



New England Commission
of Higher Education

July 8, 2019

Dr. Katherine S. Newman
Interim Chancellor
University of Massachusetts Boston
c/o Office of the President
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Boston, MA 02108

Dr. Kumble R. Subbaswamy
Chancellor
University of Massachusetts Amherst
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Amherst, MA 01003-9313

Dr. Robert E. Johnson
Chancellor
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
285 Old Westport Road
North Dartmouth, MA 02747-2300

Dear Chancellors Newman, Johnson, and Subbaswamy:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 12, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the reports submitted by University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston), University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMass Dartmouth), and University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst) regarding their plans to offer online inter-campus graduate certificate programs to international students through a contractual relationship with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. and took the following action:

that the reports submitted by UMass Boston, UMass Dartmouth, and UMass Amherst be accepted and the online inter-campus graduate certificate programs to be offered to international students through a contractual relationship with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. be encompassed within the accreditation of each institution, with an effective date of April 12, 2019;

that a visit to assess implementation of the inter-campus graduate certificate programs be scheduled for Spring 2020;

that the report prepared in advance of the Spring 2020 site visit give emphasis to the institutions' progress in implementing the inter-campus graduate certificate programs with attention to the Universities' success in:

1. recruiting and admitting qualified students into the programs;

2. assuring the adequacy of instructional resources and academic and student services to support student success;
3. ensuring the effectiveness of the arrangements for the academic governance of the programs as well as the arrangements with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. to enable the Universities to maintain control of all academic elements of the programs;
4. implementing plans to ensure the quality and rigor of the programs are equivalent to other programs offered at the institutions' home campuses.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The reports submitted by University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and University of Massachusetts Amherst were accepted and the online inter-campus graduate certificate programs to be offered to international students through a contractual relationship with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. encompassed within each institution's accreditation because the Commission finds the activity to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies.

The Commission commends UMass Boston, UMass Dartmouth, and UMass Amherst for developing an innovative approach to provide international students with access to high-quality graduate certificate programs. We understand that the proposed initiative builds on the successful arrangement established by UMass Amherst with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. (Shorelight), a Boston-based firm with "extensive experience with recruiting international students as well as providing the support necessary to help them succeed in U.S. programs." As proposed, international students enrolled in the 12-credit certificate programs will take courses from each of the three UMass campuses in their home country via distance learning technology provided by Shorelight. (We understand UMass Amherst will not offer courses in the certificate program at the outset of the partnership but may do so in the future.) Students who successfully complete the 12 credits will earn a certificate awarded by the campus from which they have taken the most courses and may then apply to attend a residential master's degree at the campus of their choice. All certificate courses will be accepted in transfer towards the student's chosen master's degree program. We note with favor that all of the courses for the proposed certificates have been approved through standard governance procedures on the respective campuses and will be taught by qualified UMass faculty who will work with Shorelight to adapt the current course materials to its online delivery system. The Universities expect to offer certificates in computer science in Fall 2019 and mechanical engineering in Spring 2020, with plans to add certificates in computer engineering and electrical engineering at a later time. Administrative responsibility for the certificate programs, including management of the admissions process, will be handled through UMass Boston; admissions to subsequent master's programs will remain with the campus offering the degree. We understand Shorelight will contribute "100% of the capital required to get [the initiative] off the ground," will receive all registration and tuition revenue, and will reimburse all campus costs related to administering the program and to developing and teaching the courses. After expenses, remaining revenue will be split 50-50 between the UMass campuses and Shorelight.

Commission policy requires an on-site evaluation of the inter-campus graduate certificate programs. The report prepared for the visit in Spring 2020 should update the Commission to reflect and assess actual experience in implementing the programs. A copy of the relevant policy and procedures is enclosed for your information.

In addition, the institutions are asked, in the report prepared for the Spring 2020 evaluation, to give emphasis to four matters related to our standards on *Students*, *Institutional Resources*, *The Academic Program*, and *Organization and Governance*.

The Commission understands that Shorelight will be responsible for “identifying and recruiting potential students for the participating programs” and that the Universities will retain responsibility for admissions decisions. The projections included with the proposal anticipate initial enrollment of 30 certificate students in FY2020, growing to 150 in FY2021, and to more than 500 in FY2024. We look forward to learning, through the Spring 2020 evaluation, of the institutions’ success in achieving their goals for the recruitment and enrollment of qualified students in the proposed certificate programs. We remind you of our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources*:

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution’s academic program, including specifically recruited populations (5.6).

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).

We note that each of the University campuses offering courses will be responsible for academic support services and that these services will entail the use of videoconferencing for counseling and advising. Each student will be assigned a faculty advisor who will schedule “regular meetings” to provide curricular and career support. Shorelight will also hire “locally based facilitators” to provide “language- and culture-based assistance” and coordinate meetings among students enrolled in the programs. The Spring 2020 evaluation will afford the Universities an opportunity to report on the effectiveness of these arrangements in assuring that students in the inter-campus graduate certificate programs are provided with “information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success” (5.7) and with “advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body” (5.10).

The Commission is gratified by the arrangements included in the Global Content Delivery Agreement to ensure that the Universities will retain responsibility for all academic elements of the certificate programs. We also understand that oversight of the programs will be the responsibility of two committees: an Executive Committee comprising two Shorelight representatives, the President of the University system (or designee) and the chancellor of UMass Boston (or designee); and an Academic Committee, appointed by the Executive Committee, whose membership will include one Shorelight representative and one representative from each destination campus. We look forward, in Spring 2020, to receiving evidence of the initial success of these arrangements, consistent with our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *The Academic Program*:

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 institution using contractual arrangements, consortial or other written agreements involving credits and degrees, the delivery of coursework, the assessment of student achievement, or the recruitment or support of students periodically reviews the effectiveness of such arrangements and negotiates appropriate changes. Consistent with Commission policy, the institution maintains sufficient control over the arrangements to ensure quality in the academic program and services for students and prospective students, including the ability to modify the agreements as needed. Written agreements provide for the termination or phasing out of such arrangements as circumstances warrant, and the institution develops appropriate exit strategies as needed (3.18).

Through its system of academic administration and faculty participation, the institution demonstrates an effective system of academic oversight, assuring the quality of the academic program wherever and however it is offered (4.5).

The institution demonstrates its clear and ongoing authority and administrative oversight for the academic elements of all courses for which it awards institutional credit or credentials. These responsibilities include course content, the specification of required competencies, and the delivery of the instructional program; selection, approval, professional development, and evaluation of faculty; admission, registration, and retention of students; evaluation of prior learning; and evaluation of student progress, including the awarding and recording of credit. The institution retains, even with contractual, dual enrollment, or other arrangements, responsibility for the design, content, and delivery of courses for which academic credit or degrees are awarded. The institution awarding a joint, dual, or concurrent degree demonstrates that the program is consistent with Commission policy and that the student learning outcomes meet the institution's own standards and those of the Commission (4.32).

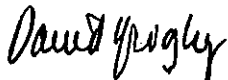
Finally, the Commission appreciates the Universities' commitment to ensuring that the courses and instructional faculty for the proposed certificate programs will be "held to the same standards of academic quality that apply to [each institution's] face-to-face programs." We note with favor that the programs will participate in the Academic Quality Assessment and Development process that incorporates an analysis of students' academic success. The Spring 2020 evaluation will afford the Universities an opportunity to demonstrate that the online inter-campus graduate certificate programs "are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution ... [and] are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus" (4.46).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the reports submitted by University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and University of Massachusetts Amherst and hopes their preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. We appreciate your cooperation with 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 and the president of the University of Massachusetts System of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Robert J. Manning and Mr. Martin T. Meehan. 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 Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Robert J. Manning
Mr. Martin T. Meehan