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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Dr. Judith A. Ramaley  
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Dear President Ramaley:

It is my pleasure to inform you that at its meeting on November 11, 1999, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with regard to the University of Vermont:

that the University of Vermont be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Spring, 2004;

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

1. developing and implementing its strategic plan and budget, and achieving its goals;
2. fulfilling the objectives of the capital campaign now being planned, and developing other measures for augmenting revenues;
3. developing assessment activities, the results of which are used to validate the success of, as well as improve the institution's educational effectiveness in the areas of budgeting, programmatic support, and student learning;
4. enhancing enrollment and retention, including addressing issues of diversity, in keeping with the institution's own goals;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring, 2009.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Continuation of the University of Vermont's accreditation is based upon the Commission's finding that its *Standards* are being substantially met by the institution.

The Commission commends the University for its detailed and broadly participatory self-study. From the University's report, as well as from the findings of the visiting team, it is apparent that the University of Vermont is a healthy, vibrant institution with renewed vitality, a clear identity, and good morale—much of which is due to the excellent leadership of its recently appointed president.

Despite the campus' chronic funding problems, information technology is in remarkably good shape, under the direction of very capable library leadership. In this regard, it is evident that the institution has a clear commitment to quality undergraduate education, choosing to remain a Research II institution. This is reflected in the president's strategic focus on programmatic areas that include liberal arts/undergraduate education, health, the environment, and technology.

Clearly, the institution enjoys the effective leadership of a president with a widely shared vision for the University of Vermont and a firm grasp of the strategic actions necessary to achieve that vision. Of concern, however, is the extent to which sustained progress will depend on the president's continued leadership over the long-term. The University's Board of Trustees has traditionally reviewed University of Vermont presidents annually and publicly, and presidents receive one-year contracts. As the visiting team writes in its report, and we concur, "...we are concerned about the extraordinarily large number of presidents (reportedly four, including interim appointments) and provosts (reportedly eight) who have served the University since the last self-study. We received no information to suggest that this unusual provision for annual terms (as opposed to the more common three or five-year terms of office) is responsible for this high rate of turn-over at the top. Yet we suggest that the Board of Trustees may want to ponder whether appropriate incentives and situational protections are in place to encourage senior leaders to be both creative and vigorous in their leadership and long lived."

In keeping with the spirit of our standards, the Commission urges the Trustees to consider the benefits of longer-term contracts, since stability of leadership is key to long-range planning and effective institutional operation. We also would remind them that reshaping the institution and redirecting budget allocations are likely to lead to political frictions on campus, at least for a time, until changes are accepted. The president will need the support of the Trustees during this period.

Commission policy requires a 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. The items identified for particular emphasis are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Programs and Instruction, Faculty*, and the CIHE "Policy Statement on Institutional Effectiveness."

In the past two-and-a-half years the current president has brought much-needed stability to the University after a decade of rapid turnover in leadership positions. In addition, the president has engaged in leading a campus-wide discussion of key areas of emphasis and priorities for the University of Vermont — a discussion that should provide the basis for a reshaping of the institution to be accomplished through both strategic budgeting and investment, and through a capital campaign with fundraising to support specific priorities. Taken together, these produce a meaningful linkage between goals, planning, budgeting, and fundraising. The president has also worked very effectively with a state-wide K-16 education coalition to improve state funding for

education. As a result, the state appropriation increased significantly in the last year, though it is still meager. The president anticipates rising allocations in the future.

By means of the fifth-year interim report, the Commission looks forward to learning of the success that the University has had in developing and implementing its strategic plan and budget.

Similarly, there are plans that assessment of student learning outcomes, still being developed, will be linked to campus-wide educational priorities and program-level goals. This is laudable, since there is commendable candor about the extent to which existing assessment/evaluation efforts have produced data but have not necessarily led to the use of the data for improvement.

By means of the fifth-year interim report, the Commission is interested in learning of the success that the University has had in creating a "culture of assessment" in which the results of assessment efforts are used to improve educational effectiveness, including budgeting, programmatic support, and student learning. Relevant Commission standards are:

The institution evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its evaluative procedures are appropriate and effective for addressing its unique circumstances. To the extent possible, evaluation enables the institution to demonstrate through verifiable means its attainment of purposes and objectives both inside and outside the classroom. (*Planning and Evaluation*, 2.4)

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. (*Planning and Evaluation*, 2.5)

Diversity remains a concern for the institution, in regard to student enrollment and retention, faculty recruitment and retention, and as a step toward improving learning opportunities for students. The president is pursuing a range of very creative efforts—above and beyond the recruitment of diverse faculty, students, and staff—to ensure that University of Vermont students will be exposed to a diverse range of people and cultural experiences. However, as the visiting team notes in its report, the "University of Vermont ideally wants to see minority representation reflect approximately the same demographic proportions as exist in American society. Yet those with whom we spoke believe...that this goal is difficult to achieve even in the best of circumstances..." The visiting team further reports, and we concur, "While the University of Vermont seems to be working to address issues of diversity, objectives are not clearly defined....Recruiting goals should be realistic and clear. University of Vermont's leaders should continue to advocate diversity, and they should be prepared to demonstrate the educational advantages of a heterogeneous learning environment."

By means of the fifth-year interim report, the Commission looks forward to hearing of the success that the University has had in enhancing student enrollment and retention and faculty recruitment and retention relative to addressing issues of diversity. Relevant Commission standards are:

The institution has an orderly and ethical program of admission which complies with the requirements of legislation concerning equality of educational opportunity. It endeavors to develop a student body which as a whole is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve. (*Programs and Instruction*, 4.33)

The institution employs an open and orderly process for recruiting and appointing its faculty members. Faculty participate in the search process for new members of the

instructional staff. The institution observes pertinent legal requirements related to equal employment opportunity and compatible with its mission and purposes, addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity of race, gender, and ethnicity. (*Faculty*, 5.4)

Finally, the scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring, 2009 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive visit 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.

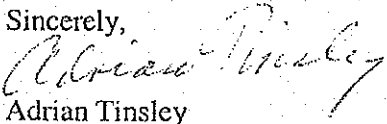
The Commission expressed its appreciation for the self-study prepared by the University of Vermont and for the evaluation report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, as well as the team chairperson, Dr. John T. Casteen III, during its deliberations.

You are encouraged to share this letter and the team's complete report with all of the University of Vermont'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. Frank A. Bolden. 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 in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

If you have any questions about the Commission's actions, please contact Charles M. Cook, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,

  
Adrian Tinsley

AT/ams

cc: Mr. Frank A. Bolden  
Visiting Team