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

March 19, 2001

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Dr. David G. Carter
President
Eastern Connecticut State University
83 Windham Street
Willimantic, CT 06226

Dear President Carter:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 2, 2001, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Eastern Connecticut State University:

that Eastern Connecticut State University be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a fifth-year report for consideration in Fall, 2005;

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

1. developing useful information on student retention and graduation rates, and enhancing the ability of the institution to track these rates by relevant student characteristics and make improvements based on the data;
2. further developing its role as the public liberal arts university of Connecticut by:
 - a. more clearly articulating the institution's mission and the implications of the mission for students, faculty and curriculum and programs;
 - b. developing a general education program and statement of student learning outcomes to reflect this mission;
 - c. ensuring that the roles of and support for faculty are appropriately aligned for the successful achievement of this mission;

3. further developing its system of assessment, linking assessment to a unified planning process, and using the results of assessment to improve educational effectiveness;

that the next comprehensive visit be scheduled for Fall, 2010.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

The continuation of Eastern Connecticut State University in accreditation is based on the Commission's finding that the University substantially meets the *Standards for Accreditation*. The institution is to be commended for its important state-approved mission as Connecticut's liberal arts university. Strong and stable administrative leadership, notable success in recruiting a diverse faculty, administrative staff, and student body, along with a widely shared sense of community mark Eastern Connecticut as an institution with many important successes. The Commission also notes with favor the recently completed construction of major new buildings, a sound and forward-looking master planning process, and more than \$112 million in new projects under design or in the early stages of construction. These efforts, along with significant reduction in deferred maintenance, help develop the campus as an increasingly desirable place to work and study.

The requirement of a fifth-year report is consistent with the Commission's policy on Periodic Review; its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution's current status. The areas to be given emphasis in the University's fifth-year report are matters related to our standards on *Mission, Programs and Instruction, Faculty and Planning and Evaluation*.

The Commission is concerned about the retention rate of students at Eastern Connecticut. Currently, the institution reports a first to second year retention rate of approximately 70 percent and a six-year graduation rate of about 35 percent (most recently reported for the 1993 cohort). It does not yet appear that the institution has useful data on retention and graduation by salient student characteristics. Also, while increased selectivity and improved academic indicators of the entering class may, by themselves, lead to improved retention, the Commission encourages the institution to continue the development and improvement of programs and services, such as the first-year program now being piloted, to improve student success. The Commission looks forward to indicators of improved success in this important area.

The development of Eastern Connecticut State University as the state's public liberal arts institution offering primarily undergraduate programs to a student body that is predominantly residential provides the institution with a distinctive and important mission. This designation originates from 1986, and the institution's more recent determination to align its programs, general education, and faculty with that mission marks a necessarily significant undertaking. While the institution has an appropriate mission statement, as the self-study notes, it is important to "refine [the institution's] definition of a liberal arts university." Successfully addressing this issue can help the institution align its resources and programs to the fulfillment of the mission. As noted in the Commission's standards, "The mission and purposes of the institution are widely understood by its trustees, faculty, and administration. They provide direction to the curricula and other activities. Specific objectives, reflective of the institution's overall mission and purposes, are developed for the institution's individual units" (1.3). While the Commission believes that the successful redesign of general education, the alignment of academic programs to support the liberal arts mission, and assuring that the roles and support for faculty are aligned with the mission are particularly important, it encourages the institution to more fully explore the

implications for all areas of the institution's functioning, including the institution's interaction with the public.

The Commission encourages focused attention to the development and implementation of a general education program appropriate to the mission of a public liberal arts university. The current general education program is characterized as a traditional distribution system, operating with little oversight and little support to build students' understanding of this important element of their program. As noted in the Commission's standards, "The general education requirement is coherent and substantive, and it embodies the institution's definition of an educated person. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation" (4.15).

Clearly, much of the institution's success in fulfilling its mission as a public liberal arts university depends on the faculty; as the institution moves more purposefully to address this mission, the Commission looks forward to its success in ensuring that "Faculty assignments and workloads are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. They are equitably determined to allow faculty members adequate time to provide effective instruction, participate in scholarship, research, and service compatible with the mission of the institution. Faculty workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change" (5.8). The institution has been fortunate to hire a significant number of new faculty recently, who join a capable core of dedicated longer-term faculty; more directed efforts to fully implement the mission must necessarily include ensuring consistent and appropriate assignments, evaluation, and support for faculty across the various departments. The Commission notes positively the reports of faculty collegiality, community, and mutual respect, as well as support for innovation in teaching; all are key assets.

The fifth-year interim report should also apprise the Commission of the institution's success in further developing its system of assessment. While currently, individual programs have stated objectives, there is no institutional statement of the educated person, and currently no plan for assessing student learning in the area of general education. While the institution has state mandates in the area of general education and finds that some of its programs, such as social work and biology, are active in this area, the Commission will look for the institution to develop an assessment plan that is consistent with its mission, inclusive of general education as well as the major fields of study, which demonstrates how the results of assessment are used to improve the academic program and experiences of students. "The institution systematically applies information obtained through its evaluation activities to inform institutional planning, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness especially as it relates to student achievement" (2.5). Also, "The institution evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives" (2.4).

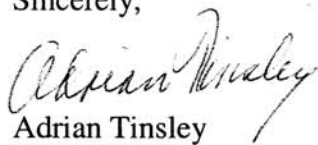
The Commission appreciates the opportunity to meet with you and with Dr. Christopher Dahl who chaired the visiting team. We also appreciate your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England and hope that the efforts made at continuing self-evaluation will contribute to the institutions' self-improvement.

You are encouraged to share this letter with members of the University community. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its requested reports. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Lawrence D. McHugh. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

Dr. David G. Carter
March 19, 2001
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Please contact Charles M. Cook, Director of the Commission, should you have any questions regarding the Commission's action on your report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Adrian Tinsley".

Adrian Tinsley

AT/slo

cc: Mr. Lawrence D. McHugh
Dr. William J. Cibes, Jr.
Visiting Team