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November 25, 2019

Dr. Suresh Garimella
President
University of Vermont
85 South Prospect Street, 349 Waterman Building
Burlington, VT 05405-0160

Dear Dr. Garimella:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 20, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Vermont:

that University of Vermont be continued in accreditation;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2024;

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

- 1) implementing its plans to revise its general education curriculum;
- 2) engaging in strategic planning and campus master planning;
- 3) implementing initiatives to assure the effectiveness of academic advising and career services;
- 4) implementing a systematic approach to the assessment of student learning and using the results for improvement;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2029.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

University of Vermont is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends University of Vermont (UVM) for a thoughtful, reflective self-study that was developed through a participatory process that

engaged the campus community. Along with the team, we acknowledge the institution's many strengths, including the "admirable commitment" of faculty to student success, the "strong collaborative and collegial culture" among the University's Deans and Associate Deans, "mission-driven" staff, a "highly successful" Foundation, the "outstanding" programs offered by its Student Affairs Division, and the transparency achieved by the institution's IBB budget model. We are gratified to learn of the commitment of the institution's governing board and effectiveness of the University's internal governance processes, and we note with favor the institution's commitment to the review of its academic programs and its administrative units. UVM has experienced growth in both undergraduate and graduate student populations and has enjoyed modest success in increasing the diversity of its student body. We commend the University for its "highest ever" graduation rate of 69.4%, undergraduate retention rates in the mid-70% range, and post-graduation employment rates of 70% or higher. We share the judgment of the visiting team that University of Vermont is well-positioned to continue to fulfill its mission and achieve its vision to "be among the nation's premiere small research universities."

Commission policy requires an interim (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. In addition to the information included in all interim reports the University is asked, in Spring 2024, to report on four matters related to our standards on *The Academic Program; Planning and Evaluation; Institutional Resources; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Students; and Educational Effectiveness*.

The Commission appreciates University of Vermont's candid acknowledgment that its current general education program, with 15 common credits and 25 credits distributed across diverse colleges and schools, represents a "missed opportunity to define the meaning of a UVM education" for the institution's undergraduates, and we share the observation of the visiting team that this approach to general education can "deter student mobility across the curriculum." We are, therefore, gratified to learn that UVM has convened a General Education Alignment Task Force that will bring a proposal for a centrally approved and assessed 40-credit general education curriculum to the institution's Faculty Senate for consideration in Spring 2020. We understand that the Task Force has outlined a five-year implementation plan that projects a start date of Fall 2021 and "full integration" of the new curriculum into the UVM student experience by Fall 2023. In keeping with our standard on *The Academic Program*, we look forward to learning, through the Spring 2024 interim report, of the University of Vermont's success in implementing its plans for the revision of its general education curriculum:

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 (4.16).

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another (4.17).

The institution ensures that all undergraduate students complete at least the equivalent of 40 semester credits in a bachelor's degree program, or the equivalent of 20 semester credits in an associate's degree program in general education (4.18).

The Commission understands that, with the arrival of a new president at University of Vermont in July 2019, the institution is adopting "new strategic priorities and implementation timeline" in

Fall 2019. The University is “confident” that efforts to reorient planning around these new priorities will “foster more coherent and effective institution-wide planning.” We also note with favor that UVM will be developing a new campus master plan that will be integrated with its long-term financial planning. The Spring 2024 interim report will afford University of Vermont an opportunity to demonstrate that it engages in planning that is “systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution” (2.1). Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Institutional Resources* provide this additional guidance:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

The Commission shares the concerns articulated in the self-study and the report of the visiting team about the consistency of academic advising at University of Vermont. We note that, to improve the quality of advising for students across the University, the institution has adopted the EAB Student Success Collaborative software, Navigate; following a pilot with select faculty in Spring 2019, the software is expected to be available to all faculty in Fall 2019. We are also gratified to learn that a working group of Student Government Association representatives, student-service professionals, faculty, and the Division of Enrollment Management will continue to discuss ways to enhance the advising experience at UVM. We further note the intention of the University to engage in a “coordinated campus-wide effort” to prepare students for life after graduation from UVM that will involve enhancing career services and opportunities for internships, research, and study abroad. We look forward, in Spring 2024, to learning of the institution’s success in assuring that its “system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives” (6.19). This section of the interim report will also be informed by our standard on *Students*:

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution’s faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students’ academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

While acknowledging the “significant and substantive progress” made by University of Vermont to institute best practices for the assessment of student learning, the Commission concurs with the visiting team that greater consistency is needed across the University with respect to the implementation of assessment efforts and the use of data. We understand UVM is undertaking a “data-centralization effort” through which all data analyst positions will be consolidated under the newly renamed Office of Institutional Research and Assessment; the expectation is that the new structure will provide “integrated support” leading to more effective use of institutional data, including data about student learning. The University is also evaluating assessment-staffing needs and anticipates the addition of a coordinator who will focus on supporting assessment of general education outcomes and program-level outcomes. We ask that the Spring 2024 interim report provide an update on the University of Vermont’s progress in implementing its plans to enhance the effectiveness of its assessment efforts. We remind you of our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

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).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2029 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.

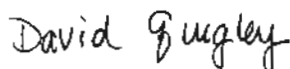
The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Vermont and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Patricia Prelock, Interim Provost and Senior Vice President, Jennifer Dickinson, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, and David M. Dooley, 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 Corinne Thompson. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David Quigley

DQ/sjp

Enclosure

cc: David Daigle
Visiting team