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December 21, 2006

Dr. James W. Schmotter
President
Western Connecticut State University
181 White Street
Danbury, CT 06810-6860

Dear President Schmotter:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 16, 2006, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the progress report submitted by Western Connecticut State University and voted to take the following action:

that the report submitted by Western Connecticut State University be accepted;

that the fifth-year interim report scheduled for submission in Fall 2008 be confirmed;

that, in addition to providing the information included in all interim reports and the matters specified in our letter of March 23, 2004, the University give emphasis to its success in developing and implementing specific measures to evaluate the success of the doctoral program in instructional leadership;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2013 be confirmed.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The Commission commends the thoroughness of the report presented by Western Connecticut State University, which was responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of March 5, 2004 regarding assessment of student learning outcomes and implementing the doctoral program in instructional leadership. The institution developed a plan for assigning administrative responsibility for assessment policy and implementation, appointed a coordinator for each of the three schools and the graduate program at the University, and developed a common format for reporting assessment results annually. A special allocation of \$25,000 was made for assessment

training and related activities. The progress report provides ample evidence that the institution has approached assessment comprehensively and seriously, and that its activities have been useful in identifying ways to improve student learning.

The report also provides evidence of institutional capacity for implementing the doctoral program in instructional leadership. Students are admitted in biennial cohorts, thus relieving some of the pressures on faculty and institutional resources. Additional well-qualified faculty have been hired for each new cohort, and the institution has reduced teaching loads for some doctoral faculty to allow for scholarly activity. Additional resources (\$55,000 over three years) have been dedicated to program-specific library materials. The report provides details about assessment of student learning and evidence of students' professional advancement since they enrolled.

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 and the items identified for attention in our letter of March 23, 2004, the University is asked to report on a matter related to our standards on *The Academic Program, Faculty, and Students*.

The Commission notes that Western Connecticut State University provided solid evidence that it is assessing student learning in the doctoral program, but not much information about its evaluation of overall program success. We look forward to learning, in the institution's fifth-year interim report scheduled for Fall 2008, of specific measures that will be used to evaluate the success of the doctoral program as a whole, considering curriculum, instruction, advising and support services, among other program elements. Our standards on *The Academic Program, Faculty, and Students* will be instructive here:

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its degree programs under effective institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.8).

The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources. The evaluation of existing programs includes an external perspective and assessment of their effectiveness . . . (4.9).

Programs encompassing both research activities and professional practice define their relative emphases in program objectives that are reflected in curricular, scholarly, and program requirements (4.27).

The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation with methods to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is periodically and systematically assessed using adequate and reliable procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty collectively and individually endeavor to fulfill their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task (5.16).

The institution has in place an effective system of academic advising that meets student needs for information and advice and is compatible with its educational objectives. Faculty and other personnel responsible for academic advising are adequately informed

and prepared to discharge their advising functions. Resources are adequate to ensure the quality of advising for students regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (5.17).

. . . In all cases, the institution provides academic support services appropriate to the student body . . . and provides available and responsive information resources and services, information technology, academic advising and career services and complaint and appeal mechanisms . . .(6.8).

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

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Western Connecticut State University and hopes its preparation 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,



Judith R. Gordon

JRG/jm

cc: Mr. Lawrence McHugh