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April 23, 2018

Dr. David M. Dooley
President
University of Rhode Island
Green Hall, 35 Campus Avenue
Kingston, RI 02881-1303

Dear President Dooley:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 1, 2018, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Rhode Island:

that University of Rhode Island be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall, 2022;

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

- 1) improving its system of academic advising across the institution;
- 2) assessing student learning outcomes at the institutional level and in its outcomes-based General Education program and using results to make improvements;
- 3) addressing the challenges and adapting to a changing educational environment within the State of Rhode Island with attention to implementing the performance-based funding mandates specified in the 2016 Rhode Island legislation.

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2027.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

University of Rhode Island is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

We join the visiting team in commending University of Rhode Island (URI) for submitting an excellent self-study that documents the tremendous

progress the University has made over the last decade in transforming URI into a globally recognized research institution. Notable accomplishments include: increases in enrollment (18.4%) and student diversity (from 11.5% to 19.5%); average annual capital investments of \$71 million; the launch of a new General Education program; the development of two new Colleges – College of Health Sciences and Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies; and a new faculty initiative that has enabled URI to add 60 new full-time faculty positions and expand its programs and increase scholarship and research at the University. We are particularly impressed to learn of the recent launch of a \$260 million “award-winning” Nursing Education Center (developed through a partnership with Brown University and Rhode Island College) that provides an “extraordinary environment” for nursing students. Evidence of URI’s dedication to thoughtful and deliberate planning is found in its *Innovation with Impact: Shaping the Future of URI, 2016-2021 Academic Strategic Plan*, as well as its recently adopted *Information Technology Strategic Plan* and *Campus Master Plan*. We particularly note with approval that these institutional plans guide resource allocation and ensure academic quality in programs offered on the main campus, at off-campus locations, and through distance education. We further appreciate learning from the visiting team that URI is supported by a vibrant and engaged community comprising an active Board of Trustees, strong leadership, and remarkable faculty and staff who are committed to the institution’s mission and student success. This talented campus community, combined with relevant, high-quality academic programs and a strong governance structure, provides a solid foundation from which the University can continue to achieve its mission as it “transforms University of Rhode Island from what it was to what it needs to be as a leader in the 21st Century.”

Commission policy requires an interim (fifth-year) 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 interim reports the University is asked, in Fall, 2022, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Students; The Academic Program; Educational Effectiveness; and Organization and Governance*.

We understand from the visiting team that student advising has been a source of dissatisfaction among some URI students. We are therefore gratified to learn that URI has implemented strategies to improve its system of academic advising across the institution: 11 full-time professional advising staff have been hired; career and experiential learning centers have been established to increase opportunities for experiential learning and career planning; and a new advisor education program has been instituted. We further note with favor that the University will continue to use the results of student satisfaction surveys (e.g., the 2019 NSSE survey) as a means of monitoring the effectiveness of its system of academic advising. The interim report submitted for consideration in Fall 2022 will afford URI an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in this area as evidence that “[t]he institution’s system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives, [and t]he quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19). Our standard on *Students* is also relevant here:

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution’s faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students’ academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

While we note positively that a “close the loop” assessment model is embedded into courses within URI’s student-centered, outcomes-based General Education program (launched in AY2016), we also recognize that some General Education courses are still under development and “assessment is still a work in process.” In addition, while the progress URI has made in

assessing student learning outcomes at the course and program levels is commendable, the University candidly acknowledges that assessment of learning outcomes at the institutional level “could be strengthened and made more systematic.” We look forward, in the Fall 2022 interim report, to receiving information on URI’s continued success in assessing student learning outcomes at the institutional level and in its outcomes-based General Education program and in using results to make improvements. This request is in keeping with our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

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).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution’s academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment (8.6).

Finally, we recognize that URI is grappling with complex issues related to the Rhode Island Council on Postsecondary Education and the Commissioner of Higher Education, including concerns about the operation of Rhode Island’s three institutions of higher education; matters involving external governance and potential conflicts between the governing bodies and the executive branch of state government; and the performance-based funding initiative (scheduled to be implemented in 2019) whereby institutions will be required to demonstrate proof of progress in three priority areas (graduation rates, production of graduates in high-wage, high-demand fields, and the achievement of institutional goals). As URI documents in its self-study, the University has used these measures and others to evaluate student success for some time (e.g., between FY2014 and 2016 retention rates increased from 82% to 83% and graduation rates rose from 59% to 63%). However, to date, the state has yet to establish mechanisms by which it will evaluate performance and allocate funding. As informed by our standard on *Organization and Governance*, we ask that URI apprise the Commission, through the Fall 2022 interim report, of its progress in addressing these challenges as evidence that the University “has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity” (*Organization and Governance*, statement of the standard).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2027 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.

Dr. David M. Dooley
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The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Rhode Island and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Donald DeHayes, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Matthew Bodah, Interim Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Budget, and Susan Hunter, team chair, during its deliberations.

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. William Foulkes. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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,



David P. Angel

DPA/sjp

Enclosures

cc: Mr. William Foulkes
Visiting team