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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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July 31, 2017

Dr. Anthony S. Caprio
President
Western New England University
1215 Wilbraham Road
Springfield, MA 01119-2684

Dear President Caprio:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 20, 2017, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Western New England University and voted to take the following action:

that the interim report submitted by Western New England University be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2022 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2022 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. continuing progress to diversify its staff;
2. maintaining the financial strength of the institution.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim report submitted by Western New England University was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of November 6, 2012 and October 28, 2014 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Western New England University (WNEU) for its clear and informative report documenting its efforts over the past five years to continue the institution's focus on the whole student, "but in a 21st century context." We are pleased to learn that WNEU has adopted a new model for its University Senate, approved via a University-wide online vote in

May 2014, that includes representation from all five Colleges and Schools. We note with approval that the University Senate and the undergraduate Faculty Council have helped facilitate communication between faculty and the administration through their active committees, a new governance website, and inclusion of the two chairs at the Board's quarterly meetings. We recognize that the Ph.D. program in Engineering is thriving, with support for the program exceeding that originally proposed including the hiring of additional teaching fellows at increased stipends and ensuring "relevant state of the art software" to advance faculty and student research. WNEU's "unwavering" focus on student services is evident from continued small class sizes, additional resources being allocated to the Career Development Office, tripling the space of the Math Center, and the new positions in the Law School to promote student success. The Center for Graduate and Advanced Studies established in 2015-16 to support the graduate student experience and to serve as a "hub" for the development of interdisciplinary educational opportunities is noteworthy, as is the Center for Teaching and Learning created in March 2011 to further the University's core value of excellence in teaching by offering, among other events, monthly professional development workshops for faculty. Since the Spring 2012 comprehensive evaluation, attention has also been given to improving and expanding the institution's facilities with completion of a \$40 million building to house the College of Pharmacy and ongoing renovation of the campus center. With plans to build on its strengths in the STEM disciplines and Computer Science and Information Technology, WNEU will have many accomplishments to celebrate during its centennial year in 2019.

We are gratified to learn from the reflective essay that assessment at Western New England University is well established at the course, program, and institutional levels. We note with favor the annual assessment reports prepared by each department as well as the assessment of student achievement of WNEU's General Education Requirement that is conducted every summer. Use of assessment results for program improvement has led to increases in the percentage of students rated "adequate or better" in the different functional areas to include global cultures (from 40% in 2007 to 62% in 2012), critical thinking (from 62% in 2010 to 80% in 2016), and aesthetics perspectives (from 52% in 2009 to 71% in 2014). We commend WNEU for making retention an "intentional" and "data-driven" process that is the "responsibility of the entire campus community," and acknowledge the study conducted by the Student Success and Retention Committee. Overall, undergraduate first-year, fall-to-fall retention increased from 73.5% in 2011 to 78% in 2016, with a goal set to increase this rate 1% per year through 2019. In addition, student success is demonstrated by the results of the Class of 2016 survey that found an exceptionally high percentage of respondents from each College were either employed or had been offered employment within six months of graduation or were attending graduate school: College of Arts and Sciences (97%), College of Business (98%), and College of Engineering (96%).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2022 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure; and Institutional Resources.*

Demonstrating the University's commitment to creating "an inclusive and welcoming environment," the survey conducted by the Diversity Task Force in 2013 and its subsequent Campus Climate Assessment Report provided a number of recommendations including expansion of campus education and training and development of additional resources for international students. In addition, we understand that a proposal to add a Chief Diversity Officer is under consideration. Notable progress has been made in that student diversity

increased from 15.8% in Fall 2011 to 22.4% in Fall 2016, and in the Law School from 11.5% to 27.4%. In addition, over the past ten years, faculty diversity also increased from 12.4% to 16%, but staff diversity decreased from 11.4% to 10.8%. In light of WNEU's strategic plan that "speaks to increasing the diversity of academic, administrative, and staff leadership positions," we ask that the institution's Spring 2022 self-study give emphasis to the success of its efforts to continue to diversify its staff. Our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* and *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure* provide this guidance:

The institution ensures equal employment opportunity consistent with legal requirements and any other dimensions of its choosing; compatible with its mission and purposes, it addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty and academic staff. Hiring reflects the effectiveness of this process and results in a variety of academic and professional backgrounds, training, and experience (6.5).

The institution adheres to non-discriminatory policies and practices in recruitment, admissions, employment, evaluation, disciplinary action, and advancement. It fosters an inclusive atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds (9.5).

From the interim report, we are assured that Western New England University has "operated in a fiscally sound manner" over the past five years. WNEU has achieved its goal to maintain a competitive tuition by keeping its discount rate below 50%, increasing the number of external grants received including from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, and continuing to diversify its program mix by "capitalizing" on the institution's growing presence in health care fields. We are also aware that the University is launching a capital campaign that will focus on "financial aid, student support, and facilities development" timed to coincide with its Centennial in 2019. As expressed in our standard on *Institutional Resources*, the Spring 2022 self-study will provide an opportunity for the institution to provide an update on its success in maintaining the financial strength of the institution:

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Western New England University and hopes the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

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. Michael A. Serafino. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

Dr. Anthony S. Caprio
July 31, 2017
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,
President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Michael A. Serafino



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 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 Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by 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:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org**

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

_____ College (University) is accredited by 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:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org**

Accreditation by the Commission on Institutions 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 status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Association:

_____ College (University) has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status by 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:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.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 Commission on Institutions 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 candidate status 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 or withdrawal of 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