

July 30, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

A comprehensive assessment of University of Arizona administrators is conducted every five years to evaluate performance to date, uncover any unaddressed systemic concerns, and review long-range goals and objectives. A review of Dean Mike Abecassis was conducted in the spring semester 2025 to review the Dean's performance from 2019 through 2024. The following is a summary of the process and findings.

Nominations for the Review Committee were solicited from stakeholders in the College of Medicine-Tucson, College of Medicine-Phoenix and Banner Health. The Review Committee was co-chaired by Dean David Hahn, Engineering, and Dr. Venkata Evani, Banner Health. The committee members included:

- Todd Boltz, Medicine Administration (COM-T) Senior Director, Operations
- Erika Eggers, PhD Physiology (COM-T) Professor, Physiology / Biomedical Engineering / Physiological Sciences-GIDP / Neuroscience - GIDP / and BIO5 Institute, Associate Department Head, Research - Physiology
- Mindy Fain, MD Medicine (COM-T) Executive Director of Practice, Innovation in Health Sciences, Division Chief, General Internal Medicine / Geriatrics / Palliative Medicine, Co-Director, Arizona Center on Aging
- Geoff Gurtner, MD Surgery (COM-T) Professor & Chair, Surgery
- Steve Herron, MD Psychiatry (COM-T) Associate Clinical Professor, Psychiatry (Clinical Series Track) Clerkship Director
- Nancy Johnson, RN, MSN, MS, PhD, COHS Director, Clinical Partnerships, Assistant Clinical Professor, Family and Community Medicine
- Ken Knox, MD Administration (COM-P) Vice Dean, Academic & Faculty Affairs, Professor, Internal Medicine and Immunobiology Research Director, Lung Institute
- Juanita Merchant, MD, PhD, Medicine (COM-T) Regents Professor & Chief, Gastroenterology Division, Associate Director for Basic Research, UA Cancer Center
- Amy Mitchell, MD OB/GYN (COM-T) Associate Professor, Vice Chair of Education
- Danielle Sawyer, PhD Medicine (COM-T) MD/PhD Student

The committee reviewed the following inputs to evaluate the four metrics as outlined in the [Five-Year Administrator Review Process](#):

- Dean Abecassis' self-study and an interview with the dean
- 5-Year Administrator's 360 survey to faculty and staff in the College of Medicine-Tucson
- Focus group gatherings and individual meetings with faculty, staff and students.

Strengths and Accomplishments

The committee recognized and commended the dean for his financial management as he balanced the budget with his innovative approaches to budgeting. His strategic planning and capacity to implement creative solutions for long-term financial stability were identified as notable areas of strength. Other areas of strength reported include his success in recruiting outstanding faculty and leaders from leading national medical centers and his ability to proactively retain faculty.

Specific accomplishments were also noted such as:

- Implementing an efficient recruitment process and successfully recruiting several new chairs and professors
- Financially stabilizing COM-T with a positive net operating margin for the past five years while also establishing new incentive plans that led to improved financial outcomes for both the college and Banner University Medicine
- Successfully securing an endowment for the deanship and funds for distinctive programs like the Sarver Heart Center and Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine
- Restructuring the dean's office into a functional administrative unit by implementing an annual rolling 3-year, metric-, target-, and tactic-driven specific plan to ensure alignment between units, faculty and staff
- Initiating new college-wide communication channels such as a weekly newsletter, an annual state of the college address, and annual report to others, highlighting important achievements.

Opportunities for Improvement

The comprehensive review also examined opportunities for improvement in the four areas assessed: trust, collaboration, maximizing resources and achieving results. In terms of trust, Dean Abecassis is a problem solver but, in his efforts to do so, there is a clear perception by faculty and staff that their perspectives and voices are not always heard.

Collaboration is key to any dean's success, and there was concern that ideas and initiatives might be fully formed before other stakeholders who will be implementing those initiatives are engaged in the conversation. Engagement with COM-T leaders has been solid but more interactions with faculty and staff would support the college's forward movement.

Dean Abecassis has been an effective financial steward, but the faculty would like to see more attention to faculty and staff retention and development and maximizing resources in those areas. There is also a need for clarity in sharing information about what resources are available, and the process used to determine how those resources are invested in the college.

The Dean has delivered on many key results, achieving the financial and stabilization goals he had for the college. It was noted, however, that it is important to build consensus, gather sufficient data, and ensure clarity in the 'why' of decisions and the need to support stakeholders in achieving expected results.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will be the focus of Dean Abecassis' actions in the coming year to address the areas of improvement noted in his five-year review:

- Promote and bolster a culture of trust that is grounded in respectful communication and an inclusive approach that values the voices across the college
- Increase visibility and presence on campus
- Use an inclusive approach to leadership that values and incorporates diverse perspectives and strengthens internal and external partnerships
- Establish and communicate clear expectations
- Provide equitable distribution of resources across college faculty and staff
- Follow through on commitments as the college's financial context allows
- Use complete data and multiple perspectives in the decision-making process
- Communicate the strategic direction for the college in collaboration with the community

Dean Abecassis and I met to reflect on what he learned through the evaluation process, the data collected and the recommendations from the comprehensive review committee. He has developed a thoughtful plan to address each of the areas of improvement noted in his review including: strategies to increase and improve his communication and collaboration with staff, faculty and students and our Banner stakeholders; approaches to engage the community in decision-making that maximizes the input of the college community in allocating resources; and, implementation of a vision and goals for the college's future direction that are shared by the entire community.

I will work with Dean Abecassis to support his efforts to address these opportunities for improvement as the college continues to build on the successes of the past 5 years. Both Dean

Abecassis and I would like for the college to continue gaining momentum. We want to make sure that the college can do so while including everyone in the college's positive trajectory.

I look forward to working with the faculty, staff and students to ensure the College of Medicine-Tucson achieves its full potential. Thank you to everyone for your participation and contributions to this important process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia A. Prelock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patricia A. Prelock, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, BCS-CL
Provost and Chief Academic Officer