



New England Commission
of Higher Education

December 20, 2018

Dr. Katherine Bergeron
President
Connecticut College
270 Mohegan Avenue
New London, CT 06320-4125

Dear President Bergeron:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 16, 2018, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Connecticut College:

that Connecticut College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2023;

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

- 1) implementing its strategic plan with emphasis on aligning initiatives related to enrollment, staffing levels, and the capital campaign with the mission of the institution and ensuring that the Board is well-informed about the financial health of the institution;
- 2) developing a comprehensive approach to assessing the *Connections* program with attention to demonstrating that all departments are appropriately engaged in the assessment of the *Connections* General Education initiative;
- 3) evaluating the effectiveness of changes to the College's shared governance processes;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2028.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

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

DAVID QUIGLEY, Chair (2021)
Boston College

GEORGE W. TETLER, Vice Chair (2019)
Worcester, MA

HARRY E. DUMAY (2019)
College of Our Lady of the Elms

JEFFREY R. GODLEY (2019)
Gretton, CT

COLEEN C. PANTALONE (2019)
Northeastern University

MARIKO SILVER (2019)
Bennington College

KASSANDRA S. ARDINGER (2020)
Trustee Member, Concord, NH

RUSSELL CAREY (2020)
Brown University

FRANCESCO C. CESAREO (2020)
Assumption College

F. JAVIER CEVALLOS (2020)
Framingham State University

RICK DANIELS (2020)
Conassett, MA

DONALD D. DEHAYES (2020)
University of Rhode Island

PAMY EDDINGER (2020)
Banner Hill Community College

THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2020)
Thomas College

KIMBERLY M. GOFF-CREWS (2020)
Yale University

MARTIN J. HOWARD (2020)
Boston University

SUSAN D. HUARD (2020)
Manchester Community College (NH)

JEFFREY S. SOLOMON (2020)
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

ELEANOR BAKER (2021)
Falmouth, ME

KATHERINE BERGERON (2021)
Connecticut College

PETER L. EBB (2021)
Trustee Member, Boston, MA

GREGORY W. FOWLER (2021)
Southern New Hampshire University

DEMIS H. HANNO (2021)
Wheaton College

LILY S. HSU (2021)
Johnson & Wales University

ELLEN L. KENNEDY (2021)
Berkshire Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2021)
Lebanese American University

JOHN M. SWEENEY (2021)
Providence College

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The Commission joins the visiting team in congratulating Connecticut College on an exemplary self-study that documents the institution's many strengths and highlights its accomplishments over the last decade. We concur with the observation of the team that the College's outstanding Board of Trustees, leadership, faculty, staff, and students, combined with its robust curriculum, long-standing honor code, and the whole-hearted devotion of the campus community to continue building on a century-old tradition of excellence well into the future, are among the institution's "tremendous assets." The College's distinctive approach to linking student and faculty work with "purposeful action" illustrates the institution's commitment to its mission to "educate students to put the liberal arts into action as citizens in a global society," as does the Board-approved strategic plan, *Building on Strength: A New Plan for Connecticut College*, that clearly articulates the College's priorities, notable among which is its goal to become a leader in integrative education. We are impressed by the College's new *Connections* General Education curriculum, an innovative approach to delivering general education that "ensures that all students integrate their intellectual pursuits by braiding their breadth requirement in a meaningful pathway together with their major, community engagement, global experience, and other co-curricular activities." Further, Connecticut College's progress in establishing a systematic approach to assessing student learning outcomes is commendable, and we congratulate the College on its success in raising an impressive \$53 million in 2018 toward its current fundraising campaign goal. With Connecticut College's rich history of continually adapting to change, combined with the strength of its leadership and the dedication of its campus community, the College is positioned to continue its ambitious journey to "put the liberal arts into action" in new and vibrant ways.

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 2023, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Institutional Resources*, *The Academic Program*, *Educational Effectiveness*, and *Organization and Governance*.

The Commission acknowledges positively above that strategic planning is a strength of Connecticut College. We note with approval, for example, that the College gave careful thought and consideration to the long-term financial implications of declining enrollment trends (decreasing from an all-time high of 1,898 students in AY2012 to 1,783 students in AY2018) and the increase in the institution's first-year tuition discount rate (from 27% in AY2014 to 39% in AY2018) when developing *Building on Strength: A New Plan for Connecticut College*. Accordingly, mission-focused initiatives were established to address the institution's financial challenges, including increasing the size of its endowment, revising its enrollment strategy, and "right-sizing" its faculty and staff to align with enrollment. As the team mentioned in its report, and we concur, it will also be imperative to keep the Board well-informed about the financial health of the institution and deploy an effective communication plan to clearly articulate the impact of any changes on faculty and staff. We look forward, in the interim report submitted for consideration in Spring 2023, to learning of the institution's success in this regard as evidence that Connecticut College's "multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students" (7.6). We are further informed here by our standard on *Institutional Resources*.

The governing board reviews and approves the institution's financial plans based on multi-year analysis and financial forecasting (7.7).

The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will

influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (7.14).

We are heartened to learn that the new *Connections* General Education curriculum, implemented in Fall 2016, has generated excitement among the campus community and beyond. It is particularly noteworthy that Connecticut College faculty are increasingly being invited to discuss the *Connections* model at conferences nationally and around the globe. Additional evidence of the success of this innovative program is the 22% increase in applications over the last year, with prospective students increasingly citing the *Connections* curriculum among the reasons they are choosing to apply to Connecticut College. We further acknowledge with favor that the College has started to assess student learning in select components of the new curriculum (e.g., ConnCourses and first-year seminars), and results of these assessments have been used to make improvements to the program. However, as the team noted in its report, an institutional plan to systematically evaluate the Integrative Pathways and Modes of Inquiry portions of the program still needs to be developed. We therefore look forward to receiving, in the Spring 2023 interim report, an update on the institution's success in developing a comprehensive approach to assessing the *Connections* program with attention to demonstrating that all departments are appropriately engaged in the assessment of the *Connections* General Education initiative. We are informed here by our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.16).

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 integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its 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).

Finally, as documented in the self-study and confirmed by the visiting team, Connecticut College has a long history of the College president presiding over monthly faculty meetings. Recently, faculty voted to implement a pilot plan to add a second "faculty-only" meeting each month to allow them to discuss and vote on legislative matters, independent of College administration. We note favorably that the Faculty Steering and Conference Committee will evaluate the effectiveness of changes to this governance structure, and the Spring 2023 interim report will afford the College an opportunity to apprise the Commission about the results of the Committee's evaluation as assurance that the new model "provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution" (3.13). Our standard on *Organization and Governance* will further inform this section of the report:

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 scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2028 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 Connecticut College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Mr. Rich Madonna, Vice President for Finance & Administration, and Dr. Kathleen McCartney, 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 DeFred Folts. 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 Quigley

DQ/sjp

Enclosures

cc: DeFred Folts
Visiting team