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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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July 28, 2017

Dr. Susan Herbst
President
University of Connecticut
352 Mansfield Road, Unit 2048
Storrs, CT 06269-2048

Dear President Herbst:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 20, 2017, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Connecticut:

- that University of Connecticut be continued in accreditation;
that the University submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall 2021;
that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University give emphasis to its success in:
1. ensuring its assessment of student learning is comprehensive and includes evidence the University uses the results for program improvement, with attention to the achievement of the institution's various student cohorts;
2. implementing its long-term financial plan that incorporates its goals for enrollment and the potential of decreased state support;
3. accomplishing the University's objective to diversify its faculty;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2026.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

University of Connecticut is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation.

Along with the visiting team, we commend the University of Connecticut (UConn) for the work it has accomplished over the past decade to improve its

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teaching, research, and service that has successfully raised the profile of the institution – nationally and internationally – and its capacity to “solve critical societal problems.” Acknowledging that UConn is a complex institution, we are pleased to learn that shared governance is “alive and well” at the University as demonstrated by the inclusive planning and problem-solving processes in place, including the University Senate, that are designed to encourage the engagement of faculty and staff from across the institution including its regional campuses. The University’s comprehensive and integrated strategic plan that has as its core the 2014 Academic Vision and Plan provides evidence that the institution embraces metrics and performance measures and, as reported by the visiting team, the University has established a record of “not only meeting most goals, but of exceeding them.” We also note with favor UConn’s strong academic programs and commitment to student success – with a student-faculty teaching ratio of 16:1 in 2015 – confirmed by retention rates exceeding 90% and a mean time to graduation of 4.2 years. Through learning communities and programs such as the McNair Scholars and IDEA Grants, the University encourages undergraduate research and service learning, and the engagement of UConn Health in mentoring undergraduate honors students is commendable. In addition, we share the judgment of the visiting team that the University has assembled a “stellar” faculty and made progress to “strengthen the research enterprise of the University.” Through its professional schools and research centers and institutes, furthered by the sharing of graduate students for research across campuses, UConn fulfills its leadership role as the state’s flagship, public research university in critical demand areas to include STEM research, education, and workforce preparation. The University’s Board, president, staff, and faculty are to be congratulated for building an effective partnership that has always “placed the good of the institution first and foremost,” and that will enable the institution to achieve its shared vision of quality and excellence in the years ahead.

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 University is asked, in Fall 2021, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*; *Educational Effectiveness*; *Institutional Resources*; and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

We note with favor that UConn has made “substantive” progress since its last comprehensive evaluation to develop a systemic approach to the assessment of student learning by expanding its Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE), completing a university-wide assessment plan, implementing a new program review process, and investing in Husky Data to create an online data warehouse and business analytics function. Yet, as observed by the visiting team, some “unevenness” in the approach to assessment across units was still apparent. We therefore agree that opportunities exist for UConn to take advantage of OIRE’s increased capacity to enhance the institution’s collection and analysis of data on student success, as well as measures of the effectiveness of its academic support programs and services. Of note is the potential for increased analysis of the retention and graduation rates of UConn’s underrepresented students to determine whether the initiatives implemented to reduce achievement gaps are working. In keeping with our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Educational Effectiveness*, we ask that the Fall 2021 interim report give emphasis to the institution’s success in ensuring its assessment of student learning is comprehensive and includes evidence of UConn’s use of the results for program improvement, with attention to the achievement of its various student cohorts.

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. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement (2.7).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation (2.8).

The institution provides clear public statements about what students are expected to gain from their education, academically and, as appropriate to the institution's mission, along other dimensions (e.g., civic engagement, religious formation, global awareness). Goals for students' education reflect the institution's mission, the level and range of degrees and certificates offered, and the general expectations of the larger academic community (8.2).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level (8.3).

We are aware that since FY2010, the University of Connecticut has faced budget rescissions totaling some \$86.9 million and that additional decreases in state funding remain a significant concern. To compensate, the University has to date been successful in managing its resources through unit budget reductions, operational efficiencies, and tuition increases so that its academic programs and student services were not affected. In response to its uncertain economic environment, UConn has also developed a long-term financial plan that will "enable the University to make prudent investments in faculty, capital projects, and student services," and that this plan "allows flexibility to respond to changes in state support or other fiscal impacts." To achieve these goals, we note that modest tuition increases are planned for FY2017 through FY2020 and that the institution will continue to pursue external funding through grants and philanthropy, setting an increased fundraising goal of \$100 million per year. Through the Fall 2021 interim report, we look forward to receiving an update on the University's implementation of its financial plan, as evidence that "[t]he 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).

We concur with the visiting team that UConn has made notable efforts to address diversity and inclusive excellence on campus. However, as recognized by the institution, while student diversity has increased over the past five years, the overall diversity of the University's faculty has "not progressed." We therefore appreciate that the recruitment of a more diverse faculty is "on the agenda," and are pleased to learn that the recently hired Chief Diversity Officer is developing an "ambitious" outreach plan that includes initiatives to help recruit and retain faculty from diverse backgrounds. We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2021 interim report, of the University's progress to accomplish its goal to increase the diversity of its faculty. Our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* provides 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 scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2026 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 University of Connecticut and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Jeremy Teitelbaum, Interim Provost and Executive Vice President, Sally Reis, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, and Linda Wells, team representative, 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 Mr. Lawrence McHugh. 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,



David P. Angel

DPA/sjp

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Lawrence McHugh
Visiting team



COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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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:

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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