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February 1, 2019

Dr. Carolyn Martin
President
Amherst College
P.O. Box 5000
Amherst, MA 01002-5000

Dear President Martin:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 15, 2018, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Amherst College:

that Amherst College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2023;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the College give emphasis to its success in:

1. engaging in the innovation that characterizes its strategic plan while respecting the traditional and enduring features of the College;
2. achieving its goals to engender a strong sense of belonging among all students;
3. implementing its plans to review processes and standards for untenured tenure-line faculty, address faculty workload issues, and invest in STEM disciplines;
4. implementing the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee with respect to the development of campus-wide learning goals and advising structures in support of the open curriculum;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2028.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Amherst College is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

We commend Amherst College for its comprehensive, well-written self-study that highlights the institution's many strengths and candidly discusses the areas where it seeks to enhance its excellence. Along with the visiting team, we take favorable note of the institution's "strong culture of academic rigor, true desire for inclusiveness, deep commitment to the liberal arts ... and compelling vision for undergraduate education." Amherst College is guided by a strong sense of institutional direction, as manifested in its 2015 strategic plan, and it has invested resources to support the initiatives outlined in the plan, including improvements to its physical plant (noteworthy here is the \$240 million science center), support for faculty scholarship, the "professionalization" of the office of human resources, "generous" financial aid policies, and resources and services to support low-income and first-generation students. We are gratified to learn of the College's commitment to evaluating its academic programs and student learning, as evidenced by the several "focused evaluations" the institution has undertaken during the last decade, including reviews of its open curriculum, students' writing and public speaking skills, students' research abilities and library skills, and its science placement strategies. We commend Amherst College for its efforts to identify initiatives to maintain the strength of its endowment – valued at \$2.3 billion at the time of the visit – and to "more carefully manage endowment spending to assure intergenerational equity." There is no doubt that Amherst College "thrives on introspection, self-evaluation, and striving for excellence" and that, under the "visionary leadership" of its president and a deeply committed Board of Trustees, the dedicated, well-qualified, and engaged faculty and staff of Amherst College are well positioned to ensure the College continues to "lead the way among its peer liberal arts institutions."

Commission policy requires an interim (fifth-year) report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. Its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution's current status in keeping with the Policy on Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all interim reports, the College is asked, in Spring 2023, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Mission and Purposes; Students; Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure; The Academic Program; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and Planning and Evaluation*.

As noted in the report of the visiting team, Amherst College is facing new challenges that have "forced the College to reassess a number of long-standing traditions." We share the team's belief that the institution is "finding creative ways" to balance the retention of traditions that continue to serve the community well with the experimentation necessary to identify new approaches. We look forward, in Spring 2023, to learning of the College's success in this regard, as it strives to implement its strategic plan in ways that reflect "both the institution's traditions and its vision for the future" (1.1).

The self-study and team report both discuss Amherst College's success in diversifying its student body – 44% of Amherst students self-identify as students of color; 14% are first-generation college students; and 58% receive financial aid – and both candidly acknowledge that some students have reported feeling a "lack of community" in campus social life. We are gratified to learn that, during the past few months, a heightened sense of community has begun to take hold on the campus, due, in part, to the leadership of a new chief student affairs officer who is coordinating efforts of the Office of Student Affairs to partner with other divisions of the College to "affirm different communities by aligning services and resources to students' needs." The Spring 2023 interim report will afford Amherst College an opportunity to update the Commission on its continued success with initiatives designed to enhance students' sense of belonging and strengthen the sense of community on campus, as evidence that the institution "assesses the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes" (5.20) and that it "fosters an inclusive atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds" (9.5).

The Commission is gratified to learn of the College's commitment to address issues related to faculty workload and the clarity of tenure standards and expectations. Initiatives in this area include greater compensation and support for department chairs, changes intended to ease the service burden on faculty, a redesigned and expanded new faculty orientation program, the development of common procedures to welcome and mentor untenured faculty, and proposals to revise the Faculty Handbook language about tenure criteria and to adopt a common teaching evaluation form and common procedures to administer teaching evaluations. The self-study and team report also discuss the challenges arising from increased interest on the part of Amherst students in STEM disciplines, including the sufficiency of faculty, elective courses, and research opportunities. We note with favor the institution's intention to address these challenges by investing in these disciplines while maintaining its efforts to "support and enrich" the humanities. We look forward to learning, in Spring 2023, about the College's success in addressing these matters, as evidence that the College "allocates resources on the basis of its academic planning, needs, and objectives (4.7)." Our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* provides this additional guidance:

Faculty assignments are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. They are equitably determined to allow faculty adequate time to provide effective instruction, advise and evaluate students, contribute to program and institutional assessment and improvement, continue professional growth, and participate in scholarship, research, creative activities, and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution. Faculty assignments and workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change (6.7).

In a handbook or in other written documents that are current and readily available, the institution defines the responsibilities of faculty and other members of the instructional team; the criteria for their recruitment, appointment, retention, evaluation, promotion, and, if applicable, tenure; and policies for resolving grievances (6.8).

Finally, the Commission understands that, during the current academic year, Amherst College faculty will consider the "major proposals" developed by the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee to address College-wide learning goals, assessment of student learning, global education, and advising. We appreciate that these proposals have "the potential to have a significant impact" on the College's curriculum, and we look forward to receiving an update about this matter in the Spring 2023 interim report. Relevant here is our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution's principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience (2.7).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2028 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Amherst College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Catherine Epstein, Dean of Faculty and Winkey Professor of History, and Ronald Liebowitz, team chair, during its deliberations.

Dr. Carolyn Martin
February 1, 2019
Page 4

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Andrew J. Nussbaum. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George Tetler

GT/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Andrew J. Nussbaum
Visiting Team



Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions

The following policy governs the release of information regarding the status of affiliated colleges and universities by institutions and by the Commission.

1. Release of Information by Institutions Regarding Their Accreditation Following Commission Action

At the conclusion of the evaluation process institutions are encouraged to make publicly available information about their accreditation status including the findings of team reports and any obligations or requirements established by Commission action, as well as any plans to address stated concerns. Because of the potential to be misleading, institutions are asked not to publish or otherwise disseminate excerpts from these materials.

While the Commission does not ordinarily release copies of self-studies, progress reports, evaluation reports, or other documents related to the accreditation of individual institutions, it believes it to be good practice for institutions to make these materials available, in their entirety, after notification of Commission action.

The Commission will release information on actions of show cause or deferral. If such information is also released by the institution in question or is otherwise made public, the Commission will respond to related inquiries and may issue a revised public statement.

If an institution releases or otherwise disseminates information which misrepresents or distorts its accreditation status, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action publicly correcting any misleading information it may have disseminated, including but not limited to the accreditation status of the institution, the contents of evaluation reports, and the Commission actions with respect to the institution. Should it fail to do so in an immediate and timely way, the Commission, acting through its President, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information. This may include release of notification letters sent by the Commission to the institution, and/or a press release.

2. Published Statement on Accredited Status

The Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing on its website and in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

An institution may wish to include within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (formerly the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.).

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the Commission indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the Commission is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: info@neche.org

The shorter statement that an institution may choose for announcing its accredited status follows:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (formerly the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.).

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: info@neche.org

Accreditation by the New England Commission of Higher Education has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the Commission” or “this degree is accredited by the Commission” are incorrect and should not be used.

3. **Published Statement on Candidate Status**

An institution granted Candidate for Accreditation (Candidacy) status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Commission of Higher Education:

_____ College (University) has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status by the New England Commission of Higher Education (formerly the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.). Candidacy for Accreditation is a status of affiliation with the Commission which indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward accreditation.

Candidacy is not accreditation nor does it assure eventual accreditation.

Inquiries regarding the status of an institution affiliated with the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the college or university. Individuals may also contact:

New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: info@neche.org

4. **Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions by the Commission**

The Commission publishes the following information about member and candidate institutions on its website:

- Name of the institution
- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted
- Accreditation status (member or candidate)
- Address
- Phone and fax numbers
- CEO name and title
- Degree levels awarded
- Dates of initial accreditation (or candidacy), last review and next review
- Locations of off-campus instructional sites
- The basis for Commission action affecting candidacy or accreditation status
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the most recent on-site evaluation and subsequent Commission action on the institution's accredited status
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation
- Submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required by the Commission
- The date and nature of any show-cause for denial of candidacy or accreditation, probation, or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation status
- The extent of, or limitations on, the status of affiliation
- In cases of adverse action (denial or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, placing an institution on probation), the Commission's reasons for that status and, in the case of probation, its plans to monitor the institution. The Commission, in consultation with the institution, will prepare a written statement incorporating the above information. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the statement. The institution will also be offered the opportunity to make its official comment; if the institution does make

an official comment, the comment will be made available by the Commission

- For institutions whose candidacy or accreditation has been withdrawn, the date of, and reasons for, withdrawal.

The Commission recognizes that, to be fully understood, information about the accredited status of institutions must be placed within the context of the policies and procedures of the New England Commission of Higher Education. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

The Commission may also publish on its website a public statement about an action taken regarding a member or candidate institution when further information about the action and the Commission's reasons for taking the action would be helpful to members of the public.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidacy or accreditation, and withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation) are communicated when the decision becomes final (i.e., when the institution does not appeal or when the appeals process is completed and the decision is upheld). The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before the decision is final or the appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

5. Public Disclosure of Institutional Actions

Within 30 days after the action on accreditation status is taken, the Commission will notify the Secretary of Education, New England state higher education officers, appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. The Commission will also make public on its website the basis for these decisions. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or withdraw the candidacy or accreditation of an institution

Place an institution on probation

Approve substantive change (e.g., moving to a higher degree level)

A decision by an accredited or candidate institution to voluntarily withdraw from affiliation with the Commission.

Per federal regulation, within 60 days of a final decision to take an adverse action (probation, denial of candidacy or accreditation, or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation), the Commission will submit a copy of the final decision letter to the Secretary of Education. The Secretary will make the letter public.

November 1998
September 2001
April 2010
September 2011
Editorial Changes, March 2014
April 2015
April 2017
Editorial Changes, September 2018