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**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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March 23, 2004

**Dr. James R. Roach
President
Western Connecticut State University
181 White Street
Danbury, CT 06810-6860**

Dear President Roach:

It is my pleasure to inform you that at its meeting on March 5, 2004, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Western Connecticut State University:

that Western Connecticut State University be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a report for consideration in Fall, 2006, giving emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. implementing the assessment of student learning outcomes across the curriculum;
2. fully implementing the doctoral program in instructional leadership;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall, 2008;

that in addition to provide information included in all interim reports, the University give emphasis to its continued progress in addressing the matters identified for attention in the Fall, 2006 report, as well as its success in:

1. developing and implementing a comprehensive planning process that integrates previous plans and gives special attention to the human and financial resources to meet emerging needs in the areas of graduate education, student services, library, and information technology;
2. integrating part-time faculty into the academic life of the institution;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2013.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Continuation of the accreditation of Western Connecticut State University is based upon the Commission's finding that its *Standards for Accreditation* are being substantially met by the institution. The Commission notes with approval the institution's strengths, including an effective governance system; a dedicated faculty committed to undergraduate education and interdisciplinary collaboration; a committed president who has been a strong advocate for the campus; an impressive physical campus that is a source of pride for the entire campus community; prudent fiscal management that has enabled the University to set aside substantial reserves to offset future uncertainties; and a successful capital campaign, including the institution's first million-dollar gift. We also commend the University for the progress it has made in achieving its goals for diversifying the faculty and staff. Western Connecticut State University is well regarded by the local community and has had a strong cultural impact on the city of Danbury and the surrounding region. The institution is effectively accomplishing its mission as an urban, public, comprehensive university and seems well positioned to meet future challenges.

The matters the University is asked to report on in Fall, 2006, are related to the Commission's standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Programs and Instruction, and Faculty*.

The Commission commends Western Connecticut State University for the in-depth assessment practices undertaken by its programs that hold specialized accreditation. However, we concur with the visiting team that the institution has yet to develop a "University-wide conversation on assessment" and has not formalized the implementation of student learning assessment across all programs and services. We are gratified to learn that the University has developed a three-year academic plan that addresses assessment and that the student services division has started to assess student learning outside the classroom. The Fall, 2006 report, will provide the University with an opportunity to report on its success in developing and implementing a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning, consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, "The institution evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives" (2.4).

The Commission notes with approval the University's development of graduate programs in response to area and community needs, including a number of Master's programs that expand the University's offerings beyond its traditional strength in education as well as a doctoral program in instructional leadership. We understand that the doctoral program is one of only twelve of its type in the nation and that it has received substantial support from local school districts. As we noted in our letter of March 21, 2003, however, the doctoral program represents a significant undertaking for the University, one that will place additional demands on limited resources and will increase expectations for faculty research and scholarship. We note that some of the University's faculty already report insufficient time for scholarly activity, given their workload of 12 credits per semester. We understand that all faculty work under a collective bargaining agreement that specifies workload; however, this is a situation that will need to be addressed as the University expands its doctoral program and other graduate offerings. In addition, we encourage the institution to continue to pay careful attention to the content and quality of the doctoral program as well as to the measures that will be used to assess the program's success. Relevant here are our standards on *Programs and Instruction* and *Faculty*:

The institution provides sufficient resources to sustain and improve programs and instruction (4.2).

Faculty responsible for graduate programs are sufficient by credentials, number, and time commitment for the successful accomplishment of program objectives and program improvement (4.21).

Faculty assignments and workload are . . . equitably determined to allow faculty adequate time to provide effective instruction, advise and evaluate students, continue professional growth, and participate in scholarship, research, and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution" (5.8).

Commission policy requires a 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 provided in all interim reports, we look forward in Fall, 2008, to receiving evidence that additional progress has been made in addressing the matters identified for emphasis in the 2006 report. We recognize that these issues do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the continued attention over time; thus we ask that further information be provided in the fifth-year report. In addition, we ask that the University give special emphasis to two matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Faculty*.

The Commission notes that the University's past approach to planning and resource allocation has been reasonable, but concurs with the visiting team that there is a need for future efforts to be more fully integrated. The University faces a number of new demands on its resources, including expanded graduate program offerings, increases in the number of students living on campus and the resulting need for additional resources to support the quality of student life, and the library and information resources required to support the research and scholarly activities of the faculty. Careful planning will be needed to ensure that the University can continue to meet these demands and also respond effectively to future challenges and opportunities. The Spring, 2008 report, will provide the institution an opportunity to report on its success in adopting an integrated approach to planning, consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, "Planning and evaluation are systematic, broad-based, interrelated, and appropriate to the institution's circumstances" (2.2).

The 1993 NEASC evaluation report expressed concern about the lack of integration of part-time faculty into the academic life of the institution, and the Commission notes that there has been little progress made during the last decade. The University's self-study acknowledges that the involvement of part-time faculty in the campus community is essentially limited to teaching, and the team report observes that processes for the evaluation of part-time faculty appear to be "poorly developed and implemented." We anticipate being apprized, in the Spring, 2008 report, of the institution's success in addressing these concerns, in keeping with our standard on *Faculty*: "Should part-time or adjunct faculty be utilized, the institution has in place policies governing their role compatible with its mission and purposes and the standards of the Commission" (5.9).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2013, is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive visit 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 Western Connecticut State University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with Dr. Eugene Buccini, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Carol Hawkes, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Margaret Leahey, Director of Grant Programs, as well as the team chair, Dr. Joseph S. Wood, 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. Lawrence D. McHugh. 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 Charles M. Cook, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Terrence J. MacTaggart

TJM/slo

cc: Mr. Lawrence D. McHugh
Dr. Valerie F. Lewis
Visiting Team