

October 8, 2026

Public Comment to ARC Academic Senate: AQL Labs

I'm Sarah Lehmann and I'm a faculty librarian.

I learned at District Academic Senate that ARC has received a pitch from a small edtech startup called AQL Labs to join an "AI Accelerator" cohort beginning in November 2026. The deadline to apply is tomorrow, and participating would cost \$30,000. The materials are in the ARC Senate Canvas. The pitch is that this company will help colleges identify two processes that could be improved with AI, and then help the colleges pilot an AI-based solution for those two processes. The company seems to have just two employees, the founders, both of whom are based out of state.

I am not sure how seriously the college is considering this project, but with this timeline, I hope it's a "maybe next year" sort of thing. I have a lot of questions.

First, could we simply begin this work on our own without paying a fee? Our talented faculty and staff are already using AI to solve problems. At a recent department chairs meeting Randy Schuster and Tak Auyeung shared how the SLO committee uses AI to identify program SLOs in need of review. We have great local talent as well as robust governance and planning structures - let's not pay to reinvent the wheel.

Second, what is the value to students vs the investment of money and institutional capacity? Our college and district have a history of purchasing expensive edtech tools and educational reform initiatives, investing lots of time and money into them, and then abandoning them. Civitas, AdAstra, and Achieving the Dream come to mind. We have spent millions of dollars and hundreds of hours of staff time on shiny solutions that didn't pan out. We could have spent those resources on the slow and steady and sometimes painful process of working within our governance structures, trudging through college and district bureaucracy, and incrementally improving our institutional practices so we can better support our students. It is not glamorous but there is no substitute for this hard work.

Third, how much would ARC benefit vs how much would this company benefit, and who will ultimately own the work we produce? How will our data be used? Who will receive a share of the profits from any tools the company develops using our information and ideas? AQL Labs has two divisions: the "Foundry," which is what we'd be participating in, and the "Studio," where they help edtech entrepreneurs develop and test new AI tools. The Studio webpage states that AQL Labs will provide entrepreneurs with, quote, "Vital growth supports including pilots and market testing with a growing network of trusted Foundry colleges and universities." Just to be clear, it sounds like we would be the guinea pigs here, and the goal would be to sell our ideas back to us in the form of ai tools that we helped develop.

The final question is what evidence do we have that this company can deliver what it is promising? The only actual work this company seems to have done is an initial pilot project with

Long Beach City College. I think we all agree we need to grapple with the impact of AI, but let's take a step back from this specific project.