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May 31, 2011

Dr. Elsa M. Nuñez
President
Eastern Connecticut State University
83 Windham Street
Willimantic, CT 06226-2295

Dear President Nuñez:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 14, 2011, 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 interim report for consideration in Fall 2015;

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

- 1) implementing assessment of the liberal arts core curriculum and using results for improvement;
- 2) ensuring an appropriate mix of full-time, part-time, and temporary faculty to maintain and enhance the quality of the academic program;
- 3) developing policies and practices to ensure and evaluate quality in on-line course offerings;
- 4) ensuring that multiple planning efforts and initiatives are coordinated and evaluated for effectiveness;
- 5) ensuring that board governance and budgetary systems enable the institution to continue to achieve its mission.

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2020.

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The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

We commend ECSU for an exceptionally thorough and candid self-study that documented the institution's notable progress since the last comprehensive evaluation. We concur with the visiting team that strong presidential leadership has engendered a sense of community and transparency throughout the university, and that shared institutional commitment has contributed to a focused sense of mission, alignment of resources to meet that mission, and commitment to the strategic planning process. We note with favor that the institution's revision of the liberal arts core has been both ambitious and forward-thinking. We particularly commend the institution's focus on student success and its detailed attention to the retention and graduation rates of different segments of its student population. With its strong leadership, dedicated faculty and staff, and its well-managed infrastructure and facilities, ECSU is solidly positioned for future success.

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 included in all fifth-year reports, the University is asked, in Fall 2015, to report on five matters related to our Standards on *The Academic Program, Faculty, Planning and Evaluation, and Organization and Governance*.

We are heartened by the ECSU's ongoing progress in the assessment of student learning, as demonstrated by its thoughtful evaluation of various assessment measures and its implementation of the assessment recommendations of a Spring 2010 task force. However, we share the visiting team's concern that assessment has been somewhat fragmented in the past and that there is not yet a comprehensive assessment plan for the University. The report prepared for Fall 2015 will afford the opportunity for the institution to discuss how it has planned and implemented an assessment of the liberal arts core curriculum and used the results for improvement of the program. We are guided by our standard on *The Academic Program* in this regard:

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.15).

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Data and other evidence generated through this approach are considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.45).

The materials submitted indicate that at the time of the team visit, almost 60% of the ECSU faculty were on either part-time or one-year temporary appointments, leaving only about 200 continuing full-time faculty to carry all student advising for an enrollment of 5,663 students. We note that the committee work required for an effective shared governance system and the scholarly obligations appropriate to a liberal arts institution are also carried by this small group of core faculty. We are gratified to learn that the University received approval to conduct five tenure-track searches, and an additional six tenure-track hires will be made in Fall 2011. Nonetheless, we wish to be assured that the consistency of instruction and stability of the faculty is preserved for the future. We look forward to learning, in the report prepared for Fall 2015, of the institution's success in ensuring a mission-appropriate mix of full-time, part-time, and

temporary faculty that will enable it to reach its full potential as a public liberal arts university. Our standard on *Faculty* is relevant here:

There 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. Responsibilities of teaching faculty include instruction and the systematic understanding of effective teaching/learning processes and outcomes in courses and programs for which they share responsibility; additional duties may include such functions as student advisement, academic planning, and participation in policy-making, course and curricular development, research, and institutional governance (5.3).

Faculty assignments and workloads are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. They are equitably determined to allow faculty adequate time to provide effective instruction, advise and evaluate students, contribute to program and institutional assessment and improvement, continue professional growth, and participate in scholarship, research, creative activities and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution. Faculty workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change (5.7).

The institution avoids undue dependence on part-time faculty, adjuncts, and graduate assistants to conduct classroom instruction. Institutions that employ a significant proportion of part-time, adjunct, clinical or temporary faculty assure their appropriate integration into the department and institution and provide opportunities for faculty development (5.8).

We take favorable note of the institution's creation in Fall 2010 of recommendations for ensuring quality in on-line courses; these include setting course design requirements, providing faculty training, offering technical skill remediation for students, and conducting a special curriculum review. The report prepared for Fall 2015 will afford the opportunity to update the Commission on the implementation of these recommendations, in keeping with our standard on *The Academic Program*:

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 (4.2).

We are pleased to learn that ECSU's planning efforts have been broad-based, transparent, and effective, setting a long-term strategic direction for the University. We share the opinion of the visiting team that with multiple planning initiatives under way (e.g., strategic plan, ten-year facilities master plan, academic plan), coordination of plans across the institution and evaluation of their effectiveness will be essential to their successful implementation. We anticipate that the recent appointment of a Strategic Plan Assessment Coordinator and development of an intranet site will facilitate the collection and dissemination of evaluative data across all planning initiatives. The report prepared for Fall 2015 will afford the opportunity for ECSU to update the Commission on its successful integration and coordination of planning efforts. We are guided by our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

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 determines the effectiveness of its planning and evaluation activities on an ongoing basis. Results of these activities are used to further enhance the institution's implementation of its purposes and objectives (2.7).

We understand that there may be future changes in the structure of ECSU's governing board. The report prepared for Fall 2015 will provide an opportunity to demonstrate that governance and budgetary changes have strengthened the institution, while enabling it to function effectively and fulfill its mission as a public liberal arts institution. This is in keeping with our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

In multi-campus systems organized under a single governing board, the division of responsibility and authority between the system office and the institution is clear. Where system and campus boards share governance responsibilities or dimensions of authority, system policies and procedures are clearly defined and equitably administered (3.9).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2020 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 Eastern Connecticut State University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and R. Barbara Gitenstein, 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 Richard J. Balducci. 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,



Mary Jo Maydew

MJM/dmc

Enclosure

cc: Richard J. Balducci
Visiting team