



Founded in 1885

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

JEAN A. WYLD, Chair (2015)
Springfield College

PATRICIA MAGUIRE MESERVEY, Vice Chair (2014)
Salem State University

DAVID F. FINNEY (2013)
Champlain College

WILFREDO NIEVES (2013)
Capital Community College

LINDA S. WELLS (2013)
Boston University

ANDREW B. EVANS (2014)
Wellesley College

DAVID S. GRAVES (2014)
Laureate Hospitality, Art & Design

R. BRUCE HITCHNER (2014)
Tufts University

MARY ELLEN JUKOSKI (2014)
Mitchell College

DAVID L. LEVINSON (2014)
Norwalk Community College

BRUCE L. MALLORY (2014)
University of New Hampshire

CHRISTOPHER J. SULLIVAN (2014)
Concord, NH

DAVID P. ANGEL (2015)
Clark University

G. TIMOTHY BOWMAN (2015)
Harvard University

DAVID E.A. CARSON (2015)
Hartford, CT

THOMAS L.G. DWYER (2015)
Johnson & Wales University

JOHN F. GABRANSKI (2015)
Haydenville, MA

WILLIAM F. KENNEDY (2015)
Boston, MA

KAREN L. MUNCASTER (2015)
Boston Architectural College

JON S. OXMAN (2015)
Auburn, ME

CHRISTINE ORTIZ (2015)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

JACQUELINE D. PETERSON (2015)
College of the Holy Cross

ROBERT L. PURA (2015)
Greenfield Community College

REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. (2015)
Providence College

Director of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
bbrittingham@neasc.org

Deputy Director of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
pobrien@neasc.org

Associate Director of the Commission
CAROL L. ANDERSON
canderson@neasc.org

Associate Director of the Commission
ROBERT C. FROH
rfroh@neasc.org

Associate Director of the Commission
PAULA A. HARBECKE
pharbecke@neasc.org

April 2, 2013

Dr. Carolyn Martin
President
Amherst College
P.O. Box 5000
Amherst, MA 01002-5000

Dear President Martin:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 8, 2013, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the fifth-year interim report submitted by Amherst College and voted to take the following action:

that the fifth-year interim report submitted by Amherst College be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring, 2018 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring, 2018 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. evaluating the effectiveness of the organizational restructuring that created the office of the Provost to provide greater capacity and better coordination for planning across the campus;
2. addressing the issue of faculty workload, working conditions, and compensation;
3. addressing the institution's goals to increase faculty diversity to meet or exceed the pace of peer institutions, with particular attention to the institution's success with recruitment and creating a supportive environment for faculty from a range of backgrounds;
4. implementing college-wide assessment and reporting including evaluating the effectiveness of new measurement tools and surveys and of the augmented staff support within the office of Institutional Research;
5. implementing its strategic planning project.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The Commission commends Amherst College for its detailed report that describes the significant progress the College has made with the six areas of emphasis articulated in the Commission's letter of January 12, 2009 and that effectively addresses how the institution continues to fulfill each of the *Standards for Accreditation*.

We note with favor the College's success in accomplishing its goals in challenging economic times. We are pleased to learn that the "downsizing" undertaken by Amherst College to address the economic recession was accomplished without terminations and that the College was able to increase its financial aid by 35% and accomplish priority capital projects including renovation of the science center and expansion of residence hall space. The College has reorganized and expanded its writing and quantitative skills centers and created pathways to enable students to succeed in quantitative programs. We understand that the institution has clarified the goals of its first-year seminars to support greater intentionality and the adoption of a common pedagogy. We note with approval the College's increased capacity in institutional research, which has enabled the institution to assess the impact of reformulated student learning goals and to extend its assessment efforts to the co-curriculum and other areas of student life. We take favorable note of the work of the ad-hoc committee on advising and appreciate the College's candid acknowledgement that improving advising will be an "arduous process." To address the workload required of faculty committees, the College has, on a trial basis, given each member for the Committee of Six a one-course relief for academic years 2011 to 2014. We understand that advising and faculty workload are issues that will continue to be addressed through the strategic planning project.

Amherst College addressed each of the standards in its report, and we note that the institution's leadership has made significant progress in transitioning from a decade-long cycle of planning and implementation to the development of a comprehensive ongoing strategic planning project. A provisional schedule has been designed with a goal to present a final plan for approval by the College's trustees in early 2014.

In the "Assessment, Retention, and Student Success" section of the report, the institution documented its efforts to establish a robust clearinghouse of survey data that provides evidence of student and alumni educational experiences and success. We note that assessment, retention, and student success will also be integral to the strategic planning project.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring, 2018 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 matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, The Academic Program, Faculty, and Integrity*.

We note positively that in response to identified limitations of faculty committees to engage in long-term planning, the institution created the office of the Provost and improved access to institutional data. The College intends to review all aspects of the residential college, acknowledging that "planning and organizational reform have not kept pace with the increasing scale and complexity of the responsibilities of various units" within student life programs. Of particular interest, this will include development of learning goals for the co-curriculum and other areas of student life. We welcome information about the College's success in addressing these challenges as part of the self-study prepared for Spring 2018. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, and Students* inform us here:

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness. (2.2)

Faculty exercise an important role in assuring the academic integrity of the institution's educational programs. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise. (3.12)

Through its system of board and internal governance, the institution ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key considerations. (3.14)

Institutions with stated goals for students' co-curricular learning systematically assess their achievement. (6.20)

The report submitted by Amherst College indicates that the strategic planning project will address issues of faculty workload, working conditions, and compensation. The report acknowledges the challenges that the College's faculty face in balancing engagements in career and life and coping with the rate of faculty retirements, and how tenured faculty are pressed with additional work such as chairing departments and hiring, mentoring, and evaluating untenured colleagues. As part of the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation in Spring, 2018, we would like to learn about the College's success in addressing the issues of faculty workload, working conditions, and compensation, as guided by our standard on *Faculty*:

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)

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)

We understand that institutional expansion and rapid turnover of faculty, "as much as a third of the faculty within the last eight years," have created the opportunity for Amherst to hire faculty in support of its goals to align the diversity of its faculty with that of its student body and to increase faculty diversity to meet or exceed the pace of its peer institutions. As part of the next self-study, we would like to be informed about the College's success in achieving its goals for faculty diversity, with particular interest in the institution's success with recruitment and creating a supportive environment for faculty from a range of backgrounds. Our standards on *Faculty* (cited above and below) and *Integrity* should be helpful here:

The institution employs an open and orderly process for recruiting and appointing its faculty. Faculty participate in the search process for new members of the instructional staff. The institution ensures equal employment opportunity consistent with legal requirements

and any other dimensions of its own choosing; compatible with its mission and purposes, it addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty. Faculty selection reflects the effectiveness of this process and results in a variety of intellectual backgrounds and training. Each prospective faculty member is provided with a written contract that states explicitly the nature and term of the initial appointment and, when applicable, institutional considerations that might preclude or limit future appointments. (5.4)

The institution ... fosters an atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds. (11.5)

We note with favor that to continue its work on the assessment of student learning, the institution intends to make more explicit the definition of academic goals. Increased staff support within the office of Institutional Research will provide assistance to academic departments as they develop better tools and measures of student learning and greater access to data. Through the 2018 comprehensive evaluation, we welcome information regarding the effectiveness of these and other steps taken by the institution to enhance college-wide assessment and reporting. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program* provide guidance here:

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness. (2.2)

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)

Expectations for student learning reflect both the mission and character of the institution and general expectations of the larger academic community for the level of degree awarded and the field of study. These expectations include statements that are consistent with the institution's mission in preparing students for further study and employment, as appropriate. (4.50)

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, and includes external perspectives. The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning are trustworthy and provide information useful in the continuing improvement of programs and services for students. (4.54)

We understand that Amherst College will seek approval for its strategic planning project from the institution's Board of Trustees in early 2014. The strategic planning steering committee will then guide the College in formulating needs and aspirations as well as mechanisms for planning and evaluation in four domains: finance, facilities, curriculum and pedagogy, and student life. The self-study prepared for the 2018 comprehensive evaluation will provide the institution the opportunity to report on the success of its strategic planning efforts. Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* (cited above and below) provides guidance for how the institution evaluates its progress here:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and

Dr. Carolyn Martin

April 2, 2013

Page 5

responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities. (2.3)

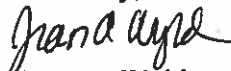
The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its system of evaluation is designed to provide relevant and trustworthy information to support institutional improvement, with an emphasis on the academic program. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods. (2.5)

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Amherst College 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.

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 Mr. Cullen Murphy. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,


Jean A. Wyld

JAW/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Cullen Murphy