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November 9, 2020

Dr. Mark Preble  
Acting Chancellor  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth  
285 Old Westport Road  
North Dartmouth, MA 02747-2300

Dear Chancellor Preble:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 25, 2020, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Massachusetts Dartmouth:

that University of Massachusetts Dartmouth be continued in accreditation;

that the inclusion of the dual Ph.D. program in Marine Sciences with Universidade de São Paulo Instituto Oceanográfico, Brazil, within the institution's accreditation be confirmed;

that the institution be asked to submit a report for consideration in September 2021 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) implementing its leadership transition plans with a particular focus on the process and timeline related to the search for a permanent Chancellor and Provost;
- 2) implementing its plans to reallocate and grow resources to support the institution's mission;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2025;

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

- 1) providing adequate investment in and support for research and graduate education in the context of its recent designation as a Doctoral Research University;
- 2) implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of strategies aimed at improving retention rates for first year students;

- 3) diversifying its revenue streams through increased externally funded research, expanded foundation and corporate support, and heightened private philanthropy to support the students, faculty, and programs of the University;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2030.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

The Commission joins the visiting team in congratulating University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMass Dartmouth) on an exemplary self-study that documents the institution's many strengths, highlights its accomplishments over the last decade, and tells the story of an institution that is guided by long-held core values of student access and engagement and now is expanding its reach in research, scholarship, and innovation. Achieving Doctoral Research University (DRU) status in February 2016 is a particularly noteworthy accomplishment, and the ratification of a Faculty Senate Constitution in 2014 and approval of this Constitution, with amendments, by the Board of Trustees in 2017 is also commendable. UMass Dartmouth's strong culture of assessment is illustrative of the University's deep commitment to student success and achievement that is also apparent in the experiential opportunities the University provides to students to enhance their education, including service learning, active engagement with community projects, outreach, and research activities. We appreciate UMass Dartmouth's candid observation that COVID-19 has served as a catalyst for the University to "evaluate where it is online." This self-assessment allowed the University to identify "better tools" for online students and to expand faculty development opportunities. With the support of its Board of Trustees and leadership team, combined with its exemplary faculty, staff, and students, UMass Dartmouth is well positioned to continue "serving and empowering its region, remaining affordable and providing access to education for first generation and commuter students, and preparing students to drive economic development" well into the future.

The Commission confirmed inclusion of the University's dual Ph.D. program in Marine Sciences with Universidade de São Paulo (USP) Instituto Oceanográfico, Brazil, within the institution's accreditation because we find the activity to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies. During its visit, the team verified that the UMass Dartmouth School of Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) oversees the dual degree program; a UMass Dartmouth faculty member is the lead coordinator of the program; and the Graduate Program Director manages the dual degree program at UMass Dartmouth. We understand that a central feature of the program with USP is a one-year residency program at the university that is not the student's home institution. Students are assigned an advisor at each institution, and there is extensive curriculum mapping between the institutions. While only one student from UMass Dartmouth had taken advantage of the USP residency at the time of the visit, we note that several students from USP have completed residencies at UMass Dartmouth. We further note positively that USP students enhance the research capacity of UMass Dartmouth's SMAST, and faculty consider this to be a prestigious program offering students an important international opportunity.

The two items the institution is asked to report on in September 2021 are related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *Planning and Evaluation*, and *Institutional Resources*.

We understand that, shortly after the team visit, the Chancellor of UMass Dartmouth accepted a position at another institution, and the Provost stepped down to return to the faculty. While we appreciate that the Acting Chancellor and Acting Provost bring many years of institutional

knowledge to their temporary positions, we also note that a national search to fill these positions has not yet been launched, primarily due to COVID-19, and there is speculation that the search for a permanent Chancellor, followed by a search for a permanent Provost, may not take place until sometime in AY2022. We are concerned that it may be difficult for the institution to move forward with its plans until a permanent leadership team is in place and ask, therefore, that the report submitted for consideration in September 2021 include an update on the University's success in implementing its leadership transition plans with a particular focus on the process and timeline related to the search for each of these positions. We are guided here by our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

The chief executive officer, through an appropriate administrative structure, effectively manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and establishes the means to assess the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer manages and allocates resources in keeping with institutional purposes and objectives and assesses the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer assures that the institution employs faculty and staff sufficient in role, number, and qualifications appropriate to the institution's mission, size, and scope (3.12).

The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators, is responsible for the quality of the academic program. The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.14).

The Commission understands that the University plans to implement a "strategic reallocation process" over the next several months to ensure it will be able to fulfill its core academic mission, serve its region more effectively, and support greater emphasis on research. In addition, the University is cultivating a "culture of philanthropy" to increase private funding that will be necessary to support its many initiatives, including its new status as a Doctoral Research University. As evidence that UMass Dartmouth "has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5), we look forward to being apprised, through the September 2021 report, of the institution's success in implementing its plans to reallocate and grow resources to support the institution's mission. We are further informed here by our standard on *Institutional Resources*:

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

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).

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 Spring 2025, to report on three matters related to our standards on *The Academic Program, Students, Educational Effectiveness, and Institutional Resources*.

We support the University's assessment that, as it matures as a DRU, it will be essential to focus on the innovation and expansion of its graduate program offerings. We are therefore gratified to learn of UMass Dartmouth's commitment to increase resources to support its graduate programs and to increase funding in support of faculty research and scholarship. To confirm that graduate programs "are not offered unless resources and expectations exceed those required for an undergraduate program in a similar field" (4.21), we look forward, in the Spring 2025 interim report, to receiving an update on the institution's success in providing adequate investment in and support for research and graduate education in the context of its recent designation as a Doctoral Research University. Our standard on *Institutional Resources* (cited above) is also relevant here.

As documented in the self-study, one-year retention rates for first-time, full-time matriculated students have been trending downward in recent years, peaking at 79.4% for the 2013 cohort to the current low of 70.9% for the 2017 cohort. As the University candidly recognizes, "the two-year retention rate is dependent on the one-year rate;" hence, the decline in that measure from a peak of 70.5% for the fall 2013 cohort to 63.8% for the fall 2016 cohort, with a lower rate anticipated for the fall 2017 cohort. We further share the institution's concern that lower first- and second-year retention rates will likely result in a "drop in the overall graduation rates in a few years." To address this matter, UMass Dartmouth has developed an "assertive program of interventions," including increased institutional aid in the form of grants and waivers to help to alleviate student loan burden and expanded access to well-trained professional advisors. In keeping with our standards on *Students* and *Educational Effectiveness*, we ask that the Spring 2025 interim report include an update on the University's success in implementing strategies aimed at improving retention rates for first-year students:

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 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).

The self-study documents the variety of revenue sources (e.g., state appropriations, tuition and fees, grants, contracts, gifts, and auxiliary operations such as housing, dining, and online and continuing education) UMass Dartmouth relies on to support its mission. We also note that although state appropriations "have grown in absolute dollars over time (from \$61,941,000 in FY2010 to \$83,740,000 in FY2018), they have not kept up with increases in salary, fringe benefits, technology, and inflation," and the University "is actively working to both increase and diversify its revenue streams" through such means as externally funded research, expanded foundation and corporate support, and heightened private philanthropy to support its students, faculty, and programs. We recognize that it will take time to realize the results of these efforts, and the Spring 2025 interim report will provide the University an opportunity to update the Commission on its progress in this area. Our standard on *Institutional Resources* (cited above) is relevant here.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2030 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.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Michael Goodman, Acting Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs; Ramprasad Balasubramanian, Associate Provost, Decision Support and Strategic Initiatives; Tammy Silva, Director Institutional Research and Assessment; and, Rodney Rogers, 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 and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Robert Manning and Mr. Martin T. Meehan, J.D. 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 Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/jm

cc: Mr. Robert Manning  
Mr. Martin T. Meehan, J.D.  
Visiting Team

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions