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December 11, 2002

Mr. Michael T. Rivard
Interim President
Fitchburg State College
160 Pearl Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Dear President Rivard:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on November 7, 2002, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Fitchburg State College:

that Fitchburg State College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report in Spring, 2005 describing its progress in:

1. engaging in institutional planning that is systematic, broad-based, and participatory;
2. re-establishing a governance system that supports the accomplishment of the institution's mission and purposes;
3. operationalizing the Leadership College component of the institution's mission; and
4. developing the systematic means to evaluate evidence of student learning;

that the College submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Spring, 2007;

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

1. engaging in institutional planning that is systematic, broad-based, and participatory;
2. the continued development of a governance system that supports the accomplishment of the institution's mission and purpose;

3. continued development of the Leadership College emphasis;
4. using the results of assessment of student learning for improvement; and
5. systematically strengthening the system of academic advising for students;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring, 2012.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Fitchburg State College is continued in accreditation because it substantially meets the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*. The Commission commends the institution on the thorough and candid self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation. We concur with the observation of the team that the self-study and visit give much evidence of the dedication that faculty and staff bring to the students and to their work at Fitchburg State College. The College is also commended for the dedication of student services to ensuring student success at the institution, and the prudent fiscal management that has allowed the institution to develop significant reserves for unforeseen revenue and expenditure fluxuations.

The items to be addressed in the Spring, 2005 report are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, and Mission and Purposes*.

We concur with the observation of the visiting team that "there is little evidence that planning is connected to the revised mission and the stated educational objectives of the College," and that planning is not systematic or broad-based and "seems to happen in a disjointed, reactive fashion." The campus is currently in the process of designing a new planning process. Through the report in 2005, the Commission looks forward to learning of the institution's progress in re-establishing useful planning processes, consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, broad-based, interrelated, and appropriate to the institution's circumstances. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.2).

The institution undertakes both short- and long-term planning, including candid and realistic analysis of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It 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. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.3).

Difficulties in planning were no doubt exacerbated by what the team refers to as the "emotionally charged relationships" with the Board of Higher Education, and the problems in communication between faculty and administration, as indicated by the no confidence vote in the quondam president. We concur with the team's observation that at the time of the visit, "Large issues facing the College are not addressed in public, multi-constituency forums, and communication among members of key constituency on matters of institution-wide concern is deficient." Recently, the relationships with the Board of Higher Education are said to have improved, and the interim president has taken several steps to improve formal and informal communication on campus, laying the groundwork for more effective institutional governance. Through the report in 2005, consistent with our standard on *Organization and Governance*, the Commission wishes to be apprised of the institution's progress in assuring a "system of governance that facilitates the

successful accomplishment of its mission and purposes" (3.1) and that "involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them" (3.2).

Through a process by which the Board of Higher Education asked each of the state colleges to articulate a unique mission, Fitchburg State College has been designated as the Leadership College. Because of what the team calls the "accelerated timetable" in asking institutions to articulate their unique mission and because the faculty withdrew themselves from participation in campus governance during a protracted and difficult negotiation of the system-wide faculty contract, the team notes that "broad acceptance of the expanded mission has yet to be realized." We agree, and find that with indications that the College has entered a period more conducive to thoughtful engagement among key constituencies, it is now in a good position to identify and create useful ways to operationalize the expanded mission. This is consistent with our standard on *Mission and Purposes*, which includes:

The mission and purposes of the institution are accepted and widely understood by its trustees, faculty, and administration. They provide direction to the curricula and other activities. Specific objectives, reflective of the institution's overall mission and purposes, are developed for the institution's individual units (1.3).

Fitchburg State College has not yet begun to look systematically at student learning. While the team reports some activity in the area of professional programs, we concur with its overall observations that few programs have established clear outcomes and objectives, and that when assessment does occur, it is not always clear that the results are used for improvement. The College has recognized the need for more systematic efforts, and is hiring a new staff member, to report directly to the President and to be in charge of the institution's continuing program to assess its own effectiveness, including the assessment of student learning. The report in 2005 will provide the Commission with evidence of the institution's progress in addressing our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, specifically:

The institution evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its evaluative procedures are appropriate and effective for addressing its unique circumstances. To the extent possible, evaluation enables the institution to demonstrate through verifiable means its attainment of purposes and objectives both inside and outside the classroom (2.4).

The institution systematically applies information obtained through its evaluation activities to inform institutional planning, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness especially as it relates to student achievement (2.5).

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. The items for special focus are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Organization and Governance*, *Mission and Purposes*, and *Programs and Instruction*.

The material requested for the interim evaluation regarding the systematic and participatory planning, a re-established governance system, operationalizing the Leadership College aspect of the College's mission statement, and more systematically considering evidence of student learning are in recognition that these areas are central to the long-term well-being of the institution and that they will require the continuing attention of Fitchburg State over a period of several years. By including them in the interim evaluation as well as the report due in 2005, the Commission seeks to learn of the institution's continuing progress and increasing successes with these key issues. As explicated above, these areas are related to our standards on *Planning and*

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Evaluation, Organization and Governance, Mission and Purposes, and Programs and Instruction.

Finally, we concur with the identified need to improve academic advising for students and are pleased to note that the institution has begun to make progress in this area. Through better-designated opportunities in the academic calendar, better information available in print and electronically, and the key designation of faculty responsibility for advising, the institution is making investments in this aspect of ensuring student success. At the time of the interim report, we look forward to learning of the institution's increased success with academic advising for students, as reflected in our standard on *Programs and Instruction*:

The institution has in place an effective system of academic advising which meets student needs for information and advice and is compatible with its educational objectives. Faculty and other personnel responsible for academic advising are adequately informed and prepared to discharge their advising functions (4.32).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring, 2012 is consistent with the Commission's policy of requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation every ten years.

You will note 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.

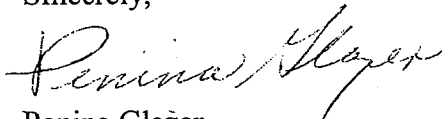
The Commission expressed its appreciation for the self-study prepared by the College and for the evaluation report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you as well as team chairperson, Dr. Stanley Yarosewick.

You are encouraged to share this letter and the team's complete report with all of the College'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. George L. Alcock. 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 in 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 Charles M. Cook, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Penina Glazer

PG/slo
Enclosure

cc: Mr. George L. Alcock
Visiting Team