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April 3, 2008

Dr. Robert L. Carothers  
President  
University of Rhode Island  
Green Hall, 35 Campus Avenue  
Kingston, RI 02881-1303

Dear President Carothers:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on February 28, 2008, 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 a report for consideration in Fall 2010 that gives emphasis to its success in:

- 1) developing and implementing a comprehensive, integrated financial planning process that provides clear and robust links to academic and capital priorities;
- 2) implementing a systematic process of academic program review;
- 3) analyzing the implications for planning and governance of possible changes to the relationship between the University and the State of Rhode Island;

that submission of the report be followed by a visit to validate its contents;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall 2012;

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

- 1) addressing the issues identified for attention in the Fall 2010 report;
- 2) achieving its goals for student retention and persistence to graduation and assuring the effectiveness of the institution's financial aid policies in facilitating accomplishment of these goals;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2017.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The University of Rhode Island is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*. The Commission takes favorable note of the progress that the University has made in addressing the concerns about general education and assessment identified at the time of its last review and for its commitment to institutional quality in the face of financial constraints. We are pleased to note the many strengths of the University, including: a committed faculty and staff; enthusiastic students who express high levels of satisfaction with the education offered by the institution; quality academic programs, including nationally recognized professional programs in pharmacy, engineering, oceanography, business, and nursing; and an attractive, well-maintained physical plant. We are gratified to learn of the University's success in securing a number of federal research grants and its other efforts to diversify its revenue base. The institution has benefited from the stable leadership of its president and provost, both of whom will be retiring from their positions after many years of service. As it prepares to welcome new executive and academic leadership, the University can take pride in its many accomplishments.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2010 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Financial Resources*, and *Organization and Governance*.

The Commission concurs with the visiting team that the University of Rhode Island would benefit from "a much better integration of financial, academic and strategic planning." We are gratified to learn that the recently hired provost has begun a strategic planning process that will be more transparent, involve the school's deans in the development of a set of goals and priorities for the division of academic affairs, and provide greater integration with financial planning. The report submitted in Fall 2010 will provide an opportunity for the University to describe its success in undertaking an approach to planning that is consistent with our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program* and *Financial Resources*:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.1).

The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources (4.9).

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 (9.3).

The institution establishes and implements its budget after appropriate consultation with relevant constituencies in accord with realistic overall planning that provides for the appropriate integration of academic, student service, fiscal, development, information and technology and physical resource priorities to advance its educational objectives (9.7).

The Commission commends the University of Rhode Island for its development of the Academic Investment and Improvement Model (AIIM), a program review process that was designed to

overcome identified shortcomings of the institution's prior approach to the review of academic programs. However, as noted in the team report, this approach does not incorporate an external perspective into the review process, nor has the University implemented a systematic approach to academic program review. We anticipate being apprized, in Fall 2010, of the institution's success as it "develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its degree programs under effective institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control" (4.8). We remind you of the Commission's expectation that the evaluation of academic programs "includes an external perspective and assessment of their effectiveness" (4.9).

The Commission understands that the University has experienced several years of declining financial support from the State of Rhode Island and has initiated discussions about possible changes to its relationship with the state. We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2010 report, of the outcome of these discussions, with emphasis on the implications of such changes for the governance and financing of the institution. Relevant here are our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *Financial Resources*:

The institution 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 institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support. The institution's governing board retains appropriate autonomy in all budget and finance matters; this includes institutions that depend on financial support from an external agency (state, church, or other private or public entity) (9.2).

Submission of the Fall 2010 report will be followed by a site visit to validate its contents. A copy of the relevant procedures is enclosed for your information.

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 provided in all interim reports, we look forward in Fall 2012 to receiving evidence that additional progress has been made in addressing the matters identified for emphasis in the 2010 report. We recognize that these issues do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the institution's continued attention over time; thus we are asking that further information be provided in the fifth-year report.

The University is also asked, in its Fall 2012 report, to address a matter related to our standards on *Students* and *Financial Resources*.

As noted in both the self-study and team report, the University is dissatisfied with its first-to-second year retention rates, currently at 85% for in-state students and 73% for out-of-state students, as well as its six-year graduation rate of 57%. We commend the institution for its analysis of the reasons for student attrition and, in particular, the impact that its financial aid policies may have on student persistence. The Fall 2012 report will provide an opportunity for the University to report on its success in addressing this issue, consistent with our standards on *Students* and *Financial Resources*:

The institution measures student success, including rates of retention and graduation and other measures of success appropriate to institutional mission. 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. Rates of retention and graduation are

separately determined for any group that the institution specifically recruits, and those rates are used in evaluating the success of specialized recruitment and the services and opportunities provided for the recruited students (6.6).

The institution and its governing board regularly and systematically review the effectiveness of the institution's financial aid policy and practices in advancing the institution's mission and helping to ensure that the institution enrolls and supports the student body it seeks to serve (9.5).

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.

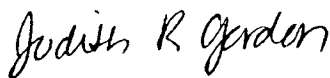
The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Rhode Island and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Dr. Beverly Swan, Provost, as well as Dr. Sherry Penney, team chair, during its deliberations.

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. Jack Warner. 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, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Judith R. Gordon

JRG/jm

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Jack Warner  
Visiting Team