



December 15, 2021

Andrew Agwunobi
Interim President
University of Connecticut
352 Mansfield Road, Unit 2048
Storrs, CT 06269-2048

Dear President Agwunobi:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 18, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Connecticut and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Connecticut (UConn) be accepted;

that the University submit a report by February 1, 2022 for consideration in Spring 2022 that addresses the areas of emphasis requested by the Commission in its letter dated June 23, 2020, namely providing an update on UConn Law's partnership with Hallym University of Graduate Studies with particular emphasis on the School's success in:

- 1) determining the status of the certificate program originally intended to be offered through the partnership;
- 2) achieving its enrollment and financial goals for the partnership;
- 3) assessing the success of LLM graduates and using the results for improvement;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2026 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2026 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) continuing to achieve its goals for faculty diversity;
- 2) implementing its assessment plans including learning outcomes assessment, student services evaluation, and assessment of diversity, equity, and inclusion in student success measures;

3) completing its strategic plan, particularly identifying strategic goals and initiatives.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Connecticut was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of July 28, 2017 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends University of Connecticut for its thoughtful interim report. We appreciate that “strong commitments of state funding” and “modest raises in tuition” resulted in a stable budget, in line with projections. Enrollment has also remained stable; Fall 2021 total FTE enrollment of 29,602 represents a slight increase from 28,738 in Fall 2017. The Commission also notes positively the steps taken to develop an “institutional framework for building a more diverse faculty;” the University created a Chief Diversity Officer, and leadership has completed racial awareness training. We are gratified to learn that UConn’s management and governance “have worked effectively to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and to deliver outcomes...that remain focused on [its] mission.” The University provides a range of programs to support students including the Life Transformative Education initiative (LTE), Academic Achievement Center, Success 360!, the Vergnano Institute for Inclusion, and Experiential Global Learning. Lastly, the Commission is pleased to acknowledge that, in line with the University of Connecticut’s mission as the “flagship, public, Land-, Sea-, and Space-grant university” in the state, University leadership articulated three institutional priorities which guide its strategic planning and tactical decision-making related to increasing faculty scholarship, providing life-transformative education, and becoming a more powerful engine for the state of Connecticut.

The University of Connecticut has also made considerable progress in its efforts to assess and understand the student learning experience. The Commission notes with favor that, with a first-year undergraduate retention rate of 93% and a six-year graduation rate of 85% at its Storrs campus, UConn is “one of the best in the nation compared to other public R1 institutions.” We further appreciate the University’s efforts to disaggregate that data by race and ethnicity, as well as by regional campus, and note positively that “continuing to narrow and ultimately eliminate these gaps is an institutional focus of overall R&G efforts.” The Commission is gratified to learn that 88.7% of undergraduate students who participated in the Student Experience in the Research University survey agreed that their program requirements were “well-defined.” Lastly, the Commission understands that in Fall 2021, the Provost will charge a University Student Learning Assessment Committee, comprised of faculty, staff, and students, to support program assessment that is “used for the improvement of student learning.”

The interim report submitted by University of Connecticut did not address the areas of emphasis requested by the Commission in its letter dated June 23, 2020. The institution is, therefore, asked to submit a report by February 1, 2022 for consideration in Spring 2022 that updates the Commission on its success in implementing the areas specified in that letter as noted above.

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. 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; The Academic Program; Students;*

Educational Effectiveness; and Planning and Evaluation.

As noted above, the Commission appreciates University of Connecticut's efforts to develop a framework for building a more diverse faculty. We appreciate UConn's candid acknowledgment that the modest increases in diversity achieved to date "are not the full measure of [its] efforts" and note with approval that the University is working to put in place "the systems and processes that encourage greater success and inclusion." We look forward to learning, in the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2026 comprehensive evaluation, of UConn's success in achieving "its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its faculty" (6.5).

The Commission concurs with University of Connecticut's assessment that, while it has made progress in understanding the student learning experience, as noted above, "some form of regular reporting and accountability is needed to ensure that academic units engage in assessment of learning outcomes, and then that they actively address findings from this for the purpose of continuous improvement." We note that the UConn Assessment Committee created a five-year implementation plan for this work. The Commission appreciates that assessment of the Life Transformative Education initiative is just beginning, and the assessment and evaluation of other student success initiatives and measures is ongoing. We are gratified to learn that the institution is "committed to building a strong culture of assessment throughout the university." The Fall 2026 self-study will provide an opportunity for University of Connecticut to update the Commission on its success in these matters, as guided by our standards on *The Academic Program, Students, and Educational Effectiveness*:

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.6).

Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve an equitable educational experience for all of its students and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these efforts and services and improve their achievement (5.20).

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. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

The University of Connecticut launched its most recent strategic planning process in AY2021 with a series of "'visioning day' events to collect stakeholder input." The Commission understands that UConn is currently creating a framework for the plan, and

anticipates that, by Spring 2022, strategic goals and initiatives will be developed. In keeping with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2026 comprehensive evaluation will afford the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in “implementing the results of its planning” (2.5):

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution 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 (2.4).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by University of Connecticut and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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 Daniel Toscano. 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.

If you have any questions about the Commission’s action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "George Tetler".

George W. Tetler

GWT/sjp

cc: Daniel Toscano

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions