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April 22, 2013

Mr. Barry M. Maloney  
President  
Worcester State University  
486 Chandler Street  
A-256  
Worcester, MA 01602-2597

Dear President Maloney:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 8, 2013, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Worcester State University:

that Worcester State University be continued in accreditation;

that the University be reminded that any plans to offer programs for which 50% or more of the credits can be earned online need to be submitted to the Commission for approval;

that the University submit a report for consideration in Fall, 2015, that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:

1. updating the institution's mission and implementing its revised strategic plan, ensuring that the allocation of resources is consistent with its mission and purposes;
2. continuing to implement a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning, with emphasis on ensuring that all academic departments collect, analyze, and use assessment data for improvement;

that the University submit a fifth year interim report for consideration in Fall, 2017;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2022.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Worcester State University is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

**PRESIDENT'S OFFICE**

**APR 24 2013**

**WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY**



The Commission commends Worcester State University (WSU) for preparing a comprehensive and candid self-study. We are particularly pleased to learn of the energy and enthusiasm for positive institutional change that has emerged under new executive leadership. We are heartened to learn of WSU's commitment to student success, as evidenced by the recent establishment of a Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement, expanded academic governance structures, plans to increase full-time faculty by 15 over the next three years, and an increase of retention rates to an average of 60% over the last four years, up from 37% five years ago. We are gratified to learn of WSU's prudent fiscal management, resulting in improvements in the University's key financial ratios and an upgrade in the institution's S&P bond rating from A- to A. Further, we note favorably that academic and technological resources and student services are sufficient to support quality academic programs and strategic improvement initiatives. Finally, the University's commitment to transparency and integrity as evidenced by the institution's membership in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) is noteworthy. We share the judgment of the visiting team that, with the institution's capable leadership, dedicated staff and faculty, supportive Board of Trustees, and a growing atmosphere of enthusiasm, collaboration and participation, Worcester State University is well-positioned for future success.

We note that the University has been increasing its online course offerings and, according to the visiting team, WSU plans to continue to expand its online programming. We remind you that any plans to offer programs for which 50% or more of the credits can be earned online will need to be reviewed by the Commission, consistent with our Policy on Substantive Change, a copy of which is enclosed for your information and use.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall, 2015, are related to our standards on *Mission and Purposes*, *Planning and Evaluation*, *Financial Resources*, and *The Academic Program*.

We understand that plans are underway to begin the process of updating the University's mission statement. We also understand that the 2010-2014 strategic plan, characterized by the visiting team as "limited" and "tactical" in nature, was revised and approved by the Board of Trustees in October, 2012. Further, WSU recently established a Strategic Planning Oversight Committee (SPOC) to align self-study projections with revised strategic initiatives and to monitor implementation of the plan. We look forward to learning, in the Fall 2015 report, of the University's progress in updating its mission statement, in addition to its success in implementing the refined strategic plan, ensuring that WSU "manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes." (9.1) We refer you to our standards on *Mission and Purposes* and *Planning and Evaluation* for additional guidance:

The mission of the institution defines its distinctive character, addresses the needs of society and identifies the students the institution seeks to serve, and reflects both the institution's traditions and its vision for the future. The institution's mission provides the basis upon which the institution identifies its priorities, plans its future and evaluates its endeavors; it provides a basis for the evaluation of the institution against the Commission's Standards. (1.1)

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities. (2.3)



The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning. (2.4)

The Commission is gratified to learn that, in support of the University's strategic priority to become more data driven, WSU hired an officer to educate, train, implement, and oversee academic and administrative assessment, institutional research, and planning activities. As validated by the team during its visit, some academic departments have notable planning and evaluation efforts underway and there is a "wealth of data" being collected. We concur with the judgment of the team that there is less evidence of data analysis and use of data for program improvement and of widespread acceptance of the benefits of doing assessment among those many departments that are collecting data. We understand that implementing a comprehensive approach to assessment is an ongoing process and that it takes time to evaluate the effectiveness of assessment strategies. The Fall 2015 report will provide an opportunity for WSU to update the Commission on its continued success in implementing its assessment plans, with particular attention on ensuring that all academic departments collect, analyze, and use assessment data for 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 scheduling of a fifth year interim report in Fall, 2017, is consistent with Commission policy and required 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.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2022, 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 Worcester State University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Dr. Charles Cullum, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Nancy Kleniewski, 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. John Brissette.

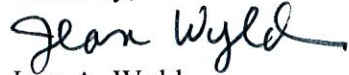
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The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jean Wyld", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jean A. Wyld

JAW/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Mr. John Brissette  
Visiting team