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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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April 18, 2017

Dr. John J. Sbrega  
President  
Bristol Community College  
777 Elsbree Street  
Fall River, MA 02720

Dear President Sbrega:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on March 2, 2017, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report submitted by Bristol Community College and took the following action:

that the report submitted by Bristol Community College be accepted;

that the interim (fifth-year) report scheduled for Spring 2019 be confirmed;

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

1. implementing its model of shared governance, including the recommendations proposed by the governance task force;
2. assessing learning outcomes at all levels and using the results for continuous improvement;
3. assessing the effectiveness of changes made to student advising;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2024 be confirmed.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The report submitted by Bristol Community College was accepted because it was generally responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of December 2, 2014.

The Commission commends Bristol Community College (BCC) for its well-written and informative report documenting the progress made by the institution in each of the four areas requested. The Commission notes with

favor BCC's commitment to establishing more effective models of shared governance and regular communication across the College community to promote "shared governance, transparency, and mutual trust." We are pleased to learn of the collaborative shared governance initiatives implemented by the College including: development of an accessible online portal to share governance documents; use of technology to improve communication with colleagues at off-site locations; and participation of faculty and professional staff on the Academic Vice President's Council. College-wide guidelines and processes have been developed for academic program implementation, Title III grant applications, and curriculum development. The College's "significant strides" towards advancing a systematic approach to the assessment of student learning are to be commended. We note with favor that BCC has formed an Educational Effectiveness Committee and established a College-wide Assessment Day; appointed an Outcomes Assessment Fellow; offers professional development to faculty and staff; and participates in the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education Outcome Assessment pilot. The Commission is also pleased to learn of BCC's systematic review of its advising services and the use of the information gathered to "effectively increase consistency in services offered at all campus locations." Improvements resulting from the review include incorporation of peer advisors/mentors in the orientation program, the involvement of advisors in priority registration, and pre-advising services for students. The Commission is further pleased to learn of the College's "robust and growing" dual enrollment programs at Massachusetts high schools, and appreciate the improvements made "to ensure consistency of policies and guidelines for all courses and practices," as well as the closer working relationships between Academic Affairs and Enrollment Services to support these programs.

Commission policy requires an 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 interim reports, the College is asked, in Spring 2019, to provide further information about three of the matters discussed in the Spring 2017 report related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*; *Educational Effectiveness*; *Students*; and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

In its report, Bristol Community College notes that by the time it submits its interim report, it anticipates its shared governance will be "measurably improved" and "many successful collaborations" will be underway. We look forward to learning, in Spring 2019, of the institution's continued success in implementing improvements to governance, including the recommendations proposed by the governance joint task force. Our standard on *Organization and Governance* provides guidance for this section of the report:

The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and sponsoring entity (if any) are clearly described in the institution's by-laws, or an equivalent document, and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution's official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles (3.1).

The institution's organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.2).

Through its system of board and internal governance, the institution ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key considerations (3.17).

Bristol Community College also anticipates that within the next five years it will have completed a “full assessment cycle” and review of each general education competency. The Spring 2019 report will afford the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on its continued success in assessing student learning, with emphasis on the use of the assessment results for improvement. This section of the report should be informed by our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*:

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 institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

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).

Finally, as noted above, the Commission is pleased to learn of the Advising Pilot undertaken by Bristol Community College to improve student advising services, and we understand the College intends to assess the effectiveness of the pilot with the use of measures such as persistence rates, student entry from general studies into a specific major, and completion of developmental courses. We look forward, in the interim report submitted for consideration in Spring 2019, to receiving an update on the institution’s success in assessing the effectiveness of changes made to student advising, in keeping with our standards on *Students and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:

Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these goals and services and improve their achievement (5.20).

The institution’s system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2024 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Bristol Community College and hopes that its preparation 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.

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. Joseph A. Marshall. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission’s

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action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Joseph A. Marshall



## **Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions**

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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 or is otherwise made public, the Commission will respond to related inquiries and may issue a public statement.

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 Commission, acting through its President, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information. This may include release of notification letters sent by the Commission to the institution, and/or a press release.

## 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 Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by Commission 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 Commission 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 Commission 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](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)**

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

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

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission 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](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)**

Accreditation by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the Commission” or “this degree is accredited by the Commission” 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 Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. 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 Commission 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](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)**

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

The Commission publishes the following information about member and candidate institutions on its website:

- Name of the institution
- Accreditation status (member or candidate)
- Address
- Phone and fax numbers
- CEO name and title
- Degree levels awarded
- Dates of initial accreditation (or candidacy), last review and next review
- Locations of off-campus instructional sites

The Commission may also publish on its website a public statement about an action taken regarding a member or candidate institution when further information about the action and the Commission's reasons for taking the action would be helpful to members of the public.

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 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 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 on Institutions of Higher Education. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

The Commission does not generally 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 and may issue its own statement.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, and withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation) are communicated when the decision becomes final (i.e., when the institution does not appeal or when the appeals process is completed and the decision is upheld). The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before the decision is final or the appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

## 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 candidacy or 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*

*April 2015*