Theriogenology
- 2 Toxicology
- 2 Virology
- 1 Zoological Medicine

<sup>9</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 8, Table 8.1A, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.1, 57, para. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Oklahoma State University, Office of the Registrar Catalog Archives, accessed March 25, 2024, [https://registrar.okstate.edu/catalog\\_archives.html#a2023-2024](https://registrar.okstate.edu/catalog_archives.html#a2023-2024); including College of Veterinary Medicine Catalogs 2023/2024, 2022/2023, 2021/2022, 2020/2021, and Center for Veterinary Health Sciences Catalogs 2019/2020, 2018/2019, 2017/2018. Individual catalogs accessed through links provided in the Office of the Registrar's Catalog Archives for respective years.

<sup>12</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 8, Table 8.1A, 58.

<sup>13</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 9: Curriculum, subhead. Clinical Curriculum, 67, para. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 8, Table 8.1A, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Oklahoma State University, Office of the Registrar Catalog Archives, accessed March 25, 2024, [https://registrar.okstate.edu/catalog\\_archives.html#a2023-2024](https://registrar.okstate.edu/catalog_archives.html#a2023-2024); including College of Veterinary Medicine Catalogs 2023/2024, 2022/2023, 2021/2022, 2020/2021, and Center for Veterinary Health Sciences Catalogs 2019/2020, 2018/2019, 2017/2018. Individual catalogs accessed through links provided in the Office of the Registrar's Catalog Archives for respective years.

Further, published University data tell a starkly different story than the one Dean Risco asks the COE to accept. Whether calculated from the 2018/2019 academic year or the 2019/2020 year up to 2023/2024, the data clearly do not substantiate his claim of a net addition of 23 faculty and in fact reveal a concerning trend in faculty composition: a significant decrease in senior faculty, who are predominantly being replaced by adjuncts and junior faculty (See Net Faculty Attrition 18/19 – 23/24 and 17/18 – 24, right).<sup>16</sup>

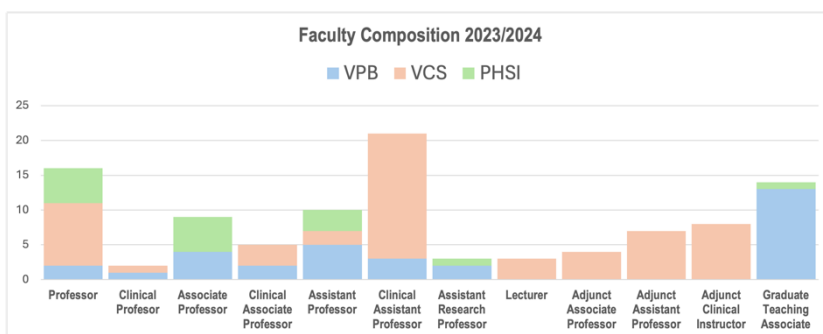
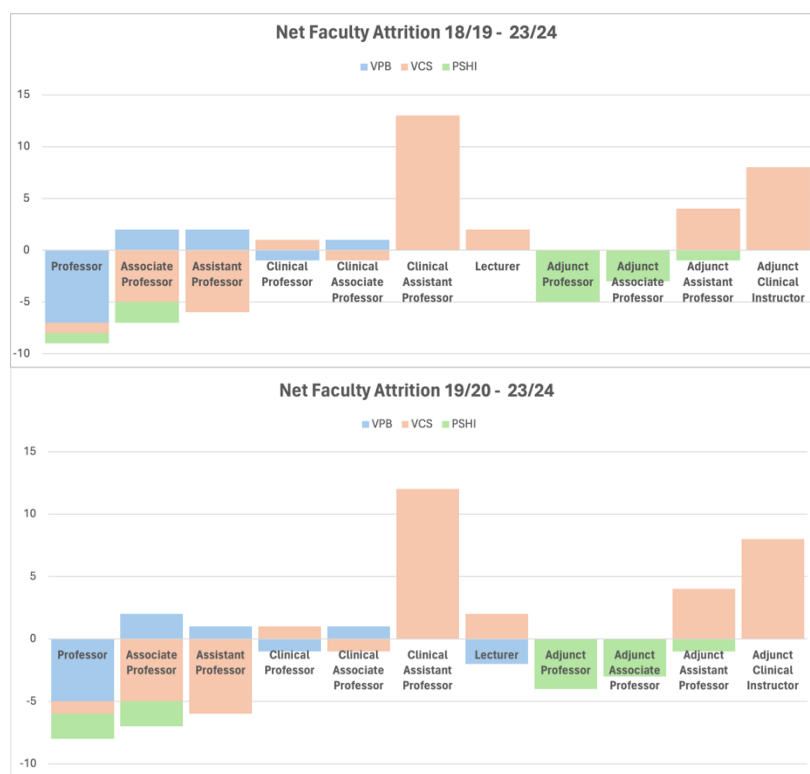
Of note, our data analysis, conducted with Python – a sophisticated programming language that can parse multivariate data sets - uncovered significant inaccuracies in even the College's source data. These errors included possible duplicate faculty counts due to misspelled names and categorization mistakes. For example, one person was listed as both 'Danielle' and 'Daniel' in the same year, while in at least 20 instances others were recorded under multiple job titles in the same year over the Self Study period. Furthermore, at least 8 faculty members were erroneously listed as employed in the most recent year when they were not – including 7 professors. These anomalies were predominantly contained in the Clinical Sciences and Pathobiology department data.

While data presented herein has corrected for these errors and we have high confidence in the general conclusions we provide, we acknowledge some imprecision may exist due to anomalies in the source data.

Still, based on the corrected data, Dean Risco's claim to have added a net increase of 23 faculty is facially fraudulent, and regardless of base year far exceeds any statistically acceptable error rate:

- If using 2018/2019 as the base year and excluding adjuncts, the claim is inflated by 2,400%
- If using 2019/2020 as the base year and excluding adjuncts, the claim is inflated by 2,500%
- For either base year and including adjuncts, the claim is inflated by a factor of 666%

In fact, again based on published University data, after severe attrition in recent years, the actual current faculty composition is now disproportionately junior and adjunct. (See Faculty Composition 2023/2024, right).



<sup>16</sup> Oklahoma State University, Office of the Registrar Catalog Archives.

Finally, for the avoidance of all doubt and according to published University data, the following non-adjunct faculty likely departed since the last COE site visit:<sup>17</sup>

1. Ashish Ranjan, BVSc, PhD	Professor (PHSI)	30. Jing Liu Pope, MD, PhD	Res. Assoc Prof. (PHSI)
2. Carey N. Pope, PhD	Professor (PHSI)	31. Fabio Pinaffi, DVM, DACT	Asst Professor (PHSI)
3. Chris Ross, DVM, PhD	Professor (PHSI)	32. Shitao Li, PhD	Asst Professor (PHSI)
4. Dianne McFarlane, MS, DVM, PhD	Professor (PHSI)	33. Candace Lyman, DVM, DACT	Asst Professor (VCS)
5. Andrew Hanzlicek, DVM, MS, DACVIM	Professor (VCS)	34. Cara Blake, DVM, DACVS	Asst Professor (VCS)
6. Danielle Dugat, DVM, DACVS	Professor (VCS)	35. Laura Nafe, DVM, MS, DACVIM	Asst Professor (VCS)
7. Jeff Studer, DVM, DACVO	Professor (VCS)	36. Ryan Baumwart, DVM, DACVIM	Asst Professor (VCS)
8. Kip Lemke, DVM, MSc, DACVA	Professor (VCS)	37. Shane Lyon, DVM, DACVIM	Asst Professor (VCS)
9. Margi A. Gilmour, DVM, MS, DACVO	Professor (VCS)	38. Craig Miller, DVM, PhD, DACVP	Asst Professor (VPB)
10. Todd Holbrook, DVM, DACVIM, DACVSMR	Professor (VCS)	39. Kelly Allen, MS, PhD	Asst Professor (VPB)
11. Anthony W. Confer, DVM, PhD, DACVP	Professor (VPB)	40. Tamara Gull, DVM, DACVIM, DACVPM	Asst Professor (VPB)
12. Jean M. d'Offay, DVM, PhD, DACVM	Professor (VPB)	41. Asitha Vasudevan Pillai, DVM, MS	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
13. Kenneth Clinkenbeard, DVM, PhD	Professor (VPB)	42. Carrie Kuzma, DVM	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
14. Mason Reichard, PhD	Professor (VPB)	43. Corey Wall, DVM, MS, DACVR	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
15. Melanie Breshears, DVM, PhD, DACVP	Professor (VPB)	44. Jennifer Thomas, DVM, DACVD	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
16. Richard W. Eberle, PhD	Professor (VPB)	45. Jonjo Reece, DVM, DACVIM	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
17. Susan Little, DVM, PhD, DAVPC	Professor (VPB)	46. Justin Plunk, DVM	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
18. Timothy Snider, DVM, PhD, DACVP	Professor (VPB)	47. Li-Jen Chang, BVM, MVM, MS, PhD	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
19. Marjorie Gross, DVM, MS, DACVA	Clin. Professor (VCS)	48. Mackenzie Hallman, DVM, DACVR	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
20. Robert Streeter, DVM, MS, DACVIM	Clin. Professor (VCS)	49. Grant B. Rezabek, DVM, MPH	Clin. Asst Professor (VPB)
21. Todd Jackson, DVM, DACLAM	Clin. Professor (VPB)	50. Yoko Nagamori, DVM	Clin. Asst Professor (VPB)
22. Joseph P. McCann, PhD	Assoc Professor (PHSI)	51. Andrea Conti-Patara, DVM, MS, MBA, PhD, DACVECC	Clin. Asst Professor (VCS)
23. Erik Clary, DVM, PhD, DACVS	Assoc Professor (VCS)	52. Narasa Raju Teluguakula, BSc, MSc, PhD	Asst Research Prof. (PHSI)
24. Nicola Di Girolamo, DVM, PhD, DECZM	Assoc Professor (VCS)	53. Sahlü Ayalew, PhD	Asst Research Prof. (VPB)
25. Giselle Cino, DVM, PhD, DACVP	Assoc Professor (VPB)	54. Clay Hallman, DVM, DACVR	Lecturer (VCS)
26. Katrina Meinkoth, DVM	Clin. Assoc Professor (VCS)	55. Jillian Paegelow, DVM	Lecturer (VCS)
27. Patricia Coan, DVM, PhD, DACLAM	Clin. Assoc Professor (VCS)	56. Julia Baldrighi, DVM, MS, PhD	Lecturer (VCS)
28. Stefano Di Concetto, DVM, DACVAA	Clin. Assoc Professor (VCS)	57. Kelsey Jurek, DVM	Lecturer (VCS)
29. Keith Bailey, DVM, PhD, DACVP	Clin. Assoc Professor (VPB)	58. Meriam Saleh, PhD	Lecturer (VPB)
		59. Maggie McCourt, DVM	Clinical Instructor (VPB)

It is significant that Dean Risco failed to acknowledge or analyze the unabated hemorrhage of senior faculty in the Self Study, despite the profound impact it has had on the program overall. While he did provide a purported current roster of faculty, he listed individuals who no longer work at the College and shows fewer than 18 FTE in teaching.<sup>18</sup>

Such pervasive inaccuracies and omissions, particularly concerning faculty levels and composition, necessitate a thorough evaluation of the document's credibility as a whole. The omission of critical issues, such as the considerable attrition of senior faculty, suggests an attempt to mislead the COE by presenting a deceptively positive state of the College. This manipulation of data, likely aimed at influencing the COE's accreditation decision, veils the stark discrepancy between the reported conditions and the College's actual state.

Thus, we strongly recommend that the COE independently verify all claims related to faculty composition in the Self Study, utilizing official and unfiltered College records.

<sup>17</sup> Oklahoma State University, Office of the Registrar Catalog Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8, Table 8.3.D, 60.



## Analysis of clinical support staff crisis

Dean Risco's claim of an increase in "clinical staff in support of teaching from 65.5 FTE to 106 FTE"<sup>19</sup> is not only unsubstantiated, making analysis by the COE impossible, but directly contradicted by the substantial loss of at least 50 clinical support technicians, including *at least 33 credentialed technicians*, during the same timeframe. This exodus has resulted in the current employment of just 15 RVTs and 4 VTs, spread across small, large and zoo animal services,<sup>20</sup> causing none to operate with optimal, let alone sufficient, trained technicians.

Without the benefit of official College employment records, we rely on clinical staff to compile from memory a listing of their departed colleagues during the Self Study period. We have high confidence that substantially more departed during the period, especially in earlier years, yet even the following list of clinical support staff departures starkly differs from Dean Risco's implausible claim of a net addition of 40.5 FTE (*departed supervisors in italics*):

- |                                 |                                 |                              |                                |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Allison Herod, RVT           | 13. Charity Surine, RVT         | 25. Jennifer Cisk-Miley, RVT | 38. Melissa Magazu             |
| 2. <i>Allison McDaniel, RVT</i> | 14. Cherlyn Simpson, RVT        | 26. John Horne               | 39. Morgan Hoover              |
| 3. <i>Anna Soto, RVT</i>        | 15. <i>Delicia Timmons, RVT</i> | 27. Jolene Crook, RVT        | 40. Rachel Wassermann          |
| 4. Arantxa Lasa, RVT            | 16. Emma Sparks                 | 28. Juli Allen, RVT          | 41. Robin Hensley, RVT         |
| 5. Ashlee Reed, RVT             | 17. Erin Dickey                 | 29. Karen Anderson, RVT      | 42. <i>Robin Jack, RVT</i>     |
| 6. Ashley McMillen, RVT         | 18. Geena McLean, RVT           | 30. Kasi Davis               | 43. Shalee Ready, RVT          |
| 7. Ashley Moffat                | 19. Gentry McGregor, RVT        | 31. Katherine Gaskill, RVT   | 44. Shanna Wilkie              |
| 8. Ashley Wick, RVT             | 20. Hanna StClair               | 32. <i>Katie Mibb, RVT</i>   | 45. Stetson Schmutz            |
| 9. Brandy Hutchings, RVT        | 21. Ian Kanda, RVT              | 33. Kayla Paggen, RVT        | 46. Tammy Garcia               |
| 10. Briana Wiker                | 22. Jamie Bowen, RVT            | 34. Kiara Deal, RVT          | 47. <i>Tracey Merrill, RVT</i> |
| 11. Callee Good-Lang            | 23. Jaqueline Zahr              | 35. Kris Duncan              | 48. Traci Grennen, RVT         |
| 12. <i>Carey McCulley, RVT,</i> | 24. Jenn Smith,                 | 36. Marla Nelson, RVT        | 49. Tristan Coffin, RVT        |
| <i>VTs</i>                      | R.T.(R)ARRT                     | 37. Melissa Buirch, RVT      | 50. Twoee Welsh                |

One hardly needs to infer why the Self Study lists the four remaining VTs on staff but omits any mention of how many RVTs have departed or remain employed: simple math at that point would confirm that the clinical support staff has significantly *decreased*, not increased as claimed, particularly at the troubling cost of credentialed technicians.

Acknowledging that credentialed technicians are not the only individuals who could comprise a category called "clinical staff in support of teaching," we do know that the Teaching Hospital lost at least 33 of them and employs only 15 today. Further, we know that dozens of veterinarians were not hired. So if not veterinarians and credentialed technicians, who is Dean Risco claiming comprise these 40.5 net new "clinical staff in support of teaching?" The Self Study does not say, and no definition or substantiation is offered.

Perhaps he is including graduate assistants, adjuncts and junior faculty in this category. If that is the case, the COE will note the likely double-counting across the Self Study's faculty and clinical support staff counts, as well as the reality that these individuals cannot functionally replace departed practicing specialists and credentialed staff. Regardless, even counting them does not net 40.5 new individuals in the category.

It is likely that the lack of substantiation or definition of the claimed calculation is a purposeful misdirection. Obviously, the Self Study's assertion of an increase in clinical support staff from 65.5 FTE to 106 FTE is demonstrably false, and clearly contradicts the reality of massive staff attrition over the period. The absence of substantiating analysis should necessitate great scrutiny from the COE, including verification of all claims by cross-referencing with official College hiring and loss records.

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<sup>19</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 2.1, para. 4.

<sup>20</sup> "Faculty and Staff," Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://vethospital.okstate.edu/about/faculty-and-staff.html>.



## Analysis of recruiting and retention crisis

In a head-turning attempt to confuse the COE, Dean Risco declares that recruiting efforts at the College are so “strong and promising”<sup>21</sup> that the College has added no fewer than 63.5 combined net new faculty (23) and clinical support staff (40.5 FTE) amid a notoriously tight veterinary labor market - and at such a rate of success that OSU and Dean Risco would, if true, be among the top recruiters of talent among all veterinary colleges and all deans in North America.

Yet he simultaneously asks the COE to accept that the College’s recruiting efforts are so significantly impaired by “global” and “unique” challenges that he can hardly recruit anyone to work there at all, often receiving “zero to few applicants” for key positions.<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, the COE is asked to believe that Dean Risco added no fewer than five dozen faculty and clinical support staff during the same time period that nearly every core clinical service has ceased to operate *due to lack of staffing caused by ongoing mass resignations*.

Tellingly, the Self Study exclusively focuses on purported reasons the College cannot recruit new talent (despite simultaneously declaring that “recruitment efforts remain strong and promising”<sup>23</sup>) – while offering *fully zero* analysis on why the College *could not retain* at least 109 faculty and clinical staff. Despite the fact that analysis of staff retention issues is a vital COE requirement, the Self Study dedicates a mere handful of boilerplate, nonspecific sentences to staff retention challenges and strategies, and often contradicts them.

For example, Dean Risco asks the COE to believe that the College simply cannot recruit and retain staff due in large part to “unique challenges in the rural setting of our campus,”<sup>24</sup> which simply does not explain why dozens of faculty and clinical staff resigned only to accept jobs *in rural settings* and, in numerous instances, *in or around Stillwater* mere miles from the College. In a particularly devastating example of this, despite repeated claims in the Self Study that the College cannot attract or keep specialists in surgery and internal medicine, those very specialists *are practicing today in Stillwater*, mere miles from the Teaching Hospital. Each previously worked for the College, and none will return due to experiences with a regressive work environment.

Dean Risco cites various reasons for recruitment difficulties but notably omits the most dominant one: a direct link between the College’s degraded reputation and its recruitment and retention crisis. This connection is obvious through a straightforward two-step analysis.

1. An organization’s reputation is documented to be strongly correlated to its recruiting success.<sup>25</sup>
2. The College’s reputation has collapsed so extensively across veterinary academia that the 2023 US News & World Report poll of deans and faculty at 33 colleges ranked it the sixth lowest peer assessed reputation score – 2.2 on a scale where 1 is ‘marginal’ and 5 is ‘outstanding.’<sup>26</sup> The poll had a robust 53% response rate,<sup>27</sup> meaning that roughly *half of all deans and faculty in America* believe OSU’s CVM is approximately ‘marginal’ and among the lowest-ranked in the country.

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<sup>21</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.1, 57, para. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.4: Assess the Challenges for Your College in Maintaining Faculty Numbers and Quality, 61, para. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.1, 57, para. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.4, 61, para. 1.

<sup>25</sup> See for example: Lievens, Filip, and S Highhouse. “The Relation of Instrumental and Symbolic Attributes to a Company’s Attractiveness as an Employer.” *Personnel Psychology* 56, No. 1 (2003): 75–102, <http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-212771>; Daniel Cable and Daniel Turban. “The Value of Organizational Reputation in the Recruitment Context: A Brand-Equity Perspective.” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 33 (2003): 2244–2266. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2003.tb01883.x>; Derek Chapman, Krista Uggerslev, Sarah Carroll, Kelly Piasentin, and David Jones. “Applicant Attraction to Organizations and Job Choice: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Correlates of Recruiting Outcomes.” *The Journal of Applied Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2005): 928–944. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0021-9010.90.5.928>.

<sup>26</sup> “Best Veterinary Schools, Peer Assessment Scores,” US News and World Report, 2023, accessed March 16, 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/veterinarian-rankings>.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Morse, “Methodology: Best Health Schools Rankings,” US News and World Report, April 24, 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles/health-schools-methodology>.

Robert Morse, Chief Data Strategist at US News & World Report,<sup>28</sup> clarified the basis of these rankings: “The veterinary ranking is based on reputation only. It does not take into account or include other factors besides the one reputation score.” He further expanded on why these reputation scores matter: “We’re asking leaders in the field - the top educators in the field who haven’t risen to those positions overnight, who have knowledge of the other schools at some level - to rate the other schools, and their opinion is more than superficial.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus, when 53% of veterinary academics assess the College to be at the bottom of a ranking that is *solely a measure of reputation*, the correlation between their low view of the College’s reputation and their resistance against working there becomes obvious.

Alarmingly, the College’s peer-assessed reputation score has declined in three successive polls, from 24 to 26 to 27 (See Peer Assessed Reputation Rankings, right). Indeed, two years after Dean Risco assumed his post, the College fell to last place, prompting *Today’s Veterinary Business* to publish an article entitled, “Oklahoma State Responds to No. 26 Ranking,”<sup>30</sup> the first sentence of which read: “Oklahoma State University’s Center for Veterinary Health Sciences placed 26<sup>th</sup> out of 26 US veterinary schools ranked by US News & World Report.” Dean Risco is quoted in the article as assuring that the College had “increased our faculty numbers” – and yet in just the four years since the College fell to last place, nearly 100 faculty and clinical support staff have departed in a mass exodus of senior talent.

Peer Assessed Reputational Rankings, US News & World Report, 2015, 2019 and 2023

	2015	2019	2023
UC Davis	1	1	1
Colorado State University	3	3	2
Cornell University	2	2	3
Ohio State University	5	4	3
NC State University	3	4	5
University of Pennsylvania	7	4	5
University of Wisconsin	5	8	7
University of Florida	14	9	7
University of Georgia	10	10	7
Texas A&M University	7	4	10
University of Minnesota	9	10	11
Purdue University	14	13	11
Auburn University	14	14	11
Iowa State University	13	14	11
Washington State University	14	14	15
Michigan State University	12	17	15
University of Illinois	19	23	15
Tufts University	10	12	18
Virginia-Maryland	19	17	19
Kansas State University	14	19	19
University of Missouri	23	19	21
University of Tennessee	21	19	21
Louisiana State University	21	22	23
Mississippi State University	25	24	24
Oregon State University	26	24	25
Tuskegee University	N/A	N/A	25
<b>Oklahoma State University</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>
Texas Tech University	N/A	N/A	27
Western University	N/A	N/A	29
University of Arizona	N/A	N/A	30
Midwestern University	N/A	N/A	31
Lincoln Memorial University	N/A	N/A	32
Long Island University	N/A	N/A	33

Clearly, the collapse of the College’s reputation is a dominant contributing factor regarding its inability to keep or attract talent, despite Dean Risco’s claims to the contrary and his aggressive recruiting efforts including the retention of professional search firms.<sup>31</sup> We know this is true because people openly declare it:<sup>32</sup>

“Money, location, poor facilities, yes those are all issues, but many of us would have stayed if it wasn’t such a difficult place to work. Admin uses lots of excuses but nobody asks us because we’d tell them the real answer. It’s toxic here and the job is already hard enough. Other colleges are just run better and at some point you have to pursue happiness.”

The COE required College leadership to assess key challenges in recruiting *and* retention. It did not suggest that such analysis should be limited only to challenges that are not embarrassing or self-inflicted. The Self Study’s omissions of analysis on the main factor affecting recruiting and retention as well as even the existence of a clear staff retention crisis casts considerable doubt on its overall validity.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Morse, Chief Data Strategist, “Biography,” *US News & World Report*, <https://www.usnews.com/topics/author/robert-morse>, accessed March 2024.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Kenwright, Assistant Content Specialist, “U.S. News reveals how it ranks veterinary schools,” *DVM360*, April 30, 2015, <https://www.dvm360.com/view/us-news-reveals-how-it-ranks-veterinary-schools>.

<sup>30</sup> Staff writers, “Oklahoma State Responds to No. 26 Ranking,” *Veterinary Business Today*, March 18, 2019.

<https://todaysveterinarybusiness.com/oklahoma-state-responds-to-no-26-ranking/#:~:text=Oklahoma%20State%20University's%20Center%20for,by%20U.S.%20News%20%26%20World%20Report>

<sup>31</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.11: Describe Measures Taken to Attract and Retain a Diverse Faculty, 63, para. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous respondent, anonymous opt-in survey conducted by CVM Independent during Summer 2023, targeting employees, students, alumni, donors, referring veterinarians, and other key stakeholders of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Oklahoma State University.

## Analysis of caseload data and student clinical opportunities

Dean Risco claims that the College somehow roughly held steady its number of hospitalized small animal patients in recent years<sup>33</sup> – despite the fact that every specialist in anesthesia, cardiology, dermatology, emergency and critical care, internal medicine, radiology and surgery resigned during the Self Study period.

He claims that roughly 2,000 small animal patients were hospitalized in the most recent year (1,512 canines, 330 felines, and about 200 other small animals)<sup>34</sup> during a period where the Teaching Hospital offered predominantly wellness care and had lost services for which hospitalizations for long term care are required. In the absence of any substantiation, it is difficult to identify a mathematical means to compute that number based on customary caseloads at staffing levels maintained by the College during the period.

We strongly suspect that the hospitalized small animal patient data is either facially fraudulent, or it is a misleading report of hospitalization *charges*, not patients. This would significantly distort the true “number of patients that were hospitalized”<sup>35</sup> which is the required criterion, misleading the COE with inflated figures.

Yet we know from students and staff that often there are few, if any, hospitalized small animal patients:<sup>36</sup>

“My 4<sup>th</sup> year colleagues and I spent more time sitting in the rounds room without a doctor or an animal anywhere in sight than we did seeing or discussing an actual patient.”

“I think the first 3 years allow us to have a great education, but once we get to 4th year it declines exponentially. We are seeing 2 or 3 patients a day, and the technicians run that hospital. I feel like we were taught how to round and hold animals.”

“I don’t know what the deans and professors were thinking when making this new curriculum, but it is very rushed and the students feel like they don’t learn anything. Students are already going to be unprepared going out in the veterinary field because the teaching hospital doesn’t see many cases, so the least the school can do is give us a more well-thought-out education before going into fourth year.”

Even as the stated 2,000 hospitalized small animal patients is woefully inadequate for academic purposes, Dean Risco further asserts, but does not substantiate, that students saw an unlikely 150,000+ patient visits during external rotations.<sup>37</sup> This claim is also likely fraudulent, but we require additional information to make such a determination with high confidence, necessitating heightened scrutiny from the COE.

Finally, Dean Risco’s assertion that clerkships and wellness services offer students “the same learning outcomes and Px/Dx skills”<sup>38</sup> as they would otherwise experience with the benefit of a fully functioning Teaching Hospital is facially false – and insulting to all faculty and clinical staff. A more plausible interpretation of such a declarative statement devoid of analysis is that it excuses College leadership from performing and reporting such analysis on the matter to the COE. Obviously, student access to a robust caseload under the tutelage of the College’s own educators within an integrated curriculum is a far more effective clinical experience than brief rotations at private clinics and general exposure to wellness care.

At the very least, the COE should apply a healthy measure of skepticism and scrutiny regarding claims of student satisfaction, caseload and clinical education standards before accepting the Self Study’s conclusions.

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<sup>33</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 4, Table 4.1A, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

<sup>35</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous respondent, anonymous opt-in survey conducted by CVM Independent during Summer 2023, targeting employees, students, alumni, donors, referring veterinarians, and other key stakeholders of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Oklahoma State University.

<sup>37</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 4, Table 4.1C, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Executive Summary, subhead. Clinical Faculty Numbers, 5, para. 2.

## Impact on operational and medical standards

Predictably, a frightening decline in medical standards at the Teaching Hospital has resulted from the loss of at least 59 faculty members, 7 Service Chiefs, 50 technicians including 33 credentialed staff, and nearly every practicing small animal specialist.

For example, in the months leading up to the mass resignation of the entire surgical department in late 2023, the Service Chief had stopped transferring cases to customary medical teams for recovery after multiple instances of negligence and poor patient care caused life-threatening medical crises for patients – including some who died as a result.

Upon assuming the position of Hospital Director in 2023, Kelly Black, DVM, DACVPM, appears to have quickly discovered what the Self Study fully omits: patient care at the Teaching Hospital has long been pervasively substandard and dangerous. He created a task force, reporting directly to him so that he could get unfiltered information, to identify causes and examples of ongoing poor medical practices, the gravity of which was apparently not explained to him during his months-long interview process.

Regrettably, both of the leaders of that task force – including the most recent Technician of the Year honoree and a highly experienced credentialed technician – ultimately resigned after experiencing clear retaliation which included being banned from entering the ICU without authorization from the very supervisor whose team was most implicated in these patient care issues. Such a pattern has plagued the College for several years now as issues are neither comprehensively investigated nor effectively addressed.

Unsurprisingly, amid an acute staff shortage crisis and declining medical standards, remaining employees bear the brunt of the resulting impact on patient care and employee stress levels. While not recognized in the Self Study, the consequences are dangerous and unacceptable, as explained by the College's own employees:<sup>39</sup>

“Exhausted and overwhelmed residents are left to run the clinics for weeks at a time with no senior contact. Technical support often consists of barely trained undergraduate students. Staffing is unsafe for workers and patients. Doctors are required to cover technician shifts with no compensation – just out of fear that the patients will not survive otherwise. Senior technicians are ignorant of basic standards of care. If residents try to complain, they are threatened with withholding of their publication funding or certificate of completion.”

“Overall I greatly enjoyed my time working at the hospital and getting to watch the students and interns learn and grow. I was driven away by the constant stresses that came from being consistently understaffed to the point that I felt that we were not performing our duties to the best of our abilities and thus not providing the best possible care to our patients. Decisions and changes were made that directly affected my job with no prior communication before the changes were implemented only adding to the already stressful environment.”

It is of paramount importance that the COE exercise maximum scrutiny in evaluating all claims made in the Self Study as to current caseload as well as all medical standards and practice.

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<sup>39</sup> Anonymous respondent, anonymous opt-in survey conducted by CVM Independent during Summer 2023, targeting employees, students, alumni, donors, referring veterinarians, and other key stakeholders of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Oklahoma State University.

## Workplace toxicity and a culture of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation

Dean Risco asserts that the College under his leadership “actively promote(s) a culture of inclusion that is respectful to all”<sup>40</sup> and claims myriad active efforts to promote “self-care and wellness, creating a culture of comradery (sic), inclusion and wellbeing” for students, staff and faculty.<sup>41</sup> However, the exodus of at least 109 faculty and clinical staff obviously indicates that the workplace culture is anything but “respectful to all.”

A recurring theme expressed by many who have departed includes negative experiences with a regressive, toxic workplace culture, as well as associated issues arising from it. The following sentiments, shared by current and recently former College employees, starkly illustrate this reality:<sup>42</sup>

"I have been yelled at, witnessed workers pushed to the point of tears, and falsely accused of things I didn't do. The problem is in the management. Student workers are overworked, underpaid, and treated terribly. Some people haven't even lasted 3 shifts before quitting. The drama, shaming, and unethical environment should be changed."

"So many times I cried because I was so overwhelmed and didn't have enough support. I started to dread a job I once loved so much. I had to leave before I became another statistic."

"Toxic culture. I was one who left due to lack of support and discrimination by senior administration."

Such testimonies underscore a deeply profound, systemic issue within the College's culture, marked by an environment that fails to support its staff and actively contributes to their distress and departure.

The existence of a pervasive toxic workplace should be obvious given the known correlation between high staff turnover rates and regressive work environments.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, workplaces characterized by hostility, discrimination, and poor leadership are positively correlated to significant attrition, so much so that a toxic workplace culture is ten times more impactful than compensation factors.<sup>44</sup> The current situation at the College echoes these findings, suggesting systemic issues that are far more acute than acknowledged.

Caroline Castillon, a Senior Contributor for *Forbes* who writes about women's advancement issues, identifies 10 signs of a toxic workplace environment,<sup>45</sup> all of which are evident at the College:

- Employee physical and mental exhaustion
- Demotivation among staff
- High turnover
- Unhealthy boundaries
- Lack of transparency
- Low morale
- Cronyism
- Lack of professional growth
- Harassment and bullying
- Disrespectful behavior

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<sup>40</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 1, subsec. 1.8: Provide the College's Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, 11, para. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 6: Students, subsec. List of student services, subhead. Counseling and Wellness Services, 46, para. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous respondent, anonymous opt-in survey conducted by CVM Independent during Summer 2023, targeting employees, students, alumni, donors, referring veterinarians, and other key stakeholders of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Oklahoma State University.

<sup>43</sup> See for example: Christian Kiewitz et al., "Suffering in Silence: Investigating the Role of Fear in the Relationship Between Abusive Supervision and Defensive Silence," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 101, no. 5 (May 2016): 731–42, <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000074>; Javed Iqbal, Ali Asghar, and Muhammad Zaheer Asghar, "Effect of Despotism Leadership on Employee Turnover Intention: Mediating Toxic Workplace Environment and Cognitive Distraction in Academic Institutions," *Behavioral Sciences* 12, no. 5 (April 2022): 125, <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12050125>; Scott Sleek, "Toxic Workplaces Leave Employees Sick, Scared, and Looking for an Exit," American Psychological Association, July 13, 2023, <https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/toxic-workplace>.

<sup>44</sup> Donald Sull, Charles Sull, and Ben Zweig, "Toxic Culture Is Driving the Great Resignation," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, January 11, 2022, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/toxic-culture-is-driving-the-great-resignation>.

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Castillon, "10 Signs It's Time To Leave A Toxic Workplace," *Forbes*, June 4, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastillon/2023/06/04/10-signs-its-time-to-leave-a-toxic-workplace/?sh=49378d10506c>.

As applied to OSU, the most definitive summary of the workplace culture was compiled by Kelly Black, DVM, DACVPM, who, upon assuming the position of Director of the Teaching Hospital at the College midway through 2023, embarked upon an independent due diligence exploration to understand the challenges he now faced. Importantly, Dr. Black recently came to his position *from outside the University*, meaning he is among a precious few College leaders who can currently claim to have no accountability for, or reason to cover up, existing catastrophic failures. Apparently unaware that he had unearthed deeply suppressed information, he catalogued his findings at one of his first staff meetings (See presentation slides, right).<sup>46</sup>

Dr. Black's independent analysis from an external perspective offers a rare, unbiased view into the systemic failures plaguing the institution. His presentation of findings outlined a toxic workplace environment rife with bullying, favoritism and fear. He acknowledged the high staff turnover that Dean Risco asks the COE to believe does not exist, and the negative impact it has had on employees, patients and students alike.

Though Dean Risco omits these grave workplace issues from the Self Study, he is fully aware of them, as evidence indicates he is the primary reason that these issues exist and have been suppressed in the first place.

As many of the most senior and knowledgeable among the faculty and staff have spoken up to address these issues, they have experienced blatant hostility, discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, including involuntary termination (e.g. 'getting fired') and voluntary termination (e.g. leaving due to these issues). This includes multiple faculty and staff liaisons, Committee Chairs and participants, Service Chiefs, specialists, clinicians and staff supervisors.

For example, evidence suggests that the more vocal that College employees are about issues, the more likely they are to experience retaliation. Consider the following:

- The Teaching Hospital staff elected two individuals to serve as their liaisons on the Dean's Staff Advisory Council, neither of whom completed their terms – one was personally terminated by Dean Risco while the other resigned in substantial part due to a hostile work environment. Dean Risco subsequently reduced the staff representatives on the Council from two to one and then reportedly *assigned his own preferred person to the position* rather than letting the staff choose their own again.
- An inordinate number of Veterinary Faculty Council (VFC) Chairs and members from 2018-present are no longer employed by the college. This Council is advisory to the Dean and is composed of departmentally appointed representatives, usually more senior faculty. Issues presented to Dean Risco

## Staff meeting presentation slides discussing important College challenges which are omitted from the Self Study

### SUBJECTIVE

#### -Collected data

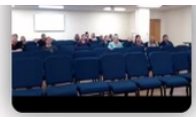
- **Need for Change in Leadership:**
  - Consistent calls for new leadership and to address issues.
- **Toxic Work Environment:**
  - Frequent mention of a negative and stressful atmosphere.
  - Reports of bullying, favoritism, and fear-driven culture.
- **Poor Leadership and Management:**
  - Criticisms of incompetent and unethical leadership.
  - Lack of communication, transparency, and effective decision-making.
- **Lack of Support and Resources:**
  - Employees feel overworked, underpaid, and unsupported.
  - Insufficient staffing, inadequate compensation, and limited resources.
- **Quality of Education and Training:**
  - Concerns about subpar education, outdated teaching, and lack of hands-on experience.
  - Perception of inadequate preparation for real-world veterinary practice.
- **Decline in Reputation and Standards:**
  - Noted decline in institution's reputation and standards.
  - Reports of decreased quality of education and services.



### SUBJECTIVE

#### -Collected data continued

- **High Turnover and Dissatisfaction:**
  - Significant number of people leaving or being let go.
  - Widespread dissatisfaction with work environment and management.
- **Mismanagement of Cases and Patients:**
  - Instances of neglect, poor patient care, and treatment mistakes.
  - Concerns about the impact on animal well-being.
- **Miscommunication and Poor Communication:**
  - Reports of miscommunication and lack of consistent communication.
  - Concerns about communication breakdowns between departments.
- **Inadequate Student Support:**
  - Students lack proper resources, support, and training.
  - Concerns about graduates' readiness for real-world practice.
- **Negative Impact on Patients and Clients:**
  - Perceived decrease in patient care quality due to toxic environment.
- **Favoritism and Unfair Treatment:**
  - Noted instances of favoritism and unfair treatment.
  - Unequal opportunities and lack of accountability.



<sup>46</sup> Kelly Black, DVM, DACVPM, "Collected Data" and "Collected Data Continued," presentation slides, Staff Meeting, Teaching Hospital, College of Veterinary Medicine, Oklahoma State University, August 2023.



during the study period often represented faculty views that were in disagreement with him or overall college direction. Their departures represent losses of potential leadership succession, institutional memory, mentorship to younger faculty, and extensive aggregate experience. Their pattern of departure suggests that they were actively marginalized for communicating dissenting messages. A deeper examination and analysis of these departures by the COE would be illuminating. The measurably harmful result, as we noted earlier, is the current dearth of senior faculty at the College.

- Service Chiefs appear to be the subjects of ongoing retaliation after speaking up on matters of concern, including their removal from key assignments and blockade from important opportunities. This is perhaps unsurprising in light of the fact that at least seven have resigned during the Self Study period, six of whom are women and one of whom resigned along with her entire team in 2023.
- Staff supervisors have been immediately threatened with write ups for confronting certain College leaders about issues of workplace hostility and poor medical standards. This, too, is perhaps not surprising given that at least seven supervisors – all women – departed during the Self Study period.
- Members of the Dean’s own staff appear to experience retaliation, including marginalization and loss of responsibilities to the point that some sought employment elsewhere.

Far from exhaustive list, this very real pattern underscores widespread, systemic retaliation issues which have collapsed key feedback loops, forcing individuals to weigh the risk of speaking out on matters of concern versus experiencing forms of retaliation. Organizational Behavior scholars call this phenomenon “defensive silence,” or the widespread deliberate choice by employees to withhold their opinions, concerns, or valuable information out of fear of negative consequences from their superiors or the organization itself.<sup>47</sup>

When questioned on these issues, Dean Risco typically minimizes them and points to employees and students who report satisfaction, as if any exception disproves the broader reality. Yet this dangerously overlooks the systemic nature of these issues. The fact that some may not directly experience the toxic environment does not negate the profound, negative impact it has on many others. Allowing this culture to persist, whether it affects some or all, undermines the foundation of a healthy academic and professional environment.

Indeed, substantial employee feedback suggests a pattern of behavior from Dean Risco himself that aligns with traits observed in leaders of toxic workplace environments. Characterized by a compelling need for control and an aversion to dissent, such leaders routinely deploy a predictable but devastating set of retaliatory tactics to counter perceived threats to authority and deviations from preferred narratives. The most frequently reported of his retaliatory tactics, as conveyed by both current and former employees, include:

- **Shift in demeanor under challenge:** Reports indicate a distinct change in Dean Risco's behavior from an ostensibly affable, low-key public persona to an unexpectedly intense and confrontational attitude in private, especially when facing opposition. This behavior, beyond common frustration, suggests a pattern where dissent not only triggers anger but also preludes retaliatory actions.
- **Vague and indefensible accusations:** Dean Risco leverages non-specific, undocumented, indefensible accusations as a basis for adversarial actions against employees. Commonly shared examples are variations of this type of statement: “It has come to my attention that you have done such and such,” nonspecific accusations that preclude employee defenses. For example, Dean Risco once claimed that unnamed departing staff made undocumented, non-specific complaints to him – and no one else – about an employee, which he relied on to ultimately terminate the employee, who could not defend against undefined complaints from unknown former employees.

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example: Loreleigh Keashly and Joel H. Neuman, “Faculty Experiences With Bullying in Higher Education,” *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 32, no. 1 (March 2010): 48–70, <https://doi.org/10.2753/atp1084-1806320103>; Frances J. Milliken, Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison, and Patricia Faison Hewlin, “An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues That Employees Don’t Communicate Upward and Why,” *Journal of Management Studies* 40, no. 6 (August 2003): 1453–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00387>; Christian Kiewitz, Simon Lloyd D. Restubog, Mindy K. Shoss, P. Raymund J. M. Garcia, and Robert L. Tang, “Suffering in Silence: Investigating the Role of Fear in the Relationship Between Abusive Supervision and Defensive Silence,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 101, no. 5 (2016): 731–742, <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000074>; Lilia M. Cortina and Vicki J. Magley, “Raising Voice, Risking Retaliation: Events Following Interpersonal Mistreatment in the Workplace,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 8, no. 4 (October 2003): 247–65, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.8.4.247>; Thomas M. Tripp and Robert J. Bies, *Getting Even: The Truth About Workplace Revenge - And How to Stop It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).



- **Abrupt negative performance evaluation:** Dean Risco often suddenly shifts from positive to negative reactions to employee performance, typically grounded in vague allegations, to establish pretext for further punitive actions under the guise of performance management.
- **Career advancement blockades and job manipulation:** Once Dean Risco perceives that an employee has opposed him or acted contrary to his interests, he actively obstructs their career advancement by sidelining them from promotions, awards or opportunities, redistributing or reducing their responsibilities, isolating them from pivotal assignments, and/or adding heightened scrutiny and micromanagement to their work. These tactics not only directly stall employee career advancement but also diminish their capacity to make meaningful contributions, eroding their professional development and sense of belonging within the organization.
- **Verbal threats:** Dean Risco often issues verbal threats under the guise of advice, using phrases like “stay in your lane” and “don’t stick your neck out” which carry an underlying threat of negative consequences for dissent. Employees, aware of the overall retaliatory environment, understand such statements as veiled but serious threats intended to silence dissent and prelude future punitive actions.
- **Social isolation:** Dean Risco engages in tactics of social isolation against those who voice dissent or challenge his decisions, methodically distancing employees from their colleagues and professional networks as a form of punishment or control, effectively siloing them within the organization.
- **Retaliation through intermediaries:** Dean Risco adeptly uses intermediaries to carry out retaliatory measures, deceptively distancing himself from direct involvement in punitive actions by managing them through trusted individuals within the University, effectively obscuring his involvement. By leveraging intermediaries, Dean Risco successfully maintains a facade of detachment, complicating efforts to directly attribute these actions to him.
- **Reputation undermining:** Dean Risco perceives a wide range of individuals, including those offering constructive dissent, advice, or merely possessing influence, as personal threats. He systematically undermines their reputations, casting aspersions on their professionalism and intentions. This not only diverts attention from legitimate issues but also significantly harms those targeted, reducing their influence, access, and esteem. Such tactics stifle open dialogue and foster an environment where fear of reputational damage silences potential constructive contributions.
- **Cronyism:** Dean Risco cultivates an environment rife with cronyism, strategically placing loyalists in key positions to reinforce his control and decision-making. This practice not only centralizes power but also restricts professional advancement opportunities for those outside his inner circle. By overloading his preferred administrative team with additional duties and bypassing opportunities for internal promotion among rank-and-file faculty and staff, Dean Risco effectively stifles diversity of thought and limits broader faculty advancement, perpetuating a cycle of favoritism and exclusion.
- **Scapegoating:** Dean Risco frequently engages in scapegoating, blaming specific individuals or groups for organizational failures, especially those voicing dissent. Such behavior not only undermines the trust and morale among employees but also creates an atmosphere of fear and silence, discouraging others from speaking out or offering constructive criticism.
- **Public promises vs private retaliation:** Dean Risco exhibits a striking contrast between his public assurances and private retaliations. He often commits to openness and dialogue in public forums, only to dismiss or penalize those same discussions privately. For example, when confronted with issues he does not wish to acknowledge, he typically offers to ‘circle back’ or involve individuals in conversations, only to curtly dismiss their follow-up attempts and mark them for various forms of professional retribution. This cycle of promising inclusivity or transparency in public, followed by punitive responses in private, perpetuates a culture of fear and discourages open communication.
- **Surveillance culture:** Dean Risco fosters a surveillance culture that encourages internal reporting among employees, breeding mistrust and animosity. He frequently uses such information, which is often speculative or based on workplace gossip or rivalry, to target and retaliate against individuals who are identified as dissenters or critics.

All of the foregoing retaliatory behaviors exhibited by Dean Risco are reported from current and recently former College employees. Yet they extend beyond employees to other key stakeholders.

Alumni who have spoken up about these issues are excommunicated, removed from communications and outreaches, omitted from articles and press releases, and censored at events. Indeed, after 47 concerned alumni, including some of the most accomplished in the College's history, sent a letter to University leaders expressing growing concerns regarding specific College leaders, workplace toxicity, severe attrition, declining standards, and other issues,<sup>48</sup> each of them experienced forms of retaliation, particularly from Dean Risco.

For these and other alumni, even longstanding reputations cannot save them: among those presently viewed by Dean Risco as his 'enemies' are the State of Oklahoma's past three "Oklahoma Veterinarian of the Year" honorees; multiple Distinguished Alumni honorees; major donors; the 2019 recipient of the "North American Accredited Hospital of the Year" award from the American Animal Hospital Association; former faculty; and even former Search Committee participants who were previously entrusted with selecting senior College leadership (including the Dean himself) but who are now deemed unwelcomed at all.

Further, local community veterinarians around Stillwater who express concerns about the quality of medicine provided by the Teaching Hospital and overall negative experiences with the College are excluded from critical partnerships. For example, Dean Risco's Self Study chart of participating clerkship locations includes *no local clinics*,<sup>49</sup> despite the obvious value of including them in the program so as not to burden students with hours-long travels as well as the value of building goodwill in the community. Unsurprisingly, Dean Risco's decision to expand the College's small animal wellness service to compensate for the loss of nearly every other clinical department has now pitted local community veterinarians against the College for financial survival, creating a climate of mistrust and animosity with the Teaching Hospital's predominant referral base.

Regarding the College's relationship with donors, Dean Risco dedicates a mere handful of sentences to explain why gifts to the College declined more than 40% in recent years.<sup>50</sup> He asks the COE to believe that the sole reason for this dramatic decline in financial support is because, essentially, donors ran out of money after the completion of a capital campaign. A more nuanced evaluation of this important issue would note that the decline in financial support from donors exactly correlates to the Dean's increasingly adversarial relationship with key alumni.

To believe Dean Risco that all these successful stakeholders – faculty, staff, alumni, local veterinarians, donors and others – are suddenly bad actors who must be excised from the College, one would have to disbelieve the decades of success they have achieved, the reputations they have earned that span the veterinary industry, and their years-long support of OSU's veterinary program. In reality, their reputations are self-evidently built on the kinds of successes that should be a welcomed credit to any College, let alone a struggling one. Yet Dean Risco irrationally sees them all as *personal threats* rather than as University stakeholders and assets.

These detailed accounts of systemic toxicity, discrimination, harassment, and retaliation - not merely as isolated incidents but as a pervasive culture - underline a critical breach of trust and leadership. This discord not only undercuts the College's mission but also erodes the very foundation of its educational and professional standards. The COE should exercise heightened curiosity as to what – *and who* – is the primary root cause of this toxic culture, including damaging breakdowns of key feedback loops and stakeholder relationships. Further, the COE should consider the degree to which this toxic culture has both caused and exacerbated *nearly every challenge* facing the College as it evaluates the substance and integrity of the Self Study.

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<sup>48</sup> Concerned Alumni of OSU College of Veterinary Medicine, *Letter addressed to Dr. Jeanette Mendez, Provost and Senior Vice President of Oklahoma State University, and copied to Dr. Kayce Shrum, President, and the Board of Regents of Oklahoma State University*, June 25, 2022. Appendix A.

<sup>49</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 4: Clinical Resources, Table 4.1H, 34.

<sup>50</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 2: Finances, subsec. Trend Analysis for Revenue, Bullet Point 9 (continued from prior page).

## Failure of critical HR and DEI mechanisms, processes and procedures

Dean Risco claims that the College has strong and effective human resources and reporting systems in place to address allegations of discrimination and harassment from students, faculty and staff,<sup>51</sup> as well as methods to “routinely collect data on...faculty/staff perceptions of the learning and workplace environment.”<sup>52</sup> He asserts that he has made “informed decisions” to counter a “declining perception of workplace culture, especially for the staff” by, for example, conducting surveys, creating task forces, and engaging both a panel of former veterinary college deans and an outside firm to investigate reports of workplace culture issues.<sup>53</sup>

This characterization of the crisis as merely a 'declining perception' significantly underrepresents the gravity of the documented regressive and toxic workplace culture. Whether due to detached or intentional minimization, such broad, unsubstantiated claims are so superficial that they echo rudimentary diversity and inclusion materials rather than real-life impactful programs. Given the critical nature of the issues facing the College and the depth of analysis expected by the COE in the Self Study, the discussion of HR and DEI mechanisms undeniably falls short of the requisite thoroughness and precision.

Notwithstanding his unsubstantiated claims, perhaps a simpler approach is available to College leadership to understand the workplace culture and the effectiveness of vital institutional structures meant to protect employees: they could ask the more than 100 faculty and clinical staff who have departed why they left, and what their experiences were with these institutional structures. Yet the COE will note that nowhere in the 98-page Self Study does Dean Risco mention a concerted strategy for conducting employee exit interviews, nor to instructing his claimed outside consultants to do so, because such practices do not formally exist.<sup>54</sup>

This is akin to a drug safety study ignoring data from deceased participants, skewing the results. To apply that to the Self Study, the COE is asked to accept that an organization that continues to hemorrhage employees can rely solely on data collected only in alternating years<sup>55</sup> from employees who have not resigned in order to understand why dozens of others have resigned. Clearly, without understanding why people are leaving *en masse*, College leadership has no basis whatsoever to claim to understand whether and to what extent the College's critical HR and DEI systems are properly functioning.

Further, despite Dean Risco's claims of utilizing surveys and committees to understand and improve the College's workplace environment, his actions notably undermine these efforts. He admits to conducting critical surveys only biennially<sup>56</sup> and has explicitly instructed faculty and staff committees to halt their own survey efforts unless he approves the content, cynically under the guise of avoiding inundating individuals with email inbox clutter.

Overall, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Dean Risco is loath to conduct legitimate, customary workplace culture and employee feedback efforts because he knows revelations are *very likely to be incriminating*.

Unfortunately, College employees have good reason to question the legitimacy, independence and fairness of the College's HR and DEI structures and practices. Despite Dean Risco's claim that the College has strong mechanisms to protect employees – especially those who might want to speak up on issues of workplace

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<sup>51</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 1, subsec. 1:11 Describe the System for Reporting and Responding to Allegations of Discrimination or Harassment, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, subsec. 1:10: Describe How the College Collects and Uses Information on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to Inform College Decisions, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

<sup>54</sup> Note: Dean Risco has explained his exit interview practices by stating that he is available for exit interviews and notes that departing employees are notified that they can request them. Yet the COE will note the difference between affirmatively conducting them for the purpose of institutional understanding and improvement versus burden shifting to employees as they exit. [Contextual information to further explain the noted assertion.]

<sup>55</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 1, subsec. 1:10, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

discrimination, retaliation and related concerns – they have witnessed those essential processes fail to protect them and their colleagues in dramatic fashion.

Consider the case of one of the staff's two elected liaisons to Dean Risco's Staff Advisory Council, who was terminated by Dean Risco himself. This individual was highly decorated, with accolades including the Mentorship Award, Employee of the Month, and the Staff Advisory Council Distinguished Service Award. She led various efforts essential to the Teaching Hospital, including overseeing: staff-wide training efforts; the implementation of vital software systems and new technologies; successful efforts to transform billing practices; and the successful accreditation of every discipline within the Teaching Hospital by the American Animal Hospital Association. Indeed, even Dean Risco previously celebrated this employee's "friendly demeanor, supportive approach, and 'always being there'" for her colleagues.<sup>57</sup>

Yet after this employee voiced concerns on behalf of her colleagues, which was her responsibility as the staff's liaison to the Dean, he personally terminated her – a highly irregular action given her position several levels below his. Afterwards, in another unprecedented action, he personally emailed the entire staff to notify them that he had terminated their elected representative, which was viewed as a threat: this will happen to anyone who speaks up.

Given the high visibility of this employee's situation, amplified by the Dean's own highly publicized termination of her, employees observed firsthand how institutional HR and DEI mechanisms designed to protect them could instead be wielded against them. Perhaps intentionally, this incident cast a chill across the College as employees learned that they must weigh the value of speaking up against the risk of retribution, where mechanisms designed to ensure fairness and protect their rights might instead be turned against them.

It is no wonder, then, that despite the claims made in the Self Study that the College under Dean Risco's leadership is dedicated to strong and fair HR and DEI practices, his employees believe these processes are systemically and fatally flawed. Consider these testimonies from employees:<sup>58</sup>

"It is a horrible place to work. The HR dept knowingly allows staff to be treated poorly. They say they're helping but nothing gets done."

"HR is horrible. They talk about people and discuss confidential information with staff, they bad mouth staff and doctors openly, they ignore pleas for help from staff and when you do follow their instructions they later reprimand you for it. There is a much longer list."

"Most people stopped going to HR, because things just didn't happen to make anything better."

The COE should see the exodus of faculty and clinical staff – and its conspicuous absence from the Self Study – as strong compelling evidence of systemic inadequacies within College HR and DEI frameworks, and decidedly insufficient informed decision-making. Indeed, extensive research conclusively links high turnover rates to flawed HR structures and practices,<sup>59</sup> a reality that is glaringly apparent at the College.

The COE is urged to exercise maximum caution in accepting the Self Study's claims regarding the strength of its HR and DEI practices and mechanisms. **To ensure the AVMA's reputation, the COE is cautioned to avoid making declarations or conclusions in its accreditation review based solely on claims in the Self Study which might later become publicly understood to be false, incomplete or inaccurate.**

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<sup>57</sup> Carlos Risco to Melissa Magazu, Delicia Timmons (Supervisor), Jeff Studer, (Director, Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital) "Congratulations! Employee of the Month for January," email message, January 15, 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous respondent, anonymous opt-in survey conducted by CVM Independent during Summer 2023, targeting employees, students, alumni, donors, referring veterinarians, and other key stakeholders of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Oklahoma State University.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example: Mark A. Huselid, "The Impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Turnover, Productivity and Corporate Financial Performance," *Academy of Management Journal* 40 no. 6 (November 1997): 635-872, <https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/256741>.

## A University-led decision to mislead the COE

Sadly, politics has also played a significant role in shaping the Self Study supplied to the COE. In recent years, the University was lobbying the Oklahoma legislature for tens of millions in new taxpayer funds while also preparing for accreditation review. It seems that, in the eyes of some, acknowledging the gravity of major issues at the College would give them credibility, while ignorance could offer plausible deniability.

For example, in a meeting on December 20, 2022, that included the Provosts of OSU and OSU's Center for Health Services, along with distinguished College alumni, the Provosts seemed to agree that, regardless of becoming aware of the urgency of issues at the College, they would not take certain actions which might alert the COE to circumstances that could impact accreditation – despite the fact that these issues are specifically the sort about which the COE requires Self Study analysis. One key interaction is notable (*emphasis added*):<sup>60</sup>

**Provost CHS:** “We’ve brought a team in from my campus to do an external review of everything. We’re looking at curriculum, the hospital, the operations, the leadership of the whole group, and we’re making some assessments on that. *We also have to take into account accreditation, and accreditation visits. I believe we’re up for an accreditation visit very soon.* We’ve had challenges with accreditation prior to Dean Risco, as you all know. So I have some concerns...” (crosstalk)

**Participant 1:** “*So your concern is changing out [the Dean] before the accreditation, it could cause additional issues, cause things to get shut down?*”

**Provost CHS:** “*Absolutely, shut the whole program down.*”

**Provost OSU:** “Which nobody wants.”

What exactly were the Provosts reacting to when they expressed worry that to potentially relieve an ostensibly culpable senior College leader might draw unwanted scrutiny from the COE? The following are direct quotes from the briefing they received that day (*emphasis added*):

- Alumnus 1: “We’ve had an exodus of faculty, excellent faculty, and they’re friends of mine. I’ve talked to everyone one of them when they left, *and every one of them said management.* Every one of them, and these are your best of the best.”
- Alumnus 1: “This is going to start getting to the (Oklahoma) legislature and the Board of Regents. It’s going to happen, I guarantee it. Because this kind of thing is not an isolated incident. *You just can’t cover this up anymore.* This has just gotten to be too bad.”
- Alumnus 1: “*We have now a reputation of not treating the faculty well. That is nationally what’s happening.* So now recruiting becomes a huge issue.”
- Alumnus 2: “I’ve had 47 interns... from 16 different veterinary colleges, and I’ve had externs... from 14 different veterinary colleges. And I’ve been extremely proud of Oklahoma State externs and interns in past years....*But those coming out now (from OSU) ... are not ready. And my big concern is lack of readiness of graduates, and the exodus of faculty.*”
- Alumnus 2: “It’s frightening to see how limited the faculty is, the exodus of these past few years. *It is a crisis, and it’s got to be dealt with as a crisis.*”
- Alumnus 3: “The only way that we can really move forward is to get a whole new set of management personnel in there that have an objective approach that also has an approach of a team effort, as opposed to a top down administrative effort, *which has resulted in intimidation of people, faculty members, even students, in some cases. And particularly staff that have been intimidated, so that they will not speak up, they will not participate.* It is not a team. It’s a boss, and do as I say.”

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<sup>60</sup> Conversation regarding CVM management, workplace toxicity, and patient care at Teaching Hospital, transcript of recorded conversation between distinguished alumni, Jeanette Mendez, MA, PhD, Provost and Senior Vice President, OSU, and Jeffrey Stroup, Pharm.D., BCPS, FCCP, Provost & Sr. VP, Center for Health Sciences, OSU, December 20, 2022. Transcribed by Otter.AI, 2024. Recording or transcript available subject to legal approval.

As stark as this briefing was, it is not the first time that University leaders learned of such matters. In a letter dated June 25, 2022, 47 alumni captured them quite clearly (see Appendix A), concluding with this:<sup>61</sup>

“We alumni would like to see a thorough review of the program including interviews with recently exited faculty and staff. If our view of poor management skills and a toxic culture is confirmed, we would hope that you, the Provost, would move to replace those currently in charge who are responsible.”

Despite detailed briefings and alarming feedback like this, University leaders chose silence and omission in the Self Study, a glaring discrepancy between internal alarms and public complacency, directly contravening the COE’s mandates for transparency and thoroughness. This fits the University’s pattern of understating, misdirecting, and misleading information regarding the College for all stakeholders, including the COE. For example, consider the following University press releases, which clearly mask critical failures of the College:

- “OSU named among the best in US News and World Report’s 2023 Best Grad School rankings” which celebrated that the College of Veterinary Medicine “came in just outside the top 25 and finished at No. 26 in the rankings,”<sup>62</sup> a claim that would be interpreted offensively by anyone with a basic understanding of the number of veterinary colleges in the ranking - akin to celebrating that the Men's basketball team had a great season after finishing 13<sup>th</sup> in the Big 12 standings.
- “Expanding for Excellence: Primary care service increases, benefiting students and clientele,”<sup>63</sup> a declaration that masks that the Teaching Hospital was forced to reduce to primarily wellness services due to a debilitating mass exodus of clinical staff and that the initiative further fractured relations with local veterinarians who now must compete with the Teaching Hospital for financial survival.

The sum total of communications like these has the enduring effect of enabling and excusing the troubles at the College, certainly in the eyes of those who lead it. Even while a certain level of optimism in public communications is understandable, the collective impact of the University's misleading narratives – including the Self Study – points to broader systemic issues, suggesting either a profound disconnect within its leadership or a deliberate strategy to mislead stakeholders and absolve culpable individuals.

As such, bolstered by support from University leaders, Dean Risco openly misleads the COE with a document that claims the College has experienced “significant improvement from the previous Self Study” in areas like faculty composition<sup>64</sup> and clinical instruction,<sup>65</sup> such that “the major, if not the only, threat to clinical resources”<sup>66</sup> is a “temporary” decline in caseload<sup>67</sup> and specialists.<sup>68</sup> Alarming, when asked to address any anticipated changes to the program which could be impacted by staffing levels, Dean Risco asserts that “there are no other further programmatic changes planned.”<sup>69</sup> Such detached and complacent statements in light of the College's evident struggles should prompt the COE to approach every claim within the Self Study with grave skepticism and scrutiny.

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<sup>61</sup> Concerned Alumni of OSU College of Veterinary Medicine, *Letter addressed to Dr. Jeanette Mendez, Provost and Senior Vice President of Oklahoma State University, and copied to Dr. Kayce Shrum, President, and the Board of Regents of Oklahoma State University*, June 25, 2022. Appendix A.

<sup>62</sup> Jordan Bishop, “OSU named among the best in US News and World Report’s 2023 Best Grad School rankings,” Oklahoma State University, March 29, 2022,

<https://news.okstate.edu/articles/communications/2022/osu-named-among-the-best-in-us-news-and-world-reports-2023-best-grad-school-rankings.html#:~:text=The%20OSU%20College%20of%20Veterinary,which%20are%3A%20biology%20at%20No>

<sup>63</sup> Kinsey Reed, “Expanding for Excellence: Primary Care Service Increases, Benefiting Students and Clientele,” Oklahoma State University, January 19, 2024, <https://news.okstate.edu/magazines/veterinary-medicine/vet-cetera/articles/2023/primary-care-service-increases-benefiting-students-and-clientele.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, *College of Veterinary Medicine Self Study*, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.1, 57, para. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 3: Physical Facilities and Equipment, subsec. 3.5: Describe the Adequacy of Facilities, 24, Bullet Point 2.

<sup>66</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 4, subsec. 4.8: Describe How the College Has Responded to Increasing/Decreasing Clinical Sources, 36.

<sup>67</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

<sup>68</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 8, subsec. 8.12 (sic): Describe Programs for on Campus Delivery of Curriculum Content by Individuals Not Employed Full-Time by the Institution, 64.

<sup>69</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, subsec. 8.10: Describe Current Plans or Major Changes in Program Direction That Would Be Affected by Faculty Retirements, Recruitment, and Retention, 63

## Concluding thoughts

In the face of such obfuscation from College leadership, the integrity of the accreditation process itself stands challenged, compelling the COE to uphold its highest standards of scrutiny and accountability in order to preserve the educational excellence and ethical stewardship demanded of all veterinary institutions.

Ultimately, there is no defensible justification for Dean Risco to issue such an inaccurate and misleading Self Study to the COE. Even with taxpayer funds and accreditation at stake, the ends do not justify the means when patient lives, employee wellbeing, faculty development and success, and student futures hang in the balance. In reality, it was never necessary for the University to make that trade at all: transparency regarding the College's challenges would have fostered even *greater* faith and trust with key stakeholders, including the COE and the AVMA. Most regrettably, faith and trust are severely lacking now, precisely when the College and all its stakeholders need it most.

The vast majority of individuals at the College are remarkably talented professionals, deeply committed to educating the veterinarians of tomorrow, advancing veterinary medicine through cutting-edge research, providing compassionate care to animals in need, and upholding the highest standards of the veterinary profession. This report must not be read as a commentary on them; indeed, a document fully celebrating their achievements, contributions, and unwavering dedication would span hundreds of pages. Rather, this report has a singular focus to address issues with the Self Study, with which these individuals were not involved and for which they must not be blamed – by anyone.

Even if College leadership might later claim that the falsehoods, inaccuracies and omissions contained in the Self Study are due to mere mistakes - or attempt to blame others for them – the COE should then immediately question the competence of those making such claims. The Self Study document is meant for no less than the American Veterinary Medical Association regarding the most serious of all conceivable evaluations, one which holds in the balance not just the quality of education that students receive, but also the type of workplace that employees experience and the quality of care provided to patients within that effort. Whether deceptively or incompetently drafted, the Self Study cannot be excused, especially considering that its responsible author, the Dean of an OSU college, has a heightened responsibility to embody the exacting standards of academic integrity, accuracy and honesty to which all students and faculty are inexorably held.

As Dean Risco reminds the Council, he is the “CEO”<sup>70</sup> of the College, accountable for all matters as consequential as the accreditation of the College he leads - including the accuracy and integrity of the Self Study he supplied to the COE. His demand for such accountability is both appropriate and required in order to uphold the integrity of the accreditation process itself.

A brighter future for our beloved College is within reach. The recent appropriation of taxpayer funds heralds a significant opportunity for transformative growth. Yet with these funds comes a solemn obligation: a mandate for leadership that is steadfastly ethical and visionary. Leveraged by astute leadership, financial resources multiply in impact, creating exponential opportunities for progress; in its absence, they risk dissipating into the void of perpetual, self-inflicted challenges. Magnificent new facilities alone will not foster an attractive workplace culture rich in emotional intelligence, inclusive diversity, transparency and respect.

We ask our OSU community to live by the Cowboy Code. If the Code is to be anything more than mere words on paper, now is the time to “do what’s right, even when it’s hard.”<sup>71</sup> A vast community of eager, dedicated stakeholders stands ready to reengage with the College we love, to collaboratively mend, rebuild and innovate for the betterment of our shared legacy in support of our students, faculty, support staff, patients and the communities we serve.

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<sup>70</sup> Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, sec. Standard 1, subhead. 1.5: Describe the Role of Faculty, Staff and Students in the Governance of the College, 10, para. 1.

<sup>71</sup> “We are Cowboys.” Oklahoma State University, <https://go.okstate.edu/about-osu/traditions/cowboy-code.html>. Accessed April 1, 2024.



## Appendix A

Concerned Alumni of OSU College of Veterinary Medicine, *Letter addressed to Dr. Jeanette Mendez, Provost and Senior Vice President of Oklahoma State University, and copied to Dr. Kayce Shrum, President, and the Board of Regents of Oklahoma State University*, June 25, 2022.

**Transcribed Document Note:** This document was converted from an image to PDF and then to Microsoft Word using Adobe Acrobat Pro to facilitate transcription.

**Redaction Note:** In the transcription process from the original document to this appendix, certain names and potentially identifiable details have been redacted. This measure has been taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals whose permission to be identified in this context was not obtained. The redactions are indicated by generic placeholders (e.g., "[REDACTED]") and do not alter the substance of the letter. Additionally, attachments referenced in the original document are not included in this appendix.

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### **CONCERNED ALUMNI OF OSU COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE (FORTY-SEVEN HAVE PROVIDED INPUT RELATIVE TO CONCERNS)**

June 25, 2022

Dr. Jeanette Mendez, Provost and Senior Vice President, OSU

This communication is offered in an effort to convey our concerns about the deteriorating condition of the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine. As alumni, we have monitored the product of the institution (graduates), our relationship with faculty, and now the mass-exodus of qualified and engaged clinical people. We have expressed these concerns to the management with the result being little to no acceptance of responsibility, identification of multiple extraneous causes, and diversion of the subject to an expressed Vision Statement. To the contrary, the Dean attempts to "paint a rosy picture" for his superiors and uninformed stakeholders.

The alumni have had a sustained genuine interest in the status and progress of their alma mater. We have been actively involved in all professional events sponsored by the college, are consistent donors, and have routinely referred clients to the college for student instruction. During the last Dean Search, multiple alumni participated in the nomination and selection of the "right candidate." Unfortunately, their candidate did not prevail due to failures of the higher administration (Provost's office) during the official hiring process. Regardless, we moved forward to help select another candidate. When that candidate was selected and hired, the alumni joined forces to help give him a "head start" by offering information on veterinary medicine and the Oklahoma Public (a group of 18 alumni with varied expertise and graduation date met with the new Dean, and each shared their views of the existing status of Veterinary Medicine in Oklahoma and opportunities for development). Coincidentally, the higher administration arranged for the new dean to meet the Oklahoma veterinarians and public by arranging multiple meetings for "meet and greet" around the state. Multiple alumni attended those meetings.

After one year, it became obvious to many alumni that the Dean viewed alumni as a "necessary evil" to deal with. He chose to modify the structure of most relational activities that had been successful in the past. He did not seek input from the organized group but moved unilaterally to control and manage alumni involvement. Some of that concern was written to Provost Sandefur with Dean Risco's full knowledge (attached). *[omitted from Appendix]*

Over the past three years, the relationships with faculty and referring veterinarians have become less than optimal. Many referring vets have come forward to express their concerns. Coincident with that challenge,

there has been a mass exodus of faculty from the clinical staff, including important specialists. Attempts at filling the vacancies with highly qualified people have been less than successful.

In response to a letter of concern written by Dr. [REDACTED] that was delivered to about one hundred alumni, a group chose to meet and try to understand the reasons for the deterioration of the college. Twenty-three met on March 3 of this year, and another group (twenty-one) met on April 7. Most of those participated in the Dean's Town Hall presentation on May 12.

The initial meeting was conducted with no pre-conceived notions, just exploratory in nature. Each person was to identify their number one concern for the college. Those were tabulated and summarized. The second meeting was expanded to include economic data and faculty and staff exit interview summaries. At the conclusion of the second meeting, time was devoted to the development of a list of questions for the Dean's Town Hall meeting scheduled in May. Summaries of those meetings are attached. *[omitted from Appendix]*

At the top of the concerns was a perceived "toxic culture" in the clinics and perhaps elsewhere, which was believed to be related to the management style provided by the current administration. That was later confirmed when [private] exit interviews were disclosed by Dr. [REDACTED] and others. No faculty or staff chose to leave because of pay scale but because of the environment and top-down mandated approach which included a significantly modified curriculum. The management attitude of "my way or the highway" was not tolerated well. Some of those expressed that they liked OSU and teaching students and would consider returning if the management were replaced with people who knew how to lead with awareness and vision.

The clinical faculty/student ratio became drastically skewed with the fourth-year students when the increased full-time student number of 106 was augmented with 40 to 50 island and foreign students. Clinical faculty were also loaded with additional teaching responsibilities for second and third-year students. The failure rate on the national Board Exam for the most recent class was greater this year than for any recent year.

The faculty number for the college is not clearly stated by the Dean's office. A Fact Sheet provided in the Fall of 2021 shows 111 with 30 of those represented as Residents and Interns (not faculty but in fact students). Therefore, the available faculty positions for the Fall of 2021 would have been 81 (which includes many who are primarily committed to research plus six post-doctoral fellows, and some of those positions were vacant because faculty had resigned). In May of 2022, the Dean stated at his Town Hall meeting that the faculty positions are 104 with 15 of those shown as research associates (non-tenure/non-clinical). Of the 104, he has shown twenty-three of those as vacated or new positions with hiring efforts underway (The new positions came about as a result of the \$3 million one-time increase in state appropriation last year, coupled with an increase anticipated this year). This brings the available teaching faculty down to 67 for the Spring semester (and many of those are primarily committed to research). Of the 67, only 16 are identified as clinical faculty, resulting in an F/S ratio of 1/10 for hands-on instruction in the clinics.

The diminished relationship with referring veterinarians has resulted in a lowered case load with resultant unavailable cases for instruction. This provides an additional stress on clinical faculty who are charged with providing each student with a minimum number of exposures to the multiple skills required for a graduating veterinarian. The faculty are overwhelmed, and it is not because of Covid or any of the other suggested causes offered by the administration.

Now there is talk about moving to a Distributive Model for the educational process which has the potential to do away with highly qualified clinical faculty and replacement by people who are studying for Board Exams or "spring-boarding" to a position elsewhere. No declaration has been made by the Administration but has been suggested by some.

A clear vision with the creation of a good working environment along with special efforts to attract and retain highly qualified faculty is lacking!

We alumni would like to see a thorough review of the program including interviews with recently exited faculty and staff. If our view of poor management skills and a toxic culture is confirmed, we would hope that you, the Provost, would move to replace those currently in charge who are responsible.

On behalf of the forty-seven alumni,

██████████, ██████████, ██████████, ██████████ [Signatories omitted]

CC: Kayse Shrum, President  
OSU/Oklahoma A & M Board of Regents