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

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April 29, 2005

Dr. Robert V. Antonucci  
President  
Fitchburg State College  
160 Pearl Street  
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Dear President Antonucci:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on March 4, 2005, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Fitchburg State College:

that the report submitted by Fitchburg State College be accepted;

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 continued success in the areas of special emphasis as indicated in the Commission letter of December 11, 2002;

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

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

The Commission commends the President and members of the Fitchburg State College community for their comprehensive and impressive response to the Commission's request for a progress report as follow-up to the Spring 2002 comprehensive evaluation.

With respect to institutional planning that is systematic, broad based and participatory, former President Riccards appointed a Director of Planning and created a new planning office to serve as a resource and facilitate broad-based discussions across the College community. Following Dr. Riccards' resignation, interim Chief Executive Officer Michael Rivard worked with campus units to develop a comprehensive and collaborative process designed to address institutional planning, and

propose the creation of the Planning Council – a college-wide planning advisory group. The Planning Council was convened in 2003 by the new president, Dr. Robert Antonucci, to include five task forces – academic quality; campus resources; enrollment management; quality of student life; and technology. The Planning Council produced a draft document entitled ‘2004 – 2009 Strategic Plan’ which is currently being reviewed by the All-College Committee while open forums with the College community continue. The Plan, which will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for their approval, includes a vision statement, planning priorities, strategies and tactics to improve each of the five focus areas, a planning implementation guide assigning responsibilities and time frames to a senior administrator, progress measures, and linkages to the budget.

Regarding the governance system, the All-College Committee continues as the institution’s main governance body, and includes faculty, administration, staff, and student representatives. President Antonucci has reorganized administrative offices reducing the number of vice presidents to two, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Vice President for Finance, Administration, and Development; and has created four new dean positions (Curriculum and Instruction, Education, Student and Academic Life, and Enrollment Management). Further, Dr. Antonucci has organized a number of vehicles to enable broader based participation and communication which include: a Leadership Council that meets at least once a semester; ‘town meetings’ convening throughout the year, regular meetings with the student government, and academic department chair opportunities to present updates at Board of Trustees meetings and to meet with the Trustees over dinner twice a year.

With respect to operationalizing the Leadership College component of the institution’s mission, in the fall of 1997, the honors program curriculum was rewritten and identified as the “Leadership Academy” with the goal of educating leaders for the 21st century. Students selected for the Academy use a distinctive core curriculum in lieu of the Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) Program (Fitchburg State College’s general education program). The Academy provides internships, an annual Honors Convocation, a Leadership Conference, and a co-curriculum transcript. In addition, a proposal has been submitted for the Academy to expand the size of the Leadership Academy, accentuate leadership emphases through revisions of departmental mission statements and course audits, delineate more clearly the relationship to the LAS Program; and expand the Leadership Conference.

Regarding developing systematic means to evaluate evidence of student learning, Fitchburg State College policy now states that there be “successful completion of an appropriate discipline-based evaluation chosen by each academic department and approved by the Vice President for Academic Affairs.” Every program indicates that they have an assessment plan centered around differing methods such as portfolio assessment, national board examinations, and grading rubrics. However, almost half the programs indicate their plan development is still in progress. The Commission looks forward to learning about continued success in developing assessment throughout the College as part of the Spring 2007 interim report.

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 material requested for the interim report regarding the systematic and participatory planning, continued development of a governance system, continued development of the Leadership College, using the results of assessment of student learning for improvement, and systematically strengthening the system of academic advising 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, the

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Commission seeks to learn of the institution's continuing progress and increasing successes with these key issues. As explicated in the Commission letter of December 11, 2002, these areas are related to our standards on *Mission and Purposes, Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, and Programs and Instruction.*

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

You are encouraged to share this letter 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 report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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

Sincerely,



Terrence J. MacTaggart

TJM/scf

Enclosure

cc: Mr. George L. Alcock