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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.  
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

November 19, 2012

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Dr. Robert V. Antonucci  
President  
Fitchburg State University  
160 Pearl Street  
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Dear President Antonucci:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 21, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Fitchburg State University:

that Fitchburg State University be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a report for consideration in Spring, 2014 that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:

- 1) implementing and assessing its strategic plan and assuring the effective integration of strategic planning, operational planning, and budgeting;
- 2) developing and implementing a process to assess the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees;

that the University submit a fifth year interim report for consideration in Spring, 2017;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the Spring 2017 report include an update on the two matters specified for attention in the Spring 2014 report;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring, 2022.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Fitchburg State University (FSU) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*. We commend FSU for the participatory process that resulted in a candid, well-written self-study. We note with approval that widespread discussions among the campus community became the basis for the University's mission statement, vision statement,

core values, and the goals and objectives of FSU's strategic plan. We are gratified to learn that the leadership of the president and his team has led to a renewed pride in and excitement about the institution and that a committed and qualified board of trustees and alumni firmly and enthusiastically support the University. We share the judgment of the team that FSU faculty and staff are devoted to students' needs and success and committed to the vision of the institution as a university. The self-study and team report provided evidence of the University's effective oversight of programs offered off-campus and through distance education. We are pleased to learn of the progress FSU has made in the renovation of facilities on campus and congratulate the University on the construction of its first academic building since 1975, a \$57 million science complex, which is due to open in June 2014. With an experienced leadership team, dedicated faculty and staff, and a supportive Board of Trustees, the University is positioned for future success.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Spring, 2014, are related to our Standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Financial Resources*, and *Organization and Governance*.

We concur with the visiting team that FSU has made substantial improvements in its planning and evaluation efforts since the last comprehensive review, as evidenced by a five-year strategic plan in place since 2009 and a systematic review of progress reports that is conducted annually by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Vice President of Financial Affairs. However, we also share the concerns of the visiting team regarding a lack of alignment across planning initiatives, strategic goals, implementation processes, and budgeting and agree that assessment data are not yet used effectively to guide planning and resource allocation. The report prepared in Spring 2014 will provide FSU with an opportunity to demonstrate its progress in assessing its strategic plan on a regular, systematic basis and aligning its planning and budgeting processes. Our Standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Financial Resources* are relevant here:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts. (2.1)

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analysis of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities. (2.3)

The institution establishes and implements its budget after appropriate consultation with relevant constituencies in accord with realistic overall planning that provides for the appropriate integration of academic, student service, fiscal, development, information and technology and physical resource priorities to advance its educational objectives. (9.8)

The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes... (9.9)

The Commission appreciates the University's candid acknowledgment that it has not recently assessed the effectiveness of its governing board. We are pleased to learn that an assessment process will be presented to the Board this fall and we anticipate being apprized, through the Spring 2014 report, of the University's success in assuring that "[t]he board systematically

develops and ensures its own effectiveness” and “enhances its effectiveness through periodic evaluation” (3.4).

Commission policy requires a fifth year interim 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 fifth-year reports the University is asked, in Spring, 2017, to report on its continued progress on the two matters addressed in the Spring, 2014 report. The Commission recognizes that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the institution’s sustained attention over time; hence, we ask for an update in the report submitted for consideration in Spring 2017.

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.

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 Fitchburg State University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Dr. Robin Bowen, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Paul Weizer, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Dr. Nancy E. Carriuolo, team chair, during its deliberations.

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 Ms. Carol Vittorioso. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission’s action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Pattenaude

RLP/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Carol Vittorioso  
Visiting Team