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Harvard University

President of the Commission  
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM  
bbrittingham@neche.org

Senior Vice President of the Commission  
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND  
pobrien@neche.org

Vice President of the Commission  
CAROL L. ANDERSON  
canderson@neche.org

Vice President of the Commission  
LAURA M. GAMBINO  
lgambino@neche.org

Vice President of the Commission  
PAULA A. HARBECKE  
pharbecke@neche.org

Vice President of the Commission  
AARON PERKUS  
aperkus@neche.org

March 20, 2020

Dr. Ellen L. Kennedy  
President  
Berkshire Community College  
1350 West Street  
Pittsfield, MA 01201-5786

Dear President Kennedy:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 6, 2020, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Berkshire Community College:

that Berkshire Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Spring 2022 that gives provides an update on the institution's success in:

1. establishing learning outcomes for all courses with emphasis on ensuring consistency of outcomes across multiple sections of the same course;
2. reorganizing its committee structure with emphasis on defining roles, responsibilities, and goals;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall 2024;

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

1. developing and implementing its 2021-2026 Strategic Plan;
2. analyzing data and using the results to inform decision-making with emphasis on academic programming, enrollment, and student services;
3. reorganizing its governance structure with attention to the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficacy of the College senate and relevant committees;
4. developing and implementing processes and procedures to support and grow professional development;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2029.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

The Commission joins the visiting team in commending Berkshire Community College (BCC) for its well-developed and candid self-study that documents the institution's numerous strengths and accomplishments over the last decade. In particular, we appreciate learning that the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan was well integrated into relevant units within the institution, and the College has accomplished major initiatives related to the Plan's five strategic initiatives – Engaged Learning, Student Achievement, Improved Infrastructure, Advancing the Institution, and Collaborative Partnerships – notable of which are the creation of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the implementation of several “Incubator Projects,” and the completion of major facilities improvements (e.g., Hawthorne and Melville Halls and the Jonathan Edwards Library). We note positively that, in spite of declining enrollments, flattening state appropriations, and significant investments in campus infrastructure, the College's cash position is currently higher than it has been in the past five years providing the institution with a “cushion” to handle any unforeseen circumstances. We share the judgment of the team that the College's well-established and engaged Board of Trustees, dedicated and highly competent president, deeply committed and qualified faculty and staff, and outstanding study body are impressive and, collectively, contribute to the success of the institution. With the institution's continued strategic attention to addressing its challenges and improving student success through data-informed planning, decision-making, and resource allocation, Berkshire Community College is well positioned to “place higher education within reach of all residents of Berkshire County and beyond” well into the future.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2022 are related to our standards on *The Academic Program*, *Educational Effectiveness*, and *Organization and Governance*.

We understand from the visiting team that, while members of the campus community are eager to become more deliberate and adept at the assessment of student learning outcomes, there is still inconsistency in the development of learning outcomes for all courses across the institution. We are therefore pleased to learn that full-time staff in the College's Division of Teaching and Learning Innovation are implementing professional development activities for both full-time and adjunct faculty related to establishing student learning outcomes and, specifically, a faculty fellow has been assigned to work directly with faculty in this area. In keeping with our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*, the Spring 2022 report will provide Berkshire an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in establishing learning outcomes for all courses with attention to ensuring consistency across multiple sections of the same course:

The institution publishes the learning goals and requirements for each program. Such goals include the knowledge, intellectual and academic skills, competencies, and methods of inquiry to be acquired. In addition, if relevant to the program, goals include creative abilities and values to be developed and specific career-preparation practices to be mastered (4.2).

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 institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment (8.6).

The team also learned during its visit that, due to changes (e.g., retirements, turnover, new hires, and reorganization efforts) over the last few years, the College is “rethinking” its committee bylaws and structure. For example, the College Senate was recently re-established; however, committee goals are not yet well-defined, and the roles and responsibilities of various committees (e.g., Academic Affairs Committee; Education Affairs Committee) are not clearly specified. We look forward, in Spring 2022, to learning of the College’s success in reorganizing its committee structure for relevant College committees as evidence that, “[t]hrough its system of ... 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).

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 Fall 2024, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*; *Students*; *Educational Effectiveness*; *Organization and Governance* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

As noted positively above, Berkshire Community College has accomplished much through its 2014-2019 Strategic Plan. Now that this plan has expired, we understand that the College is embarking on the development of a new plan and, as documented in the self-study, “the President’s Cabinet will establish a committee that will lead efforts to develop measurable goals within the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan.” Accordingly, in keeping with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, we will appreciate receiving, as part of the Fall 2024 interim report, an update on the institution’s success in developing and implementing its 2021-2026 Strategic Plan:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.5).

While we commend Berkshire on the notable progress it has made in using data to enhance institutional effectiveness, we also appreciate the institution’s candid acknowledgment that “there is uneven use of data in decision-making related to academic programming, enrollment, and student services.” We are therefore pleased to learn from the visiting team that, as part of the strategic planning process, the College plans to work closely with its Office of Institutional Effectiveness to set realistic and measurable goals. As evidence that “[t]he institution has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation” (2.8), we look forward, in the Fall 2024 interim report, to learning of the institution’s success in this area. We are further informed here by our standards on *Students* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6).

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 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).

As also mentioned above, we recognize that the College is in the process of reorganizing its governance structure and we understand that addressing these matters take time. Hence, we ask that the College include, in its Fall 2024 interim report, an update on its success in reorganizing its governance structure with emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness and efficacy of the College senate and relevant committees to demonstrate that "[t]he effectiveness of the institution's organizational structure and system of governance is improved through periodic and systematic review" (3.19).

Finally, we appreciate the focused attention BCC is devoting to strengthening its faculty development activities. We also recognize that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution; hence, the Fall 2024 interim report will allow the College an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in developing and implementing processes and procedures to support and grow professional development. We are informed here by our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:

The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is periodically and systematically assessed using valid procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty and academic staff accept their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task (6.17).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2029 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 Berkshire Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Timothy Crowley, 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 and the head of the state system on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Ms. Darlene Rodowicz and Dr. Carlos Santiago. The institution is free to release information

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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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Quigley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

David Quigley

DQ/jm

cc: Ms. Darlene Rodowicz  
Dr. Carlos Santiago  
Visiting Team

Enclosure