



Received

DEC 26 2018

President's Office

December 20, 2018

Dr. James F. Birge
President
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
375 Church Street
North Adams, MA 01247-4100

Dear President Birge:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 16, 2018, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2023 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2023 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) revising its Core Curriculum;
- 2) achieving its goals to increase student enrollment, retention, and graduation;
- 3) developing a multi-year financial plan that is aligned with its recruitment, enrollment, and retention plans.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of April 8, 2014 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) for its candid and comprehensive interim report. We appreciate that, as part of its strategic planning process, the College's mission was reviewed and

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FRANCESCO C. CESAREO (2020)
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F. JAVIER CEVALLOS (2020)
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University of Rhode Island

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THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2020)
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Berkshire Community College

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reaffirmed and that there is strong alignment between the mission and the strategic plan. We note that academic and administrative departments are developing action plans that align with the strategic plan goals, helping administrators identify priorities that were then shared at a campus-wide Strategic Planning Retreat. The Commission is pleased to learn that MCLA is in the process of revising its Core Curriculum with the goal to make the Core a “unified aspect of students’ experiences.” In addition, we note with favor the progress MCLA has made to integrate information literacy throughout the curriculum by increasing the number of full-time library assistants from three to four, creating an Information Literacy Task Force, and piloting an “embedded librarian” program through which librarians taught 37 classes and reached 893 students in Fall 2017. The College has several additional student success initiatives in place including Supplemental Instruction (SI) and the Tutor Exchange Network. The Commission is gratified to learn that SI students earned course grades .58 and .38 points higher in Spring and Fall 2017, respectively, than non-SI students. Further, MCLA was recognized by the Department of Education as one of thirteen institutions nationally to graduate students from low-income families at the same rate as students from high-income families. Numerous improvements have also been made to the physical and technological infrastructure at the institution. Lastly, the Commission acknowledges the completion of MCLA’s first comprehensive capital campaign which raised \$30.57 million, exceeding its \$22.5 million goal.

In its reflective essay, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts shared its comprehensive approach to assessing educational effectiveness. The Commission is gratified to learn that the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes are an “essential part of the framework for learning” at the College and that the VALUE rubrics are being used to assess student learning at the course and program level along with indirect measures such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Alumni Survey. We further note that, based on the survey data, new initiatives were developed to address a concern about students’ quantitative reasoning skills and that those initiatives improved student success; students who participated in the Math Bootcamp “scored an average of 15 percentage points higher” on their first chemistry exam than their non-participating peers. Similar improvements, based on assessment data, were made in the Psychology and Environmental Studies programs. In addition to analyzing student learning data, MCLA regularly evaluates graduation and retention rates, licensure passage rates, and measures of graduates’ success, including their financial success after graduation. We note with favor that, in assessments of the undergraduate experience, MCLA students report high levels of engagement with the skills and activities associated with “Higher-Order Learning and Reflective & Integrative Thinking” as compared to their peers, based on NSSE survey responses. The Commission commends MCLA for developing a culture of data-informed decision making and student learning assessment.

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. 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 *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Students*, and *Institutional Resources*.

As noted above, the Commission is pleased that Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts is in the process of revising its Core Curriculum. We understand that the implementation of Work-to-Rule during the 2017-2018 academic year resulted in a delay to the Core Curriculum revision timeline. The Fall 2023 self-study will enable MCLA to provide evidence of the College’s “success in implementing the results of its planning” (2.5) for its revised Core Curriculum. We are also guided here by our standard on *The Academic Program*:

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution’s definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which

they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.16).

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another (4.17).

The Commission understands that MCLA has embarked on a “three-stage process” for developing and implementing its enrollment management plan. The College has set goals to grow total enrollment from 1,519 in 2018 to 1,800 in 2022, while also acknowledging that Berkshire County is facing a “potentially significant decrease” in population. Further, we note that retention and graduation rates have been a “point of emphasis” for the College and that MCLA was awarded a Title III grant from the US Department of Education to address its retention and graduation goals. We ask that the Fall 2023 self-study give emphasis to MCLA’s success in achieving its enrollment, retention, and graduation goals, as informed by our standard on *Students*:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve. (*Students*, Statement of the Standard)

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution’s academic program, including specifically recruited populations. The institution’s goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6).

The Commission is pleased to learn of MCLA’s success in developing a strategic plan and, as noted above, an enrollment management plan. We understand that changes in administration delayed the College’s progress in implementing a multi-year financial plan that is aligned with its recruitment, enrollment, and retention plan. We are gratified to learn that MCLA invested in systems such as Budget Maestro and Argos and is now poised to develop and implement multi-year financial planning. We seek assurance, in the Fall 2023 self-study, that “planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution” (2.1). We also remind you of our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Institutional Resources*:

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’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 (7.6).

The institution’s financial planning, including contingency [p]lanning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. (7.14).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It

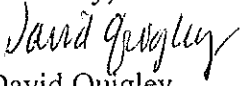
Dr. James F. Birge
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appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

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 and the head of the state system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Denise Marshall and Carlos Santiago. 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 Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,


David Quigley

DQ/sjp

cc: Denise Marshall
Carlos Santiago

Enclosures



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 ordinarily 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.

The Commission will release information on actions of show cause or deferral. If such information is also released by the institution in question or is otherwise made public, the Commission will respond to related inquiries and may issue revised public statement.

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 in an immediate and timely way, the Commission, acting through its President, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information. This may include release of notification letters sent by the Commission to the institution, and/or a press release.

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

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

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

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

The Commission publishes the following information about member and candidate institutions on its website:

- Name of the institution
- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted
- Accreditation status (member or candidate)
- Address
- Phone and fax numbers
- CEO name and title
- Degree levels awarded
- Dates of initial accreditation (or candidacy), last review and next review
- Locations of off-campus instructional sites
- The basis for Commission action affecting candidacy or accreditation status
- 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 date and nature of any show-cause for denial of candidacy or accreditation, probation, or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation status
- 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 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 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 on Institutions of Higher Education. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

The Commission may also publish on its website a public statement about an action taken regarding a member or candidate institution when further information about the action and the Commission's reasons for taking the action would be helpful to members of the public.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, and withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation) are communicated when the decision becomes final (i.e., when the institution does not appeal or when the appeals process is completed and the decision is upheld). The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before the decision is final or the appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

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. The Commission will also make public on its website the basis for these decisions. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or withdraw the candidacy or 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.

Per federal regulation, within 60 days of a final decision to take an adverse action (probation or withdrawal of accreditation), the Commission will submit a copy of the final decision letter to the Secretary of Education. The Secretary will make the letter public.

November 1998

September 2001

April 2010

September 2011

Editorial Changes, March 2014

April 2015

April 2017