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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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June 4, 2014

Mr. Martin T. Meehan, J.D.
Chancellor
University of Massachusetts Lowell
Allen House
Two Solomont Way
Lowell, MA 01854

Dear Chancellor Meehan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 24, 2014, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Massachusetts Lowell:

that University of Massachusetts Lowell be continued in accreditation;

that the Spring 2015 on-site evaluations of the University's instructional locations in Kuwait and in Haverhill, Massachusetts be confirmed;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall 2018;

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

1. continuing to develop a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning, including general education, and using the results to inform program improvement;
2. providing sufficient resources to support and enhance the University's core mathematics curriculum;
3. ensuring adequate facilities and infrastructure to keep pace with institutional growth, utilizing clear and consistent criteria for resource allocation across units;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2023.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMASS Lowell) 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 Massachusetts Lowell for its informative and candid self-study documenting the institution's evolution into a comprehensive institution with a distinctive emphasis on technology that, over the past five years, has experienced remarkable enrollment growth and program expansion. We concur with the visiting team that UMASS Lowell's "aspirational and widely supported" strategic plan, UMASS Lowell 2020, articulates clear and measurable goals consistent with the University's mission and provides a "blueprint to achieve excellence." We note with favor the University's increasing use of data in its planning and decision-making processes, as demonstrated by the UMASS Lowell Report Card used to annually track the institution's progress to achieve the plan's goals against 25 benchmarks. We are pleased to learn that the University fosters an open and inclusive campus environment by engaging academic departments and administrative units in the budget process and by conducting semi-annual open meetings for faculty and staff to enhance communication. Improved undergraduate retention – from 75% in 2007 to 81% in 2012 – is noteworthy, as is the increasing selectivity and diversity of the institution's student body that topped 16,000 in Fall 2012. We are also aware of the impressive growth of full-time faculty, from 425 in Fall 2009 to 541 in Fall 2013, to keep pace with enrollment growth, and we recognize the steady increase in research, scholarship, and creative activities that aligns with the institution's strategic goal to "develop national and international recognition as a research university." UMASS Lowell's development of interdisciplinary programs, expanded online offerings, the Research Scholar Co-Op Program, and funding for mini-grants to encourage the development of service-learning programs reflect academic innovation and provide a rich curriculum for students. Overall, we share the visiting team's judgment that UMASS Lowell's committed Board, visionary chancellor and leadership team, talented faculty, and dedicated staff position it well to manage the extensive change underway and to achieve its ambition to be a "world-class" institution of higher education.

The Commission confirms the Spring 2015 on-site evaluations of the University's instructional locations at Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait and at Northern Essex Community College in Haverhill, Massachusetts. We remind you of our letters of April 8, 2013 and October 21, 2013, which specified matters to be addressed in these evaluations.

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 the University is asked, in Fall 2018, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Faculty*, *Physical and Technological Resources*, and *Financial Resources*.

We understand that, with the exception of computer science, all of the University's professional programs are accredited by a discipline-based accrediting body and that the UMASS System's Academic Quality Assessment and Development process is used to review programs that are not externally accredited. The institution's attention to assessment is further demonstrated by the regular assessment workshops conducted for faculty, its involvement in the state's Vision Project, the hiring of a Director of Assessment, and its plans to establish an assessment management team. As observed by the visiting team and acknowledged by the institution, however, development of a systematic process to measure student achievement of the institution's general education outcomes has been "slow." We therefore are encouraged that the new general education curriculum was approved by the Faculty Senate in Fall 2013 for implementation in Fall 2015, and that the work done to revise the core "identifies and maps learning outcomes more explicitly" and includes plans to develop new assessment strategies. As informed by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program*, the Fall 2018 report will provide an opportunity for the University to update the Commission on its

continued progress to develop a comprehensive approach to assessment, including successful implementation of the new core curriculum, and to provide evidence it uses the results to inform program improvement.

Based on verifiable information, the institution understands what its students have gained as a result of their education and has useful evidence about the success of its recent graduates. This information is used for planning and resource allocation and to inform the public about the institution (2.7).

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind (4.19).

... 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).

We share the observation of the visiting team that strengthening the institution's mathematics department/program will help UMASS Lowell "distinguish itself in the competitive area of science and technology universities." We therefore are pleased to learn that the University plans to hire two new full-time faculty at the associate level (with tenure) to support and enhance its mathematics program offerings. The Fall 2018 report will enable the institution to provide evidence that it "provides sufficient resources to sustain and improve its academic programs" (4.3).

Over the past five years, the addition of new facilities – totaling nearly one million gross square feet – to "effectively support the growing research, educational, and student life goals of the institution" is commendable as highlighted by construction of the Emerging Technology and Innovation Center, a Health and Social Sciences Building, and suite-style residences, as well as purchase of the Tsongas Sports Arena. We understand that UMASS Lowell's campus master plan, updated in 2013, contains 34 projects, and that \$25 million has been designated to fund repairs and renovations in each of the next five years. We are also encouraged to learn that the University's Space Committee and Capital Planning Committee work in tandem with the Strategic Planning Committee to inform facility projects. Finally, we concur with the visiting team that UMASS Lowell's rapid growth challenges the institution's infrastructure and utilization of space thereby heightening the need for clear and consistent criteria to allocate the University's resources. We ask that the Fall 2018 report give emphasis to the institution's success in ensuring that its facilities and infrastructure continue to keep pace with projected growth and in addressing the criteria used to allocate its resources. This request is in keeping with our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Physical and Technological Resources, and Financial Resources*:

Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.3).

The institution's physical and technological resources, including classrooms, laboratories, network infrastructure, materials, equipment, and buildings and grounds, whether owned or rented, are commensurate with institutional purposes (8.1).

The institution undertakes physical resource planning linked to academic and student services, support functions, and financial planning. It determines the adequacy of existing physical and technological resources and identifies and plans the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs. Space planning occurs on a regular basis as part of physical resource evaluation and planning, and is consistent with the mission and purposes of the institution (8.4).

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (9.1).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2023 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.

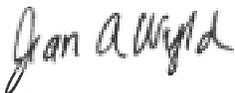
The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Massachusetts Lowell and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Ahmed Abdelal, Provost, and Joel Bloom, team chair, during its deliberations.

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 Mr. Henry Thomas III. 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 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,



Jean A. Wyld

JAW/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Henry Thomas III
Visiting Team



**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

3 Burlington Woods, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
Voice: (781) 425 7785 Fax: (781) 425 1001 Web: <http://cihe.neasc.org>

**Public Disclosure of Information
About Affiliated Institutions**

The following policy governs the release of information regarding the status of affiliated colleges and universities by institutions and by the Commission.

**1. Release of Information by Institutions Regarding Their Accreditation
Following Commission Action**

At the conclusion of the evaluation process institutions are encouraged to make publicly available information about their accreditation status including the findings of team reports and any obligations or requirements established by Commission action, as well as any plans to address stated concerns. Because of the potential to be misleading, institutions are asked not to publish or otherwise disseminate excerpts from these materials.

While the Commission does not release copies of self-studies, progress reports, evaluation reports, or other documents related to the accreditation of individual institutions, it believes it to be good practice for institutions to make these materials available, in their entirety, after notification of Commission action.

While the Commission does not initiate public release of information on actions of show cause or deferral, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

If an institution releases or otherwise disseminates information which misrepresents or distorts its accreditation status, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action publicly correcting any misleading information it may have disseminated, including but not limited to the accreditation status of the institution, the contents of evaluation reports, and the Commission actions with respect to the institution. Should it fail to do so, the New England Association, acting through its Chief Executive Officer, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information.

2. Published Statement on Accredited Status

The Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing on its website and in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

An institution may wish to include within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the New England Association indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the New England Association is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org

The shorter statement that an institution may choose for announcing its accredited status follows:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc., through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

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Accreditation by the New England Association has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the New England Association” or “this degree is accredited by the New England Association” are incorrect and should not be used.

3. **Published Statement on Candidate Status**

An institution granted Candidate for Accreditation status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Association:

_____ College (University) has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Candidacy for Accreditation is a status of affiliation with the Commission which indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward accreditation.

Candidacy is not accreditation nor does it assure eventual accreditation.

Inquiries regarding the status of an institution affiliated with the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the college or university. Individuals may also contact:

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org

4. **Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions by the Commission**

Upon inquiry, the Commission will release the following information about affiliated institutions:

- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the most recent on-site evaluation and subsequent Commission action on the institution's accredited status;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation;
- Submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required by the Commission;
- The extent of, or limitations on, the status of affiliation;
- In cases of adverse action (denial or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, placing an institution on probation), the Commission's reasons for recommending that status and, in the case of probation, its plans to monitor the institution. The Commission, in consultation with the institution, will prepare a written statement incorporating the above information. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the statement. The institution will also be offered the opportunity to make its official comment; if the institution does make an official comment, the comment will be made available by the Commission.
- For institutions whose candidacy or accreditation has been withdrawn, the date of, and reasons for, withdrawal.

The Commission does not provide information about deferments of action on candidate or accreditation status, or show-cause orders. However, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, revocation of candidacy, and withdrawal of accreditation) are communicated after the available appeals process is completed. The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before an appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

The Commission recognizes that, to be fully understood, information about the accredited status of institutions must be placed within the context of the policies

and procedures of the Commission and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

5. Public Disclosure of Institutional Actions

Within 30 days after the action on accreditation status is taken, the Commission will notify the Secretary of Education, New England state higher education officers, appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or withdraw the accreditation of an institution

Place an institution on probation

Approve substantive change (e.g., moving to a higher degree level)

A decision by an accredited or candidate institution to voluntarily withdraw from affiliation with the Commission.

November 1998

September 2001

April 2010

September 2011

Editorial Changes, March 2014

