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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

July 17, 1996

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Dr. Elizabeth Coleman
President
Bennington College
Bennington, VT 05201

Dear Liz:

I have your letter of June 27, 1996 forwarding to me 30 copies of Bob Edwards' report on his team's visit to Bennington this spring. I agree with you that the report is a model. Given your concerns regarding the last visit, I am most pleased to have your reaction to this most recent evaluation.

You asked that the report be slightly modified to preclude the possibility of a misleading impression. As you can appreciate, I am not at liberty to modify the team's report. However, through a separate communication, I will be seeking your written response to the report -- possibly that is what Bob was referring to when he suggested you take up the matter in a communication with me -- which affords you the to apprise the Commission of anything you wish regarding the report. Once received, this response becomes part of the documentation for the evaluation, an addendum, if you will, to the report.

Please call if you would like to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ch M', is written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Charles M. Cook

CMC/scf

June 27, 1996

Dr. Charles Cook
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
209 Burlington Road
Bedford, MA 01730-1433

Dear Charles:

Enclosed are 30 copies of the report from the visiting team to Bennington College.

I can best sum up my response to the report by quoting from a letter I sent to Robert Edwards, Chair of the Visiting Team: "All of us here consider the report a model of fairness and of understanding, rare in my experience under any circumstances, virtually unheard of in so complex a situation." All recommended changes of matters of fact were incorporated into the final draft version of the Report. From start to finish this portion of the process has been, from our point of view, exemplary in its integrity.

There was one passage on page 10 paragraph 3, section 3 where the language creates a seriously misleading impression. The problem is that since the passage reports the impressions of others, it is not strictly speaking a matter of fact. I discussed this with President Edwards. He appreciated totally my concerns, but we agreed that since it is not a matter of fact, it would be best taken up in this letter. As presented in the report, the impression is that the exclusive extracurricular activity of students prior to the changes initiated in June 1994 was substance abuse. While it is true that substance abuse was an issue of genuine concern and that it is being addressed more effectively since the changes, the passage as worded is a caricature and a particularly unfortunate one. Since it constitutes a misrepresentation of the vast majority of

Dr. Charles Cook
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entire generations of students, I am compelled to ask if the language might be altered somewhat to reflect more accurately the situation. I think the following minimal changes would help a great deal: replace "dependency on alcohol and other drugs" with "recreational use of alcohol and drugs." Last sentence of paragraph would read: "The question then rises: how does the quality of student life now compare to the previous environment?" instead of "how do Bennington students now spend their time?"

I look forward to the opportunity of meeting with the Commission in September.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Coleman
President

EC/cm