



December 12, 2024

Dr. Laura L. Douglas  
President  
Bristol Community College  
777 Elsbree Street  
Fall River, MA 02720

Dear President Douglas:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 21, 2024, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Bristol Community College:

that Bristol Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by January 15, 2029 for consideration in Spring 2029;

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

1. implementing and evaluating its new shared governance model;
2. achieving its goals for closing the equity gaps among its students;
3. continuing to build a culture of assessment with particular emphasis on utilizing data for continuous improvement, with attention to assessing the effectiveness of its academic advising;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2034.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

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

Along with the visiting team, the Commission commends Bristol Community College (BCC or Bristol) for its well-written and comprehensive self-study that highlights its accomplishments over the past several years, particularly its impressive adoption of technology to modernize its campus. We are pleased to learn that the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 was developed with input from over 1,800 stakeholders and is based on four guiding strategies, including “equity and student success” that is aligned with the College’s commitment to ensuring equitable student outcomes. In addition, the Commission appreciates that the

institution's participation in the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) Grant, focused on "Transforming Institutional Cultures to be Equity-Minded," has broadened the knowledge and skills of faculty and staff and enhanced the institution's data collection and analysis capabilities. We also commend BCC for its commitment to community engagement and support for the needs of the Fall River area that affirms its role as a responsive community resource. Lastly, with its strong leadership team, committed faculty and staff, and engaged student body, Bristol Community College is well-positioned to continue preparing students "to navigate and succeed in our ever-changing world" for the foreseeable future.

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 the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions. In addition to the information included in all interim reports Bristol Community College is asked, in Spring 2029, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*; *Educational Effectiveness* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

The Commission appreciates that Bristol has adopted a new shared governance model designed to establish "a mechanism for communication and participation" in the shared governance process. The formation of the Staff Senate (2018), College Governance Council (2019-2020), and six new governing councils, along with the implementation of Town Halls, the "College Wide Initiative" (CWI) framework, and President Listening Circles, together demonstrate the institution's commitment to improve communication, transparency, engagement, and inclusivity. As noted by the visiting team, given that the shared governance model and CWI process are new, "feedback and adjustments are still crucial to ensure that these processes continue to work for the college culture." We are gratified, therefore, to learn of BCC's reaffirmed "commitment to the shared governance process using all tools," and its plans to "establish and maintain appropriate and productive channels of communication." Guided by our standard on *Organization and Governance*, we ask that the Spring 2029 interim report give emphasis to Bristol Community College's success in implementing and evaluating its shared governance model:

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).

The effectiveness of the institution's organizational structure and system of governance is improved through periodic and systematic review (3.19).

As noted above, the Commission commends the institution for its deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, a "key pillar" of its Strategic Plan. We understand in Fall 2023, the diversity of the student body increased: 41% were adult learners, 66% studied part-time, 66% identified as female, and 35% identified as Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC). We appreciate the institution's candid assessment that "for BIPOC and part-time students, improvement is needed in course completion rates, retention rates, and graduation rates," and further concur with the visiting team that "there remains institutional work to be done" to close the equity gaps among student groups. We are, therefore, encouraged to learn that the College plans to "review success rates and develop action plans to address achievement gaps in various programs." The Spring 2029 interim report will afford Bristol Community College an opportunity to update the

Commission on its success in closing the achievement gaps among its students. We are guided here by our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*:

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 institution integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its institutional and program evaluation activities and uses the findings to inform its planning and resource allocation and to establish claims the institution makes to students and prospective students (8.10).

The Commission joins the visiting team in commending BCC for the significant amount of work it has accomplished in building an institutional culture of assessment and making data available to campus constituents. Yet, as recognized by the College, work remains to be done to fully realize a process of continuous improvement of teaching and learning that uses assessment findings, and we are therefore gratified by the College's plans to implement a cloud migration project and an internal data warehouse, as well as its goal to integrate its assessment practices into its strategic planning processes. The Commission further notes that BCC has made significant strides in improving student advising, including shifting its focus from "proactive advising to holistic case management" and creating the Advising & Success Center led by permanent staff. At the same time, we appreciate the institution's candor that "there is currently no data being collected to indicate the impact [of advising] on students or on faculty/staff workload." We therefore look forward to learning, through the Spring 2029 interim report, of the institution's success in continuing to build a culture of assessment with particular emphasis on utilizing data for continuous improvement, with attention to assessing the effectiveness of its academic advising. Our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* and *Educational Effectiveness* (cited above and below) provide guidance here:

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

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2034 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 and Andrew Fisher, Vice President of Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer, during its deliberations.

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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 and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Joan Medeiros and Noe Ortega. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the attached 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.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael Whelan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Whelan" clearly distinguishable.

Michael Whelan

MW/sjp

cc: Joan Medeiros  
Noe Ortega  
Visiting team

Attachments: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions