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May 1, 2014

Mr. E. Thomas Sullivan, J.D.  
President  
University of Vermont  
85 South Prospect Street, 349 Waterman Building  
Burlington, VT 05405-0160

Dear President Sullivan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 6, 2014 the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the fifth-year interim report submitted by University of Vermont and voted to take the following action:

that the fifth-year interim report submitted by University of Vermont be accepted;

that the institution be granted general approval to offer distance education programming within the scope of its mission;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2019 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2019 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) implementing its strategic plan, with emphasis on initiatives related to general education and transdisciplinary research;
- 2) continuing to implement assessment initiatives, including those related to academic program review, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), and the Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT);
- 3) developing and implementing a campus master plan that includes a plan to address deferred maintenance;
- 4) implementing its new budget model and achieving its goals for the diversification of revenue and the comprehensive campaign.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The fifth-year interim report submitted by University of Vermont (UVM) was accepted because it addressed the matters raised by the Commission in its letters of January 14, 2010 and January 23, 2013, addressed each of the eleven standards, and included a reflective essay on student learning and success.

The Commission commends University of Vermont (UVM) for a thorough, candid report. We are pleased to learn that the Strategic Action Plan, which includes four strategic goals on access, academic excellence, investments, and efficiencies, has been “widely disseminated and is used in all campus planning efforts.” We take favorable note that the University is “on the threshold” of establishing an institution-wide undergraduate general education program and of the progress made in the Writing and Information Literacy initiative. The Commission acknowledges the strategic investments made in three major areas of strength: Transdisciplinary Research Initiative (TRI), Envisioning Environment, and the Humanities Center. We understand that UVM is in the process of hiring a permanent Dean for the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources and a Director of the Humanities Center who will together continue to lead initiatives in these areas. We are pleased to note that enrollment management and financial aid strategies have enabled the University to achieve its tuition revenue targets in the last five years. The University established a three-year operating budget plan to return the budget to “structural balance,” and we note with approval that a positive fund balance was achieved at the end of the second year of the plan. The Commission is gratified to learn that the University has increased its technology security efforts. In 2011 the Information Security Office was established, and an independent external assessment of this area confirmed the security of key institutional information systems.

We commend the University on the progress it has made since the 2009 self-study with respect to the assessment of student learning. The institution has developed student learning outcomes and assessment measures, revised curricula through mapping, and established predictive models as benchmarks for the general education program. UVM assesses student engagement and success through several surveys: Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, and Recent Graduate Survey. We are pleased to learn that the institution is conducting collaborative university-wide assessment initiatives as part of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). A comparison of the results from two assessment initiatives of students’ critical thinking, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CTAT), was conducted over the past two years. The institution was able to increase the number of participants in this project and is in the preliminary stages of analysis to identify the critical thinking skill levels and contributing factors to student success. We are pleased to learn that, in 2010, UVM completed reviews of all its academic programs and has made explicit improvements to its eight-year cycle process, program-level student learning outcomes and measures, and action plans.

University of Vermont is granted general approval to offer distance education programs within the scope of its mission because the institution has demonstrated its capacity to offer high-quality academic programs in an online format. We commend the institution for its progress in enhancing its distance education programs by reviewing and updating its policies and procedures, creating and implementing its Guidelines for Developing and Administering Distance and Online Education, centralizing the management of distance education through the Division of Continuing and Distance Education, and strengthening advising. We are pleased to learn that the Nursing and Health Science faculty are “successful leaders” in online education and that faculty are required to complete the Teaching Effectively Online course. We note with approval UVM’s successful launch of the online certificate of graduate study in Public Health and of students’ general satisfaction with the program, including clinical placements and practicum experiences.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2019 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*, *The Academic Program*, *Physical and Technological Resources* and *Financial Resources*.

The Commission is pleased to learn that UVM has established eight “academic excellence goals” to “animate” its Strategic Action Plan and has developed short-term and long-term plans for its Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Initiative, academic program review, and assessment of student learning in general education. We note with favor the University’s plan to make “thoughtful, strategic investments” in its Transdisciplinary Research Initiative to gain national and international visibility. The self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2019 comprehensive evaluation will enable the institution to provide evidence of its implementation of its strategic and academic plans, as specified in our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.4).

We commend the University of Vermont for its development of a comprehensive system of academic program review. We understand that the first cycle of reviews has been completed and that the process has been revised to be “more effective in the formative and summative assessment” of academic programs and to support “robust assessment of student outcomes at the program level.” UVM also plans to continue to assess the critical thinking skills of students using the CLA and CTAT assessment tools, to compare the effectiveness of these two methods of measurement and to provide information to support the improvement of teaching and learning. We anticipate being apprised, in Spring 2019, of UVM’s progress in implementing its assessment initiatives, as guided by our standard on *The Academic Program*:

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).

The institution’s approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

The institution’s system of periodic review of academic programs includes a focus on understanding what and how students learn as a result of the program (4.52).

The Commission is pleased to learn that the University of Vermont updated its Housing Master Plan in 2013 and intends to update the Campus Master Plan in 2016. We note that deferred maintenance, estimated at \$321 million, has been “a major agenda item” for the Board of Trustees and that the University is developing long-term plans to address this issue. We look forward to learning, in Spring 2019, of the University’s success in undertaking “physical resource planning linked to academic and student services, support functions, and financial planning” and in planning “the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs” (8.4).

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Finally, we are pleased to learn of UVM's adoption of Incentive Based Budgeting (IBB), a change the institution views as an "evolutionary process." We understand the University's plans for the diversification of revenue include recruitment of international students and expansion of online programs. The Spring 2019 comprehensive evaluation will afford University of Vermont an opportunity to report on its success in implementing its IBB model and achieving its goals for the diversification of revenue. Our standard on *Financial Resources* provides guidance here:

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 (9.3).

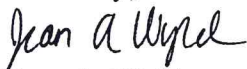
The institution ensures the integrity of its finances through prudent financial management and organization, a well-organized budget process, appropriate internal control mechanisms, risk assessment, and timely financial reporting to internal and external constituency groups, providing a basis for sound financial decision-making (9.7).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by University of Vermont 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 Ms. Deborah McAneny. 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, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

  
Jean A. Wyld

JAW/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Deborah McAneny