



May 6, 2025

W. Jeffrey Booker, PhD, First Chair of the Board of Trustees
Board of Trustees
Ferrum College
Ferrum, VA
Sent via email

Subject: Vote of No Confidence in President Dr. Mirta M. Martin

Dear Members of the Board,

The purpose of this letter is to formally express a faculty vote of no confidence in the leadership of President Dr. Mirta M. Martin. At the faculty meeting on Friday, May 2, 87% of 44 faculty members present voted no confidence in Dr. Martin's leadership. This letter is the latest in a long sequence of efforts to engage with the Board regarding faculty concerns. These efforts have been acknowledged by the Board but not addressed or acted upon in any meaningful way. The continued lack of response has left our academic community disheartened and demoralized. Meetings with Chair Showalter in January and April, and a visit from Chair Showalter with the faculty the morning of Friday, May 2, reflect inadequate engagement with the critical concerns raised with the Board since the start of Dr. Martin's interim appointment.

Faculty have been told repeatedly that Dr. Martin was hired at Ferrum College in order to be a "change agent." We the faculty want to be clear that we fully support the objective of the Board of Trustees to transform and reinvigorate Ferrum College after many years of administrative neglect. We agree that an agent of change with significant knowledge of financial, business, and academic management should lead this effort. However, Dr. Martin has proven that she lacks the ability to be transparent about her management philosophy or her approach to transforming the College's operations. Because of this and other serious issues with her management style, the faculty maintains that she has failed and will continue to fail in her efforts to move the College to a place of long-term sustainability and thriving.

Our vote of no confidence is grounded in the issues outlined below that, collectively, have damaged the institution's climate, stability, and ability to fulfill its mission.

Lack of Transparent Communication

President Martin consistently fails to communicate clearly, honestly, or in a timely manner with faculty, staff, and the broader campus community. She makes key decisions without adequate explanation or context, and she often announces significant changes without clarity, follow-up, or consultation with her Senior Leadership Team. This lack of transparency has destroyed trust among faculty and has contributed to a culture of confusion and exclusion. Since January, Dr. Martin has issued three monthly multi-page emails to campus in an attempt to address her failure to communicate clearly.

Most faculty members agree that the monthly updates from Dr. Martin are informative, but also that they are not transparent. One faculty member specifically noted that information itself is not transparency, particularly when it is impossible to trust the information received. Another specifically noted that the untimely departure of our Vice President of Enrollment, Bill Sliwa, was announced in a short email. Only minutes later, Sliwa's replacement was announced in a single line that was buried in the middle of her monthly update. The way that these position changes were announced threw many corners of campus into chaos, as faculty and staff questioned the wisdom and rationale of undertaking such changes during peak recruitment season. When Dr. Martin has attended faculty meetings this semester, she spends her time repeating prior talking points and platitudes while publicly blaming others, particularly her Senior Leadership Team, for what she has been unable to accomplish.

Rather than fostering a collaborative environment, Dr. Martin's communication style has deepened divisions and eroded morale. The cumulative effect has been a growing sense of instability on campus, where even routine decisions are met with skepticism and key stakeholders feel shut out of the very processes that affect their work and the future of the College.

Lack of Shared Governance and Transparency

Faculty overwhelmingly feel excluded from meaningful participation in decision-making. Shared governance at the College has been eroded, and a pattern of unilateral decisions has replaced the collaborative leadership that we expect in higher education. Dr. Martin has generally ignored or discouraged faculty attempts to offer feedback, and she is unable to fully and clearly articulate her strategy or vision for the College. According to members of the Senior Leadership Team, Dr. Martin avoids engaging with faculty because they offer views contrary to hers, and she publicly blames the Provost for her own lack of communication. If she and the Board have discussed long-term plans, operational or programmatic changes, or different expectations for duties and performance of faculty, those plans have not been shared or discussed with the faculty. Dr. Martin obliquely announces demands that faculty work differently or perform additional duties without discussion and then publicly accuses them of being insubordinate, lazy, and obstinate.

Further, Dr. Martin has not identified what the Senior Leadership Team is or does. She expects them to relay her views to faculty, but she often does not clearly identify those views to her Senior Leadership Team. Additionally, she openly and aggressively criticizes Senior Leadership Team members for their inability to clearly articulate her own vision to others, going so far as to refer publicly to some members of her team as “dumb-dumbs” (and in this specific case, in front of the member themselves).

This behavior has created a toxic and demoralizing environment in which leadership is defined by fear, misdirection, and shifting of blame rather than collaboration, trust, or competence. Faculty are left uncertain not only about institutional priorities, but also about who, if anyone, is actually steering the College forward. The breakdown in communication, disregard for shared governance, and public belittling of colleagues have made it impossible to foster the kind of healthy and productive campus culture that is essential to the success of any academic institution.

Toxic Work Environment and Culture of Fear

Dr. Martin has fostered a campus culture marked by intimidation, fear, and retaliation. Faculty fear voicing their concerns or challenging her decisions both publicly and privately for fear that they will be demoted, pressured to resign, marginalized, or terminated. The retaliatory culture that she has engendered and perpetuated seems to reflect her views—some stated explicitly—that those she is removing or reassigning are incompetent or disagree with her (or worse, they disagree with her because they are incompetent).

Dr. Martin is either unable or unwilling to collaborate effectively with her colleagues, especially those who offer dissenting views. Within the Senior Leadership Team, she has fostered a culture of Groupthink by explicitly instructing members to not challenge her decisions publicly or privately. While faculty broadly agree that Senior Leadership Team members should support decisions reached through genuine deliberation, it is increasingly unclear whether the Senior Leadership Team functions as a deliberative body at all. Under Dr. Martin, it serves as a mechanism for top-down communication and enforcement of the president’s will. This consolidation of power has hollowed out meaningful leadership on campus, leaving little room for shared responsibility, collaborative problem-solving, or transparent decision-making.

This climate of fear has severely damaged the College’s ability to function as a collaborative and innovative institution. Faculty report censoring themselves in meetings, avoiding direct communication with senior leadership, and steering clear of any conversations that could be perceived as critical or oppositional. Routine governance has become fraught, as committee service and department leadership roles now carry the risk of undue scrutiny or reprisal. Several long-serving employees have quietly left, citing the toxic work environment as a primary factor. Others remain because they feel bound by financial necessity or professional loyalty to their students—not because they trust or support the current administration.

The chilling effect of this culture has stifled creativity, discouraged honest dialogue, and driven a wedge between leadership and the campus community. In short, the College is not only failing to thrive under Dr. Martin's leadership—it is struggling to survive.

Institutional Mismanagement and Failed Initiatives

Dr. Martin's leadership has been characterized by a series of erratic, short-lived initiatives that lack coherence, planning, or follow-through. At spring convocation, she acknowledged the inevitability of failed experiments, but she does not include administrators, faculty, or staff in the ideation or evaluation of new initiatives. Instead, she unilaterally launches projects—such as the Guadalajara partnership and the Lab grant—that ultimately produce no measurable outcomes. This approach resembles “throwing spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks,” with the costs borne entirely by the campus community, while Dr. Martin remains insulated from the consequences. Over her two-and-a-half years at Ferrum, there has been no demonstrable improvement in enrollment, retention, or institutional stability, despite her continued micromanagement of day-to-day operations.

Faculty have repeatedly asked Dr. Martin and the Board for a clear, actionable, and sustainable plan to grow enrollment and stabilize the College's future, yet none has been provided. If she believes that employees should work differently or raise their performance to align with so-called higher education standards, she has failed to articulate what those standards are or how they relate to Ferrum's context. In the absence of transparency and collaboration, the College has suffered from continuous turnover among faculty, staff, and senior leadership—leaving essential roles unfilled and operations in disarray. Rather than progressing with purpose, the College has been stuck in a constant cycle of reinvention, driven by a pattern of reactive leadership and failed experiments.

Misleading and Harmful Financial Decisions

Dr. Martin has repeatedly claimed that she has no control over stagnant salaries or the lack of raises, yet under her administration, employee insurance premiums increased dramatically. She publicly stated that the increase was 7%, a figure that was quickly revealed to be misleading, as the actual financial burden on employees was significantly higher. Additionally, her unilateral (and failed) attempt to revise the employee handbook—without consultation from faculty or staff—resulted in a significant reduction in employee benefits, deepening the sense of frustration and mistrust across campus.

Both Dr. Martin and Board Chair Showalter have asserted that a student enrollment of 1,300 is necessary to balance the budget. Rather than taking responsibility for achieving this goal, Dr. Martin has repeatedly shifted blame onto the faculty, publicly criticizing their efforts and questioning their commitment. This scapegoating is

particularly egregious given her inability to collaborate with or retain experienced enrollment professionals, including the former Vice President of Enrollment. Despite acknowledging the urgency of enrollment growth, she has failed to allocate meaningful resources toward marketing or outreach, instead relying on faculty—already stretched thin—to conduct recruitment visits to area high schools. The result has been predictable: declining morale, ineffective recruitment, and continued budget shortfalls, with faculty and staff left to absorb the fallout.

What is more, fundraising has remained largely stagnant throughout her tenure, with no clear strategic plan or measurable progress communicated to the campus community. One of the most consequential and opaque decisions under her administration has been the transition to NCAA Division II athletics, a move whose benefits and long-term viability remain uncertain.

Faculty have raised numerous questions about the rationale, costs, and expected outcomes of this transition, but those inquiries have been met with vague responses or outright deflection. The athletic director—appointed and backed by Dr. Martin—has repeatedly misrepresented or misunderstood basic data when addressing faculty concerns, and he regularly fails to follow up on questions he cannot answer. This lack of transparency and accountability has eroded confidence in the athletics program and fueled skepticism about the wisdom of pursuing Division II status, especially in the absence of a clearly articulated institutional strategy or cost-benefit analysis.

Failure to Uphold Professional Standards and Leadership Ethics

The inability to facilitate the revision of updated and equitable faculty and employee handbooks is one of Dr. Martin's most egregious failures, both practically and symbolically. Rather than revising these documents through a process of collaborative input and shared governance, she introduced changes designed to consolidate administrative authority, strip away long-standing protections, and minimize faculty and staff participation in institutional decision-making. Her proposed revisions—crafted behind closed doors and without transparent consultation—were met with widespread resistance across campus, further eroding trust in her leadership.

The departure of the former Vice President of Enrollment—amid ongoing personal conflict with Dr. Martin—is only one example of the alarming rate of high-level attrition under her tenure. Multiple senior administrators, faculty, and long-serving staff members have either resigned or been removed in the past two and a half years, often with little or no explanation. This instability reflects a pattern of leadership driven by control rather than collaboration, where dissent is treated as disloyalty and turnover becomes a feature rather than a flaw. The result is a campus climate where policies remain outdated, roles are constantly in flux, and the very structures meant to protect employees are deliberately undermined.

While Dr. Martin has made a point of maintaining a visible presence among students on campus, her leadership



has alienated key community stakeholders, including local high school administrators—relationships essential to recruitment and public perception.

Conclusion

In January, faculty were asked by Chair Showalter to allow the Board time to “do its job” and implement change. Dr. Martin was given four charges: 1) to increase her off-campus focus on fundraising; 2) to allow her Senior Leadership Team greater autonomy and decision-making; 3) to improve transparency; and, 4) to focus on her interpersonal actions and behaviors with others, including faculty and staff.

Dr. Martin has demonstrated the ability to adjust her behavior temporarily in response to such mandates from the Board, but meaningful and sustained change has proven, time and again, to be out of her reach. Her leadership pattern reflects an unwillingness and inability to grow, evolve, or address the real needs of the campus community, which ironically mirror many of her own criticisms of faculty. Not only has there been no demonstrable change, but her negative behaviors have increased, further harming the culture and climate on campus.

Faculty cannot, in good conscience, continue under a leadership that prioritizes control over collaboration, power over progress, and intimidation over innovation. The damage done to the institution’s morale, mission, and personnel is extensive and ongoing. Dr. Martin’s leadership is no longer tenable, and her continued presence poses a threat to the integrity and future of Ferrum College.

We therefore urge the Board of Trustees to do their job, and to remove Dr. Mirta M. Martin from her position as president of Ferrum College. Faculty then urge the Board to consider running a national and collaborative search for our next leader that would allow members of the campus community to be part of the process. Our students, faculty, and staff deserve a leader who listens, collaborates, and governs with integrity and vision. Faculty are eager to collaborate with the Board on this process while also respecting the sacred duty of the Board to have the final say in the selection of the College’s next president.

Sincerely,

Abigail Jamison, Chair of Faculty Council
On behalf of the Faculty of Ferrum College