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April 2, 2015

Dr. Divina Grossman  
Chancellor  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth  
285 Old Westport Road  
North Dartmouth, MA 02747-2300

Dear Chancellor Grossman:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 6, 2015, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2020 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2020 comprehensive evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. achieving its goal to secure classification as a Doctoral Research University, with attention to faculty working conditions;
2. attaining American Bar Association (ABA) accreditation for the Law School;
3. maintaining financial stability with emphasis on the diversification of revenue;
4. continuing to strengthen its culture of assessment with emphasis on implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its plans to increase student access and success;
5. adopting the Faculty Senate Constitution.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of November 2, 2010, May 20, 2013, and January 6, 2014, addressed each of the eleven standards, and included a reflective essay on student learning and success.

The Commission commends University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMD) for a comprehensive and well-written report. Especially notable is the University's progress in expanding capacity and accomplishing key initiatives. For example, a number of new leadership positions, including Director of Learning Assessment, Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success, have been created and filled; learning outcomes for all programs have been defined; and plans "that assure data on student outcomes are collected and used to understand how and what students are learning" have been implemented. In support of its goal to become a national Doctoral Research University, UMD has launched four new doctoral and four master's level programs, all focused in areas with "high need and the potential for rapid growth," and, in FY2014, the University awarded \$246,000 in support of Distinguished Doctoral Fellowships, Distinguished Art Fellowships, and Doctoral Fellowships. UMD has expanded its online degree-completion program offerings and the institution's third fully-online program – the Master's in Computer Information Science – will launch in Spring 2015. We note with approval that the University's use of data to inform decision-making and improve retention and graduation rates has resulted in an increase in first-year retention rates, from 70.3% in Fall 2009 to 79.4% in Fall 2013; six-year graduation rates increased from 47.7% in Fall 2003 to 49.0% in Fall 2007. We are further pleased to learn of the institution's progress in implementing its Facilities Master Plan; noteworthy is the investment of \$13 million in laboratory improvements and major renovations to residence halls and the Claire T. Carney Library. Finally, we are gratified to learn that the University's new strategic plan, *UMassDTransforms 2020*, developed with broad-based participation within the campus community, will guide University of Massachusetts Dartmouth over the next five years as it "boldly addresses current challenges, and articulates the University's aspirations, opportunities, and goals."

The Commission also commends University of Massachusetts Dartmouth for its well-developed reflective essay detailing its progress in implementing multiple direct and indirect measures of effectiveness across the University. Notable is the University's progress in the assessment of general education learning outcomes – organized in "clusters" – in University Studies, College Studies, and Major Studies. For example, assessment results of learning outcomes in Cluster 2 (The Natural World: Scientific Inquiry and Understanding) in University Studies indicated "average" student performance ranging from 64-74%, with a particular weakness in effectively communicating scientific information in writing. In response, UMD determined "the need for a review of curriculum and/or pedagogical practices across all outcomes," and work to improve the University Studies Program will begin in Spring 2015. In addition to continued attention on the assessment of student learning outcomes, over the next five years the University will focus on four key academic goals: innovative and high impact research and academic programs; integrated student-centered experiences; an active and engaged University community focused on excellence in research, scholarship, and innovation; and highly productive collaborations, partnerships, and community engagement.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2020 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 five matters related to our standards on *Faculty, Mission and Purposes, Financial Resources, Planning and Evaluation, The Academic Program, and Organization and Governance*.

As cited above and further demonstrated through the interim report, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth has made significant progress in developing the capacity needed to achieve its goal as a Doctoral Research University. We also appreciate UMD's candid acknowledgment that faculty working conditions "are often below standards at doctoral universities." We understand that, while UMD has been successful in recruiting "highly qualified" tenure-track faculty, retaining them has been a challenge due, in part, to "low levels of compensation." We are encouraged to learn that the *UMassDTransforms 2020* strategic plan includes steps to improve the retention of talented faculty. The self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2020 comprehensive evaluation will afford the University an opportunity to report on the success of these initiatives as evidence that "[t]here are an adequate number of faculty whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes (5.3)." Relevant here are our standards on *Mission and Purposes* and *Faculty*:

The mission of the institution defines its distinctive character, addresses the needs of society and identifies the students the institution seeks to serve, and reflects both the institution's traditions and its vision for the future. The institution's mission provides the basis upon which the institution identifies its priorities, plans its future and evaluates its endeavors; it provides a basis for the evaluation of the institution against the Commission's Standards (1.1).

Faculty are accorded reasonable contractual security for appropriate periods consistent with the institution's ability to fulfill its mission. Salaries and benefits are set at levels that ensure the institution's continued ability to attract and maintain an appropriately qualified instructional staff whose profile is consistent with the institution's mission and purposes (5.6).

The report submitted by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth provided an update on the institution's progress in attaining American Bar Association accreditation for the Law School. We note with favor that 97 of the 126 students (77%) who graduated from the Law School since it received provisional ABA accreditation in July 2012 have passed the bar exam, exceeding the ABA requirement of 75%. We understand that UMD's "comprehensive and detailed" self-study was well-received by the ABA Accreditation Committee in September 2014 and, consistent with the ABA's normal accreditation process, the Limited Site Visit in March 2015 will focus on faculty and staff diversity, technology, bar passage rates, and finances. The Spring 2020 self-study will provide UMD an opportunity to further update the Commission on its continued progress in achieving ABA accreditation for the Law School, in keeping with our standard on *Mission and Purposes* (cited above).

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's commitment to diversify sources of revenue and "strengthening the link between its strategic priorities and the allocation of its scarce resource[s]" is well documented in its interim report. For example, a Vice Chancellor for Advancement and six support staff have been hired to support fundraising and outreach initiatives resulting in the doubling of Chancellor's Circle prospects and a 32% increase in total philanthropic dollars between FY2013 and FY2014. The expansion of distance learning offerings resulted in revenue of \$4.5 million in FY2014, up from \$2.2 million in FY2010, and by outsourcing the campus bookstore, the University will increase revenues by nearly \$500,000 over the next five years. We welcome an update, in the self-study submitted in advance of the Spring 2020 comprehensive evaluation, on the University's continued success in maintaining financial stability with emphasis on the diversification of revenue. Our standard on *Financial Resources* will guide this section of the report:

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).

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).

The Commission is gratified to learn that, in support of its strategic priorities, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth will continue to develop and implement assessment plans to increase student access and success in six areas: using student feedback for improvement and communicating improvements; coordinating the collection of student feedback; focusing on student success initiatives; and assessing the effectiveness of co-curricular academic units, graduate programs, and University Studies. We are further heartened to learn that implementation strategies and assessment metrics will be monitored annually by the Provost and Chancellor. We share the judgment of the University that UMD has made "considerable and marked improvement" over the last five years, and we look forward to learning, in the self-study submitted in advance of the Spring 2020 comprehensive evaluation, of the institution's continued success in strengthening its culture of assessment with emphasis on implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its plans to increase student access and success. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program* are relevant here:

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.4).

The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded (4.48).

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

We note with favor that UMD engaged in a thoughtful and deliberative process that culminated in the development of a Constitution for the Faculty Senate that "explicitly states the rights and responsibilities of faculty in shared governance." All eligible faculty members voted to ratify the document in April 2014 and the Constitution was subsequently sent to the Board of Trustees for approval. In keeping with our standard on *Organization and Governance*, the Spring 2020 self-study will provide the University an opportunity to confirm Board approval and adoption of the Faculty Senate Constitution as evidence that the University's "internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies" (3.9).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth 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.

Dr. Divina Grossman  
April 2, 2015  
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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 Ms. Zunilka Barrett. 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 P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Zunilka Barrett



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

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**Public Disclosure of Information  
About Affiliated Institutions**

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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](mailto: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:

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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](mailto: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*