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

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April 8, 2014

Dr. Mary K. Grant
President
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
375 Church Street
North Adams, MA 01247-4100

Dear President Grant:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 6, 2014, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts:

that Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall 2018;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the College give emphasis to its success in:

1. developing and implementing a multi-year financial plan, supported by a comprehensive and realistic enrollment management plan;
2. assuring appropriate technological resources and library and information resources to support the College's academic programs and integrating information literacy instruction throughout the curriculum;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2023.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission concurs with the visiting team that the driving force behind MCLA's success over the past decade is the shared sense of the College's clear and strong mission as a public liberal arts college. We note with favor

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PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

that, consistent with its public mission, MCLA – through the efforts of its trustees, faculty, staff, students, and alumni – is a major contributor to the civic and economic well being of the Berkshire region as demonstrated by its “very large number of enthusiastic community partners.” Through its work with the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the College now “has a voice” in higher education issues at the national level. We are pleased to learn of MCLA’s participatory and data-driven planning process that guides decision-making and of the annual planning retreats held to update the community on the institution’s progress. Completion of the College’s first academic building in 40 years, the Feigenbaum Center for Science and Innovation, is a notable accomplishment. We recognize the robust culture of assessment the College has developed and note with approval the engagement of faculty in the implementation of the ePortfolio initiative to document students’ academic and co-curricular learning. In addition, we are aware of the College’s “tremendous strides in advancement,” with the launch of its first capital campaign in 2012, and of its tireless efforts to advocate for increased public funding. Overall, we share the visiting team’s judgment that MCLA’s many “notable, transformative” achievements over the past ten years are reason for the College to celebrate. MCLA is well positioned to continue its development as an exemplary public liberal arts college focused, above all, on the success of its students.

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. In addition to the information included in all fifth-year reports, the College is asked, in Fall 2018, to report on two matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Students, Financial Resources, The Academic Program, Library and Other Information Resources, and Physical and Technological Resources*.

As reported by the visiting team and acknowledged by the College, regular multi-year financial planning is still a work in progress. We therefore are pleased to learn of MCLA’s plans to use its existing two-year planning budgets as a foundation for building longer-term models. To ensure the financial plan is based on realistic enrollment goals, the Board of Trustees has re-established its committee on enrollment management, and the departments of academic affairs, administration and finance, and student affairs are committed to working together to “develop appropriate enrollment targets.” We welcome further information, in the Fall 2018 report, on the success of these and other initiatives to integrate long-term financial and enrollment management planning into the College’s strategic planning process. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Students, and Financial Resources* provide this guidance:

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).

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. The governing board reviews and approves the institution’s financial plans based on multi-year analysis and financial forecasting (9.3)

We are pleased to learn that a “thoughtful and appropriate” strategic plan for the library has been developed that provides a vision of a learning commons designed to meet the changing needs of MCLA’s students and faculty. We understand that the College has established an endowment fund to assist in accomplishing the plan’s goals, but at the same time recognize that funding provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for library support has been significantly reduced. We are aware that the institution’s campus master plan is being updated and that it will include an evaluation of the library building and its deferred maintenance needs, and that the College also has plans to expand the new network infrastructure installed in the Feigenbaum Center campus wide. In addition, we note with approval that the Academic Technology Advisory Group has been given responsibility to review the “breath and depth” of information literacy in the curriculum and that a college-wide group will be convened in Spring 2014 to recommend next steps for strengthening information literacy across the curriculum with a report due by the end of the summer. We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2018 report, that the College makes available appropriate technological resources and library and information resources to support its academic programs, and that information literacy instruction is integrated throughout the curriculum. Our standards on *The Academic Program, Library and Other Information Resources*, and *Physical and Technological Resources* are relevant here:

The institution ensures that students use information resources and information technology as an integral part of their education. The institution provides appropriate orientation and training for use of these resources, as well as instruction and support in information literacy and information technology appropriate to the degree level and field of study (4.7).

The institution articulates a clear vision of the level and breadth of information resources and services and of instructional and information technology appropriate to support its academic mission and its administrative functions. Through strategic, operational, and financial planning, it works to achieve that vision (7.1).

Institutional planning and resource allocation support the development of library, information resources and technology appropriate to the institution’s mission and academic program. The institution provides sufficient and consistent financial support for the library and the effective maintenance and improvement of the institution’s information resources and instructional and information technology (7.2).

The institution ensures that throughout their program of study students acquire increasingly sophisticated skills in evaluating the quality of information sources appropriate to their field of study and the level of the degree program (7.10).

The institution’s physical and technological resources, including classrooms, laboratories, network infrastructure, materials, equipment, and buildings and grounds, whether owned or rented, are commensurate with institutional purposes (8.1).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2023 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 Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Theodora Kalikow, team chair, during its deliberations.

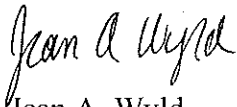
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You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Tyler Fairbank. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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,



Jean A. Wyld

JAW/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Tyler Fairbank
Visiting Team



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

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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 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
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(781) 425 7785
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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