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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

January 23, 2013

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**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 November 16, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report submitted by University of Vermont regarding its plans to offer distance education programming and took the following action:

that the report on distance education submitted by University of Vermont be accepted, and the proposed distance education programming be included within the institution's accreditation, with an effective date of November 16, 2012;

that approval for distance education be limited to the Certificate of Graduate Study in Public Health, Master in Public Health, Master of Science in Communication Science and Disorders, Master of Science in Natural Resources with a concentration in Environmental Leadership, and the RN-to-BS programs and the University be reminded that plans to offer additional programs through distance education need to be submitted to the Commission for approval prior to implementation;

that the fifth-year interim report scheduled for consideration in Spring 2014 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports and the matters specified in our letter of January 14, 2010, the Spring 2014 report provide an update on the University's implementation of its distance education programming, with emphasis on its success in:

1. providing practicum and clinical placements for students enrolled in online programs;
2. assessing student learning in online programs;
3. reviewing and if necessary revising academic policies to assure their relevance for the online environment;

that the institution may, in the report submitted for consideration in Spring 2014, request general approval to offer distance education programs within the scope of its mission.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The report submitted by University of Vermont (UVM) was accepted and the distance education programming encompassed within the institution's accreditation because the Commission finds the activity to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies.

We commend the University for its thoughtful proposal to offer distance education programming consistent with its mission and vision. We note with favor that the planning process for each program was well integrated into University governance and that responsibility for programs will lie first with the faculty within the academic unit and then with the Deans and Provost. We understand that a mix of full-time and part-time faculty will teach in the programs, and we are gratified to learn of the extensive online resources provided by the Center for Teaching and Learning, including the "Teaching Effectively Online" course that is required of all faculty who teach in distance education programs. We commend the University for its attention to providing online students with access to library and information resources as well as appropriate student services, including academic advising. The University maintains a comprehensive technological infrastructure sufficient to support its distance education programming. Enrollment and budget projections are realistic; the institution has committed an initial budget of \$1.5 million and expects to generate net revenue from the programs within three to five years.

University of Vermont's approval for distance education is limited to the programs listed above because the institution lacks extensive experience offering programs for which 50% or more of the credits can be earned online. It is typically the case that before granting general approval to offer programs for which 50% or more of the credits can be completed entirely online, the Commission expects to see developed capacity for this learning modality and success with the initial programs. We remind you that any plans to offer additional online programs will need to be reviewed by the Commission, consistent with our Policy on Substantive Change.

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 and the matters specified in our letter of January 14, 2010, the University is asked, in Spring 2014, to provide an update on its distance education programming, with emphasis on three matters related to our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Organization and Governance*.

We understand that all of the proposed distance education programs except the M.S. in Natural Resources require a practicum or clinical experience. The report submitted for consideration in Spring 2014 will afford UVM an opportunity to demonstrate its success in finding practica and clinical placements for its online students, including those from other states. Our standard on *The Academic Program* is relevant here:

If the institution depends on resources outside its direct control (for example, classrooms, information resources, information technology, testing sites), provision is made for a clear, fixed understanding of that relationship that ensures the reasonable continued availability of those resources. Clear descriptions of the circumstances and procedures for the use of such resources are readily available to students who require them (4.13).

The institution ensures that students have systematic, substantial, and sequential opportunities to learn important skills and understandings and actively engage in

important problems of their discipline or profession and that they are provided with regular and constructive feedback designed to help them improve their achievement (4.53).

The Commission is gratified to learn of the plans UVM has developed to assess student learning in each of the proposed online programs and of the University's intention to include distance education programming in its program review process. We look forward to learning, in Spring 2014, of the University's success in assuring that its "[e]valuation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings and student learning" (4.55).

While the proposal submitted by the University indicates that "relevant policies of the University and Graduate College apply to online students," no mention is made of whether any changes to existing policies or procedures will be needed to accommodate the online environment (e.g., attendance, withdrawal dates, etc.). We anticipate being apprised, through the update included in the Spring 2014 report, of UVM's success in assuring that its policies and procedures for distance education are "clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness" (3.1).


We understand that UVM will consider the addition of other online graduate programs "as faculty interest and student demand warrant." Should the University wish to be considered for general approval to offer online programs within the scope of the institution's mission, the update included in the Spring 2014 interim report should also discuss the University's developed capacity for the online modality, as noted above.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by University of Vermont and hopes that its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. We appreciate your cooperation with 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. Robert Cioffi. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation 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/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Robert Cioffi