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

February 15, 2013

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Dr. David M. Dooley  
President  
University of Rhode Island  
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Kingston, RI 02881-1303

Dear President Dooley:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 15, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the fifth-year interim report submitted by University of Rhode Island and voted to take the following action:

that the fifth-year interim report submitted by University of Rhode Island be accepted;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall, 2017 evaluation give emphasis to:

- 1) the impact of the new statewide governance structure and Board of Education on the University;
- 2) the University's success in revising and assessing the general education requirements;
- 3) implementation of the institution's program review process which includes self-studies followed by external reviews;
- 4) the institution's success in providing adequate funding for the library;
- 5) revitalization of the University's graduate programs.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The Commission commends University of Rhode Island (URI) for its progress in addressing the areas of emphasis identified in our letters of April 3, 2008 and March 29, 2011. We are pleased to learn that the process for budget development is now more participatory and connects strategic planning to the allocation of resources. A master planning committee has been

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created to align physical plant improvements with expansion of programmatic needs. We note with favor that a six-year academic program review process, that includes both self-study and external review, is being implemented. Steps have been taken to restructure financial aid to enhance recruitment and retention. Finally, the first-year retention rate for students entering in Fall 2010 was 82.3%, the highest in the past ten years.

The report submitted by the University provided evidence of its continued fulfillment of the Standards and its progress in enhancing institutional effectiveness. We understand that the institution has undertaken significant consolidation and elimination of undergraduate programs as well as the addition of several new majors in areas of demand.

We commend the University for the quality of the "Assessment, Retention, and Student Success" section of the report. We note with favor that the institution has implemented a broad and comprehensive range of strategies for the assessment of student learning at the undergraduate level. Plans are in place for the assessment of the new general education program and for determining how to "revitalize" graduate programs.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2017 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, Organization and Governance, The Academic Program, and Library and Other Information Resources*.

We understand that a proposal to secure greater independence for the University from the state will not be pursued but note the state Office of Higher Education will cease to exist as of July 1, 2014. As acknowledged in the interim report, the details and implications of these changes "have not been established at this time." It will be important to understand and evaluate the impact of the reorganization of the statewide governance structure for higher education, and the development of extended responsibilities for the Board of Education which is charged with providing oversight for all K-higher education institutions in Rhode Island. As part of the self-study prepared for the Fall 2017 comprehensive evaluation, we would appreciate an update regarding the impact of this reorganization on the University, as guided by our Standard on *Organization and Governance*:

In multi-campus systems organized under a single governing board, the division of responsibility and authority between the system office and the institution is clear. Where system and campus boards share governance responsibilities or dimensions of authority, system policies and procedures are clearly defined and equitably administered. (3.11)

We understand that the University's Subcommittee for the Assessment of General Education has recommended focusing short-term assessment on broad college competencies that will continue to be addressed in the new program (e.g., writing, communication, and quantitative literacy). Work has begun to develop common rubrics for use across disciplines to provide a meaningful contribution to the development of the new general education program. We look forward to learning about the success of these efforts in the Fall of 2017, in keeping with our Standard on *The Academic Program*:

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and

understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind. (4.19)

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, and includes external perspectives. The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning are trustworthy and provide information useful in the continuing improvement of programs and services for students. (4.54)

We note with approval that the University's Academic Plan has allocated resources for a comprehensive academic program review process, and implementation of this process has begun with a goal to complete reviews of all departments and programs over the next six years. Within the self-study prepared for the Fall 2017 evaluation, we welcome information regarding the impact of the program review process on URI's efforts to improve its programs, as well as a review of the effectiveness of the review process itself. Our Standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program* (cited above and below) should be informative here:

The institution has a system of periodic review of academic and other programs that includes the use of external perspectives. (2.6)

The institution determines the effectiveness of its planning and evaluation activities on an ongoing basis. Results of these activities are used to further enhance the institution's implementation of its purposes and objectives. (2.8)

The institution's system of periodic review of academic programs includes a focus on understanding what and how students learn as a result of the program. (4.52)

The report submitted by URI indicated that the "library budget was 65% of the median budget of peer institutions" and that "total library materials expenditures per student FTE at URI were \$199.43, compared with a peer median of \$518.19." Thus, we are pleased to learn that the Academic Plan calls for the development of a comprehensive and collaborative plan for the library and that the Provost has called for the formation of an institution- and state-wide committee to create a vision for the "Library of the 21st Century." We welcome information regarding progress with these goals in Fall, 2017 in accordance with our Standard on *Library and Other Information Resources*:

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)

Professionally qualified and numerically adequate staff administer the institution's library, information resources and services, and instructional and information technology support functions. (7.4)

We are pleased to learn of efforts undertaken by URI "to revitalize the Graduate School with the development of an aggressive, institution-tailored process to evaluate graduate student learning outcomes in all graduate programs." By June 2014, all graduate programs will be phased into the review process with the development of an assessment plan that includes programmatic goals, learning outcomes, a curricular map, and a timeline. A report on assessment activities is expected in June 2015. We anticipate being apprised, in Fall 2017, of the success of this initiative, in

keeping with our Standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program* (cited above and below):

Graduate degree programs are designed to give students a mastery of a complex field of study or professional area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements, in relevant official publications, and in the demonstrated learning experiences of graduates. Learning objectives reflect a high level of complexity, specialization, and generalization. (4.21)

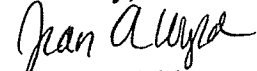
Students who successfully complete a graduate program demonstrate that they have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as the program's objectives. (4.29)

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by University of Rhode Island 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 Ms. Eva-Marie Mancuso. 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, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Jean A. Wyld

JAW/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Eva-Marie Mancuso