



Founded in 1885

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

PATRICIA MAGUIRE MESERVEY, Chair (2017)
Salem State University

DAVID P. ANGEL, Vice Chair (2015)
Clark University

HAROLD O. LEVY (2014)
Trustee Member

G. TIMOTHY BOWMAN (2015)
Harvard University

DAVID E. A. CARSON (2015)
Hartford, CT

THOMAS L. G. DWYER (2015)
Johnson & Wales University

JOHN F. GABRANSKI (2015)
Haydenville, MA

WILLIAM F. KENNEDY (2015)
Trustee Member

KAREN L. MUNCASTER (2015)
Brandeis University

CHRISTINE ORTIZ (2015)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

JON S. OXMAN (2015)
Auburn, ME

JACQUELINE D. PETERSON (2015)
College of the Holy Cross

ROBERT L. PURA (2015)
Greenfield Community College

REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. (2015)
Providence College

JEAN A. WYLD (2015)
Springfield College

TIMOTHY J. DONOVAN (2016)
Vermont State Colleges

JEFFERY R. GODLEY (2016)
Groton, CT

LILY S. HSU (2016)
MCPHS University

JAY V. KAHN (2016)
Keene State College

WILFREDO NIEVES (2016)
Capital Community College

LINDA S. WELLS (2016)
Boston University

KASSANDRA S. ARDINGER (2017)
Concord, NH

THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2017)
Thomas College

MARY ELLEN JUKOSKI (2017)
Three Rivers Community College

PETER J. LANGER (2017)
University of Massachusetts Boston

DAVID L. LEVINSON (2017)
Norwalk Community College

LYNN C. PASQUERELLA (2017)
Mount Holyoke College

President of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
bbrittingham@neasc.org

Senior Vice President of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
pobrien@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
CAROL L. ANDERSON
canderson@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
PAULA A. HARBECKE
pharbecke@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
TALA KHUDAIRI
tkhudairi@neasc.org

December 2, 2014

Dr. Mariko Silver
President
Bennington College
One College Drive
Bennington, VT 05201

Dear President Silver:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 19, 2014, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim report submitted by Bennington College and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Bennington College be accepted;

that Bennington College submit a report for consideration in Fall 2016 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. achieving its goals for enrollment and financial stability;
2. continuing to implement a comprehensive approach to assessment of institutional effectiveness with an emphasis on student learning outcomes;
3. undertaking the next iteration of strategic planning aligned with its revised mission;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2019 be confirmed.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Bennington College was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of October 26, 2011 and March 25, 2013, addressed each of the eleven standards, and included a reflective essay on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Bennington College for a comprehensive and candid report. We note with favor that over the past five years, the College has significantly reduced its deferred maintenance from \$39 million to \$10 million after renovating studios, classrooms, and underground heating systems.

We note with approval that Bennington College has addressed difficult student discipline cases by appointing a Director of Community Standards to work with the Judicial Committee comprised of students, faculty, and staff to develop procedures for communicating and enforcing community standards and promoting conflict resolution. We are gratified that Bennington plans to address its financial challenges through reduced spending as well as a capital campaign that has begun with \$6 million in new pledges received in July 2014.

We appreciate Bennington College's thoughtful and well-written reflective essay that addresses the College's historical roots of the 1929 Educational Plan of a "thoroughgoing experiment in higher education among modern lines," as well as the implementation of its current Plan. We note that the College's alumni surveys indicate 97% of graduates overall are engaged in the arts, and that 85% of new graduates are employed one year after graduation.

The three items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2016 are related to our standards on *Students*, *Financial Resources*, *The Academic Program*, and *Planning and Evaluation*.

The Commission notes with favor that Bennington is nearing its goal for first-to-second-year retention of 83% (currently ranging from 76% to 91% over the past three years). The College expects that its six-year graduation rate will be 70% this year. We are gratified to learn that Bennington College has launched initiatives to increase enrollment and net tuition revenue and has appointed a new vice president for admissions and financial aid and a new vice president for finance and administration. We understand that the College anticipates it will reduce its operating loss from \$9.1 million in FY2014 to \$5.4 million in FY2015. We ask that the Fall 2016 report give emphasis to the institution's success in achieving its goals for enrollment and financial stability, as informed by our standards on *Students* and *Financial Resources*:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve and addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students (6.1).

The 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 (9.3).

We are pleased to learn that the College is strengthening its approach to assessment by expanding its institutional research team with a director of academic planning and a director of enrollment research, using a new information management system, and discussing assessment initiatives with students, faculty and staff. We appreciate the College's candid acknowledgement that it lacks an effective assessment of the learning outcomes from a Bennington education, and we are heartened to learn that the institution is in the preliminary stages of developing a comprehensive student assessment system under the leadership of the academic policy committee and key staff in the Dean's office. We recognize that the Bennington Plan of customized learning may create unique challenges for assessment, but we understand that the institution is committed to developing an assessment approach that works well with its open curriculum. The Fall 2016 report will afford the institution an opportunity to document its success in implementing a comprehensive approach to assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness, as specified in our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program*:

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded (4.48).

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

The Commission notes with favor the report's thoughtful linking of Bennington's 1929 Educational Plan with its current Plan, and we understand that the institution will create a new mission statement that incorporates the "Benningtonness" of the institution. We are pleased to learn that the new President has engaged the community and is ready, with senior leadership, to develop a new strategic plan in line with this revised mission statement. We anticipate being apprised in the report prepared for Fall 2016 of the College's success in undertaking the "next iteration of [its] strategic plan," in keeping with our standards on *Mission and Purposes* and *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution periodically re-evaluates the content and pertinence of its mission and purposes, assessing their usefulness in providing overall direction in planning and resource allocation. The results of this evaluation are used to enhance institutional effectiveness (1.5).

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses 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 has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.4).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2019 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Bennington College and hopes that its preparation 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.

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. Alan Kornberg. 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.

Dr. Mariko Silver
December 2, 2014
Page 4

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Patricia Maguire Meservey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Patricia Maguire Meservey

PMM/jm

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Alan Kornberg



NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

3 Burlington Woods, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
Voice: (781) 425 7785 Fax: (781) 425 1001 Web: <http://cihe.neasc.org>

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 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.

While the Commission does not initiate public release of information on actions of show cause or deferral, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

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, the New England Association, acting through its Chief Executive Officer, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information.

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 New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the New England Association 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 New England Association 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 New England Association 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 New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc., through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association 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**

Accreditation by the New England Association has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the New England Association” or “this degree is accredited by the New England Association” 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 New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. 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 New England Association 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**

Upon inquiry, the Commission will release the following information about affiliated institutions:

- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted;
- 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 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 recommending 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 does not provide information about deferments of action on candidate or accreditation status, or show-cause orders. However, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, revocation of candidacy, and withdrawal of accreditation) are communicated after the available appeals process is completed. The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before an appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

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 and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

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. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or withdraw the 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.

November 1998

September 2001

April 2010

September 2011

Editorial Changes, March 2014