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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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December 2, 2014

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

Dear President Sbrega:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 18, 2014, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Bristol Community College:

that Bristol Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Spring 2017 that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:

1. establishing an effective model of shared governance with an emphasis on strengthening communication among constituents at the College;
2. implementing a systematic approach to assessing student learning outcomes with an emphasis on using the results for improvement;
3. establishing and implementing a comprehensive and effective approach to student advising;
4. assuring its dual enrollment programs offered in partnership with high schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are consistent with the Commission's Policy on Dual Enrollment Programs;

that the College submit an interim fifth-year report for consideration in Spring 2019;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the College give emphasis to its continued success in addressing the four matters specified for attention in the Spring 2017 progress report;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2024.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Bristol Community College (BCC) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

We commend Bristol Community College, the third largest community college in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for its comprehensive and candid self-study that demonstrates the institution's many strengths and accomplishments. As evidenced in its self-study and verified by the visiting team, the effectiveness of BCC's strategic initiatives, which focus on student success, sustainable growth and change, engaged campuses, and strong partnerships, is assessed annually, and assessment results are used to inform decision-making and foster continuous improvement. The team validated that, under the leadership of the Vice President of Academic Affairs, high-quality academic programming is delivered by faculty who are sufficient in number and appropriately qualified. We are heartened to learn that there are well-established academic and student support services in place that allow BCC students to acquire the literacy skills needed to succeed in college-level study or to enter the workforce, and these services are available to students on the main campus, at off-campus locations, and online. In particular, we appreciate learning from the team that the success of BCC's online offerings stems from the College's commitment to both online students and faculty. Through its self-study, the College provided evidence that BCC's comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning is evolving as demonstrated by the College's participation in the state's Higher Education pilot program involving three Liberal Education for America's Promise (LEAP) value rubrics, the re-directed focus of the Lash Center for Teaching and Learning (LCTL), and the transformation of the former Outcomes Assessment Team for Student Services into the Outcomes Assessment Committee (OAC). We note favorably that BCC's full-time retention rate has increased from 59.8% in FY2011 to 61.5% in FY2012 and, over the last five years, BCC has granted the highest number of associate degrees and certificates in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Finally, we concur with the judgment of the team that the institution should be commended for operating with a mission of open access, support, and equality, as well as for its success in fostering a "great deal of trust" among members of the campus community. With its engaged and supportive Board of Trustees, committed leadership team, and dedicated faculty and staff, Bristol Community College is well positioned for future success.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2017 are related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *The Academic Program*, and *Students*.

As noted by the team in its report and acknowledged by the College in its response, communication among various constituencies within the College is an "on-going challenge," given BCC's complex structure and large number of committees. We are gratified to learn that BCC's Central Committee, which oversees the institution's governance structure, will analyze the College's entire governance system and submit to the leadership team recommendations related to streamlining the process and integrating technology to "create more efficient and effective methods of college-wide communications ... lead[ing] to more inclusive governance." The report submitted for consideration in Spring 2017 will provide an opportunity for BCC to update the Commission on its progress in establishing an effective model of shared governance, with an emphasis on strengthening communication among constituents at the College as evidence that "[t]he institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them" (3.1).

We support the judgment of the team that there is still work to be done to implement a comprehensive and systematic approach to assessing student learning outcomes and using results to inform decision-making and foster continuous improvement. We are gratified to learn that Bristol Community College is committed to strengthening its culture of assessment and note with approval that the assessment of student learning outcomes is a particular priority of the recently hired Chief Academic Officer. Faculty will "play a leadership role in faculty-led learning outcomes assessment," and several College-wide initiatives are in place to support assessment

efforts, including plans to compare “ideal goals” to course outcomes and competencies of “an educated person.” We look forward to learning, in the report submitted for consideration in Spring 2017, of BCC’s continued progress in implementing a systematic approach to assessing student learning outcomes with an emphasis on using the results for continuous improvement. Our standard on *The Academic Program* is relevant here:

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 approach to understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution’s academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty (4.51).

As identified by the College in its self-study and confirmed by the team, the use of student advising services has not been consistent among students, especially those who are enrolled at off-campus locations or online. We note favorably that initiatives have been implemented since the team visit to address this issue, including the establishment of a permanent Advising Center as well as a “complementary” Student Success Center and a Multicultural Center, and the addition of 2.5 FTE advising staff to support students and encourage the use of advising services. Training on “Degree Works” and “accessBCC” is made available to students to further enhance the advising process, and the College will “review on a bi-annual basis the quality and the availability of each service.” The Spring 2017 report will provide an opportunity for BCC to update the Commission on its success in enhancing student advising as evidence that “[th]e institution has in place an effective system of academic advising that meets student needs for information and advice and is compatible with its educational objectives” (5.19). Our standard on *Students* is also relevant here:

The institution offers an array of student services appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students, recognizing the variations in services that are appropriate at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for programs delivered electronically as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees. In all cases, the institution provides 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. In providing services, in accordance with its mission and purposes, the institution adheres to both the spirit and intent of equal opportunity and its own goals for diversity (6.11).

We understand that BCC offers a number of dual enrollment programs through partnerships with high schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, including the recently implemented Middle College program in New Bedford and Gateway to College program in Fall River, and the College is preparing to launch a “12+1” dual enrollment program through a partnership with Fall River High School in Fall 2015. We remind the College of the Commission’s Policy on Dual Enrollment Programs (enclosed) and, in the Spring 2017 report, we seek assurance that dual

enrollment programs offered through Bristol Community College in partnership with high schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are implemented consistent with the Commission's policy.

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 College is asked, in Spring 2019, to report on the four matters specified for attention in the Spring 2017 report. The Commission recognizes that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the College's sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the interim fifth-year report as evidence that "the institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.4).

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.

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 Bristol Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Mr. David Feeney, Consultant and former Executive Vice President, and Dr. Anna Wasescha, 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. Joseph A. Marshall, RFC. 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 P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Joseph A. Marshall, RFC
Visiting Team